

‘TARES AMONG THE WHEAT’:  
EARLY MODERN ENGLISH WITCHCRAFT IN ITS SOCIO-CULTURAL  
AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

A Master’s Thesis

by  
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Ankara

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*To my family*

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AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
Bilkent University

by  
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

in  
THE DEPARTMENT OF  
HISTORY  
BİLKENT UNIVERSITY  
ANKARA

September 2008

I certify that I have read this thesis and found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

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Supervisor

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## ABSTRACT

‘TARES AMONG THE WHEAT’:  
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AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

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M.A., Department of History

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September 2008

The present thesis is an attempt to understand witchcraft and witch-beliefs in early modern England in socio-cultural and religious context. Here, various witchcraft pamphlets published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a few treatises written by the divines of the period, and several texts directly or indirectly related to the subject are examined. The general aim of this thesis is to investigate the relation between prevailing witch-beliefs and other elements of early modern English society and culture, and at the same time, to treat the interaction and conflict between the Protestant and popular cultures of the period within the context of the discussion of witchcraft. Particularly focusing on the image of the disorderly woman, the belief in the witch’s ‘familiar spirit’, and the Lancashire witch-trials of 1612, this thesis reveals that studying aspects of the beliefs about witchcraft allows for insights into the social, cultural, and religious atmosphere in early modern England and sheds light on the understanding of the world-views of both the learned and the villagers of the period.

**Keywords:** witchcraft, witch-beliefs, witch-trials, popular culture, learned culture, Protestant moralism.

## ÖZET

‘BUĞDAY TARLASINDAKİ AYRIK OTLARI’:  
ERKEN MODERN DÖNEM İNGİLTERE’SİNDE SOSYO-KÜLTÜREL  
VE DİNİ BAĞLAMDA CADILIK

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Bu tez, erken modern dönem İngiltere’indeki cadılığı ve cadı inancını, sosyo-kültürel ve dinî bağlamda anlamaya yönelik bir çabadır. Bu çalışmada, 16. ve 17. yüzyıllarda cadılık üzerine yayınlanmış çeşitli kitapçıklar, dönemin ilahiyatçıları tarafından yazılmış birkaç yapıt ve konuyla doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak ilgili olduğu düşünülen bazı metinler incelenmektedir. Bu tezin genel amacı, cadılarla ilgili yaygın inanışlar ve erken modern dönem İngiliz toplumu ve kültürünün diğer unsurları arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmak, ve aynı zamanda, dönemin Protestan kültürü ve halk kültürü arasındaki etkileşimi ve çatışmayı cadılık tartışması kapsamında ele almaktır. Bu tez, özellikle, aykırı davranışlarda bulunan kadın imgesine, hayvan görünümünde beliren ve cadıların hizmetinde olduğu farz edilen iblisler ile ilgili inanca, ve 1612’deki Lancashire cadı davalarına odaklanarak, cadılıkla ilgili inanışların çeşitli açılardan incelenmesinin, erken modern dönem İngiltere’indeki toplumsal, kültürel ve dinî atmosferin anlaşılmasını mümkün kıldığını ve hem eğitilmiş kesimin hem de köylülerin dünya görüşlerinin anlaşılmasına ışık tuttuğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** cadılık, cadı inancı, cadı davaları, halk kültürü, eğitilmişlerin kültürü, Protestan ahlakçılığı.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed *tares among the wheat*, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Matthew 13:24-30

Conceptual differences between different historical periods and cultures aside, it is known that belief in and ideas concerning witches and witchcraft have been present in some parts of the world since time immemorial. However, in Europe, at a time when a series of factors - social, cultural, religious, regional and legal - combined to pave the way for the persecution of those held to be engaging in witchcraft, for a span of roughly two hundred years, beginning in the later fifteenth century in continental Europe and in the second half of the sixteenth century in England, a great many people, most of them women, were prosecuted and tried for the crime of witchcraft, for “the practice of harmful, black, or maleficent magic, the

performance of harmful deeds by means of some sort of extraordinary, mysterious, occult, preternatural or supernatural power,” in the broadest sense in which the word was used by early modern Europeans.<sup>1</sup>

During the period statutes which varied from region to region and defined the crime of witchcraft were passed throughout Europe. In England it was not until 1542 that witchcraft was legally defined as a crime by the statute of Henry VIII,<sup>2</sup> but Henry’s law of witchcraft was repealed by Edward VI in 1547 before it had much time to take effect. After the passing of the Elizabethan witchcraft statute in 1563, which made the conjuration of evil spirits and killing by witchcraft capital offences and imposed a one-year term of imprisonment for harm to the person and damage to property by witchcraft, the first witch trial to take place in a secular court in England was held in 1566 in Chelmsford, Essex, and the last in Leicester in 1717, almost twenty years before the act repealing the witchcraft statute in 1736. The present thesis, however, confines its scope to an examination of witch beliefs and attitudes towards witchcraft in England roughly between the years 1563 and 1645 for two reasons: first, it was during this period that the influence of Puritanism was most intensely felt in England, which is, as will be seen in the following pages, an important point related to the content of this study; and second, I prefer not to include the East Anglian witch trials of 1645-7, which have long been regarded by scholars of witchcraft as ‘unusual’ for England, in the discussions of this thesis.

Historians have long taken an interest in medieval and early modern beliefs in witchcraft and magic. As a result of the broadening and deepening of the range of study, especially the past forty years have witnessed an enormous explosion of

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<sup>1</sup> Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London; New York: Longman, 1995), 4.

<sup>2</sup> For the occasional trial of witchcraft and sorcery in England before this period, see Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundation in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (London, Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976).

scholarly enthusiasm for the subject. In the study of witchcraft in early modern England, one of the significant contributions to the field in terms of a detailed picture from primary sources - mainly pamphlet literature - came from the American historian Wallace Notestein in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> His work, however dated, is still a valuable guide to the relevant published and documentary materials. In the same vein, Barbara Rosen has collected and edited some of the primary sources of early modern English witchcraft - from witchcraft statutes to the pamphlet accounts of the trials.<sup>4</sup> Since the publication of the major pioneering works by Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane<sup>5</sup> in the early 1970s, the interpretation of witchcraft in England, it seems, has tended to privilege the socio-historical analysis of the witchcraft phenomenon in early modern period. Within the framework of his discussion, Thomas, inspired by sociology and anthropology, mainly focused on the relationship between the accuser and the accused, on the personal interactions between the alleged witch, the supposed victim of witchcraft and the local community, provided a direct clue to understanding what happened at the village level, and argued “witchcraft accusation was endemic in English society, but it was essentially a local phenomenon.”<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, historians, both in Britain and elsewhere, have been producing major works on witchcraft in all its contexts. The recent historiography of English witchcraft is extremely rich. Witchcraft in early modern England has largely been the domain of social historians who have

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<sup>3</sup> Wallace Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968) (first published in 1911).

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Rosen, ed., *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*. Reprint edn. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic, Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), chs. 14-18 (first published in 1971); Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 1999) (first published in 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 698.

approached it from various angles including demonology,<sup>7</sup> gender,<sup>8</sup> case studies at a village level,<sup>9</sup> legal procedure,<sup>10</sup> social meaning of the crime,<sup>11</sup> the code of conduct,<sup>12</sup> etc. James Sharpe's thematically organized work, *Instruments of Darkness*, is an important synthesis drawing on legal records and other sources, in which he illustrates the complexity of the subject, offers a detailed analysis, and treats the subject in a broad yet fundamental way, in its social, economic, cultural, legal and theological context.<sup>13</sup> Today witchcraft continues to be a subject of considerable interest to many other scholars on the basis of two main approaches to the subject - intellectual history as seen from above and social development as seen from beneath - and a series of studies still seeks to understand witchcraft belief with all its ramifications in medieval and early modern periods both in England and in Continental Europe, either in terms of its social function, or as part of a deep-rooted religious, cultural and ideological system.

Consequently, it is evident that the topic is so vast and many-sided, raising so many distinct yet interconnected problems, that no single book, let alone an M.A. thesis, could treat it with full appreciation. This is neither the aim nor the claim of

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<sup>7</sup> Stuart Clark, "Protestant Demonology: Sin, Superstition and Society (c.1520 – c.1630)," in Ankarloo Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, eds., *Early Modern European Witchcraft* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); John L. Teall, "Witchcraft and Calvinism in Elizabethan England: Divine Power and Human Agency," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 23, 1 (1962): 21-36.

<sup>8</sup> Clive Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," *Past and Present* 140 (1993): 45-78; Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Louise Jackson, "Witches, Wives and Mothers: witchcraft persecution and women's confessions in seventeenth-century England," *Women's History Review* 4, 1 (1995): 63-84; Clarke Garrett, "Women and Witches: Patterns of Analysis," *Signs* 3, 2 (1977): 461-470.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Ryber DeWindt, "Witchcraft and Conflicting Visions of the Ideal Village Community," *Journal of the British Studies*, 34 (1995): 427-463; Annabel Gregory, "Witchcraft, Politics and 'Good Neighbourhood' in Early Seventeenth-Century Rye," *Past and Present* 133 (1991): 31-66.

<sup>10</sup> C. R. Unsworth, "Witchcraft Beliefs and Criminal Procedure in Early Modern England," in Thomas G. Watkin, ed., *Legal Record and Historical Reality: Proceedings of the Eighth British Legal History Conference, Cardiff, 1987* (London, Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pt. I.

<sup>12</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen, "Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England," *The Journal of British Studies* 34, 1 (1995): 1-34.

<sup>13</sup> James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness, Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

this study. The aim of this study is *not* to offer an explanation for the rise or decline of witchcraft persecutions and accusations in early modern England nor to explain why a set of conditions preparing the more intensive witch-hunts in continental Europe never existed or did not find fertile ground in England nor to point out the reason why the witch-hunt taking place in England was relatively mild compared to those in continental Europe, *but* rather to seek to understand the mental world of early modern England, to examine the nature and role of beliefs in magic and witchcraft during the period and to demonstrate how witchcraft accusations and confessions can open windows on early modern mentalities when they are set in their socio-cultural and religious context.

Witchcraft pamphlets provide a large part of the historical evidence for the student of early modern English witchcraft. The major, but not sole, primary sources I have used in this study, therefore, are some of the surviving pamphlet accounts of English witch trials from the early modern period. However, because of the limitations, problems and difficulties these documents pose, one needs to handle them very carefully. One should constantly be aware, for instance, that because of the lack of direct testimony, these pamphlets constitute historical evidence about witchcraft through the eyes of non-witches, who were members of the learned culture of elite or who themselves were below the level of the elite. Furthermore, it is evident that the information historians can distill from the witchcraft pamphlets is usually scattered and fragmentary since these pamphlets were not written for official use or as responses to other pamphlets or with the purpose of providing sound discussions about the existence of witchcraft. Each contains some parts of the records of individual examinations, confessions and accusations, usually preceded by a *preface* by the writers of the pamphlets in which they either express a variety of

attitudes towards their work or refer to the widespread concerns over witchcraft. The problems of the pamphlet accounts do not necessarily arise from the outside confirmation of the witch trials themselves, the executions of the so-called witches, or the publication of these pamphlets, but rather from their form and content. The fragmentation and disorder of the pamphlets and of the legal documents printed in them sometimes make it difficult for us to make inferences. The majority were published anonymously<sup>14</sup> and it is likely that some of them may not have been single-authored. These pamphlets representing the legal process against suspected witches inform us about how witches were tried and show how stories of witchcraft were used both at trials and by the pamphleteers who reported them in print. However, they are not comprehensive at all and cannot be considered verbatim or ‘complete and unabridged’ copies of the trials in general. They do not tell us about all the stages leading to the trials. For example, the process by which local suspicions against suspected witches became formalized is largely invisible in pamphlet accounts. Moreover, it is evident that they offer us only the selected parts of the allegations of witchcraft and the depositions taken at court, selected according to the legal significance first to the justices of the peace at the trials and then to the pamphleteers.

The first pamphlet account of an English trial appeared in 1566 and dealt with the trial of three witches from Essex, one of whom was acquitted of the crime, the other two were executed. From then on, witchcraft pamphlets continued to be published in England until the early eighteenth century. They were usually prepared and printed a few months after the trials they dealt with had taken place. Each of

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<sup>14</sup> There were, of course, a few exceptions. Some of the accounts of witchcraft cases came from those who had official positions. For example, Henry Goodcole, minister of God and chaplain to the prisoners at Newgate, provided the public with information in his account of the case of Elizabeth Sawyer of Edmonton (1621), and the account of the trials of the Lancashire witches (1612) was written by Thomas Potts, clerk at the trials.



them reported a particular case of witchcraft in a particular region, reproduced the legal documents related to the trial and offered an acceptable representation of the examinations taken before the judges at the assizes or wrote about witchcraft experiences in narrative form.

No doubt the pamphleteers, usually laymen with a few exceptions,<sup>15</sup> were writing to sell. Therefore, they may sometimes have produced sensational, popular, and saleable images of those who were tried at the witch trials. So far as we know, however, all the witchcraft pamphlets of that time rest upon actual events.<sup>16</sup> It may also be said that they did not put entertainment before edification, unlike, for example, the broadside street ballads, another product of the cheap print of the period. It is evident that the pamphlets were also meant to instruct their reader or hearer (if we imagine they may have been read aloud to a circle). The pamphleteers themselves supply some suggestions about their purpose in publishing these pamphlets especially in their prefaces and dedications. The pamphlet account of the Chelmsford trial of 1579, for example, begins: “Accept this pamphlet (*Christian Reader*) view, and peruse it with discretion, and hedefulnesse ... in this pretie plot may holosome hearbes of *admonitions for the unwarie, and carelesse*, and soote flowers to recreate the wearied senses, be gathered.”<sup>17</sup> The anonymous author of the pamphlet account of the trial of 1589 states: “... because the Almighty will be no partaker of any such dealinges, nor the heart of any faithfull Christian conceale the secrets thereof: which for example I have heere published unto you the discourse of

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<sup>15</sup> Ian M. Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 447; see also Sandra Clark, *Elizabethan Pamphleteers: Popular Moralistic Pamphlets 1580-1640* (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), 86-120.

<sup>16</sup> Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft*, 346.

<sup>17</sup> Anon., *A Detection of damnable driftes, practised by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex* (1579), A (emphases added).

such diuelish practices as have been used by notorious Witches.”<sup>18</sup> Thomas Potts, author of the pamphlet account of the Lancashire witch trials of 1612, writes: “... according to my understanding, I haue taken paines to finish (this worke), and now confirmed by their (Iudges in the Triall of offenders) Iudgment to publish the same, *for the benefit of my Countrie*. That the example of these conuicted vpon their owne Examinations, Confessions, and Euidence at the Barre, *may worke good in others*.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, most of the pamphlets were moralistic in many respects and arranged in such a way as to emphasize that “every event could be seen and shown to illustrate some facet of God’s relationship to man, especially his providential control of human affairs and his careful and constant warning of the inevitable consequences of sinful living”<sup>20</sup> and this common feature of the pamphlet accounts – the influence of moral attitudes in the reporting of news - has contributed especially to the discussion in the second chapter of the current thesis in which this aspect of the witchcraft pamphlets will be treated in more detail.

“The relationship between the literary, learned clerical class that described and recorded witchcraft beliefs and practices, and the content of those beliefs in the minds of those who allegedly held them”<sup>21</sup> has long been recognized by the historians of witchcraft. Since it is almost impossible to isolate from these documents what was purely popular, the focus of this thesis is the nature of the interaction of learned and popular culture in terms of witchcraft in early modern England. For these sources do not tell us only about popular culture: they are “the product of a complex interweaving of the concerns of the elite and those of the

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<sup>18</sup> Anon., *The apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches arraigned and by Justice condemne and executed at Chelmes-forde* (London, 1589), A.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discouerie of witches in the countie of Lancaster* (London, 1613), A1v (emphases added).

<sup>20</sup> Clark, *The Elizabethan Pamphleteers*, 89.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

populace.”<sup>22</sup> In analyzing these sources, therefore, the present study aims to distinguish what the elite perceived and feared from what ordinary people actually believed and practised. Thus, in spite of their limitations and difficulties, by exploiting the pamphlet accounts of court records, it is possible to identify some recurring themes in witch accusations and confessions, to find in them the voices and actions of ordinary people, to discover their attitudes towards the suspected witch and what they thought about the power of maleficent magic, and at the same time, to comprehend the religious, social, and legal norms established by the learned.

Although it is the pamphlet accounts of witchcraft trials that underlie the central argument of this thesis and form a base for the analysis of the historical evidence, I have also made use of a few ballads, sermons, folk-tales, treatises, writings of the learned, and some other documents from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which, although not topically related to the witchcraft debate of the period, are fundamental to the content of the current study in terms of the information they contain. These sources have allowed valuable insights into the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the learned and the populace.

The current thesis is divided into five chapters, including this introductory chapter, three independent chapters and the concluding chapter. Peter Burke’s definition of culture as “a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values”<sup>23</sup> will be adopted and applied to two contexts, *reformed* tradition and *popular* tradition, and thus I will attempt a comparative perspective on certain aspects of witchcraft and witch beliefs in early modern England. Thus, I will try to offer a treatment of the

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<sup>22</sup> Clive Holmes, “Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines in Early Modern England,” in Steven L. Kaplan, ed., *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 105.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), xi.

subject matter with reference to Protestant discourse on the one hand and to popular or traditional attitudes and beliefs on the other hand.

Within this framework, the second chapter takes as its focus the image of the 'disorderly' woman within the dominant model of witch accusations. This chapter aims to provide a comparative approach to the nature of witchcraft accusations in early modern England and to examine the possible connection between the witch accusations and popular understanding of socially deviant behaviour on the one hand and between the witch accusations and the influence of the English reformers and the importance attributed to good and orderly behaviour in the 'Reformed' thought on the other hand. It is the central discussion in this chapter that the witch figure reflected in the allegations of the witnesses, accusations of the supposed victims and some of the confessions of the alleged witches themselves as quarrelsome, ill-tempered, sharp-tongued and lewd, was an inverse model of a worthy and acceptable individual by the standards of early modern community and an antagonist, an exact antitype of a reformed individual by those of the reformers. In this chapter, in order to provide a background to the conditions leading to accusations of witchcraft, I have also touched upon such issues as the importance of the reputation in defining a witch, interpersonal violence in early modern rural England, and the nature of early modern law which allowed all members of the community to denounce someone as a witch and formally accuse her or him of witchcraft. All the same, the main argument of this chapter is that the stereotype of the ill-tongued vengeful and quarrelsome witch in the accusations in early modern England represents a fusion of two distinct images, the unruly and disruptive anti-social member of the village community and the unregenerate and disobedient rebel against authority, true religion and God in the Reformed thought. In this chapter, I have sometimes

widened the focus from the pamphlets to include certain sermons, godly ballads and treatises written by the learned in order to evaluate more accurately and more comprehensively the possible influence of the reformers on witch confessions and accusations.

The third chapter examines two different perspectives on the idea of the ‘familiar’ – in its broadest sense, a demon in the shape of an animal which constantly accompanied a witch – and the employment of the familiar by the witch in terms of early modern witch-beliefs in England. In this sense, the first part of the chapter tries to understand and analyze the notion of the familiar according to the popular mentality of the time. Here I have adopted an approach that considers the supposed witches and the accusers as the story-tellers in the courtrooms. The reason for my adopting such an approach is that the belief in the animal familiar of the witch seems to have been the product of a composite idea fusing various components of folk-tales, traditional beliefs, oral culture and animal lore which were transmitted from generation to generation, blended with daily experience and features of village life, adapted for different circumstances, and, finally, integrated into the narratives of witchcraft in the courtrooms. This part of the chapter also aims to relate the prominence of the familiars in witchcraft stories to the fact that English witchcraft accusations were predominantly initiated from below,<sup>24</sup> and thus they, inevitably, reflected popular beliefs and concerns and were shaped by the rural environment in which animals were indispensable to people. In this part, the idea of the familiar is also treated in connection with the popular tendency to ‘domesticate’

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<sup>24</sup> For the discussion of this aspect of the witch trials and accusations in early modern England and the implicit contrast between English witch trials ‘inspired from below’ and the Continental ones following an inquisitorial procedure, see Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), 121-125; Norman Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*, rev. edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 211-232; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 594-598.

the Devil. The second part of this chapter deals with the Reformed commentary on the belief in witches' animal familiars, a belief of mainly 'popular origin'. At the heart of this discussion lies the ambiguous attitude of the learned toward the idea of the familiar. Starting from an observation about the absence of the use of the term *familiar* in the law of witchcraft and in the writings of certain theologians, this part aims to develop an argument about what animal familiars *may* have meant to the Reformed authorities, ministers, and theologians of the time. Here making use of certain sixteenth and seventeenth-century theological texts, predominantly works of Puritan theologian William Perkins, in addition to the witchcraft pamphlets, I have tried to point out some features of the 'Protestant Devil', Protestant reformers' ideas about the appearance of the Devil in physical form and about the popular belief in his appearance in animal form, and to show that their distanced approach towards the idea of the animal familiar *may* have had something to do with the contradiction, in this case, between the two perceptions of nature at the time, that is, between Protestant 'anthropocentrism' which put a strong emphasis on the sharp distinction between species - human and animal - and popular 'anthropomorphism' which, in some cases, led to the blurring of the boundaries between species.

The aim of the fourth chapter is to deal with a slightly different case in the history of early modern English witchcraft, the case of the Pendle witches, which was documented by Thomas Potts, clerk at the trials, very thoroughly. In this chapter I have tried to analyze Potts's detailed account of the Lancashire witch trials in 1612 and to define some peculiarities of the Pendle witches in connection with the contemporary anxieties about the continuance of Catholic tradition in the county of Lancashire. This chapter, through references to the accusations and confessions at the trials of the Pendle witches, aims to explore further the nature of witch beliefs

and reveal the perception of ‘religious error’, which runs through the stories told at the Lancashire trials of 1612, and its relation to the crime of witchcraft. Investigating a case which contains some peculiarities, some new or heavy emphases on the practice of witchcraft, such as the Good Friday meeting of the supposed witches (one of the first ‘approximations’ to the Continental-style ‘sabbat-night’ of witches to be found in an English source),<sup>25</sup> the intent to use the communion bread for magical purposes, the stealing of bones from the church graveyard, and the heavy use of image magic and that of charms equated with Catholic prayers, I aim both to demonstrate that the diversity of witch beliefs might vary in different regions and to show that these details from the confessions and accusations in the Lancashire witch trials were selected by Potts, not arbitrarily at all, but in specific relation to the expectations of his audience, and carefully arranged in such a way as to confirm contemporary concerns about religious laxity and Catholic survivalism in Lancashire. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to search for the reasons for the continuance of Catholic tradition during the post-Reformation period in any given county in England, in order to reinforce the argument about the possible link between the way of presentation of the somewhat different case of the Lancashire witches and the widespread anxieties about Lancashire, here I have also resorted to some sources which contain historical evidence revealing the persistence of Catholic tradition in the county.

Certain aspects of early modern English witch beliefs, as mentioned above and as will be seen throughout the following pages, pose questions which one can only attempt to answer by means of a comparative interpretation. This is what I have tried to do within the framework of the current thesis. This study, therefore, is an

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<sup>25</sup> Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 99.

attempt to understand the reciprocal and complex relationships between popular witch beliefs, witch narratives, ideas of the Reformation and the means by which these were communicated – courtrooms, the printing press, and the pulpit, for example – as much as the nature of witch confessions and witchcraft accusations in early modern England. It will be the central argument of the current thesis, therefore, that the official, learned and ‘reformed’ ideas about witchcraft sometimes contradicted, sometimes overlapped, sometimes formed an alliance with, sometimes re-shaped, and sometimes were absorbed into the popular witch beliefs and attitudes towards witchcraft and suspected witches.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **‘NEITHER EATE NOR DRINKE WITH THEM’: THE IMAGE OF THE WITCH AS AN UNRULY WOMAN AND THE PERCEPTION OF WITCHCRAFT AS AN ANTI-SOCIAL AND IRRELIGIOUS CRIME**

The main aim of this chapter is to try to understand the nature of witchcraft accusations in early modern England and to determine whether there was a connection between the accusations and popular understanding of socially deviant behaviour on the one hand and the possible influence of the English reformers on the other hand. My purpose is to explain what, in view of the common people, the crime of witchcraft consisted of, what made some women more prone to accusations of witchcraft or suitable targets for potential suspicion, and by what means popular sentiments about the witch figure was nurtured and supported and by what mechanisms the confessions and accusations were re-shaped, adapted and transmitted. The focus of this chapter will be on the witch figure as an inverse model of a worthy and acceptable individual by the standards of early modern community and of a ‘reformed’ one by those of the reformers, rather than the witch figure elevated to an imaginary and supernatural plane. In other words, this study will be centred on witchcraft as an anti-social crime. However, it is *not* the claim of this

study that *every* aspect of English witch accusations can be understood merely by reference to deviant behaviour.

I will proceed in a few stages: first, I will indicate the importance of reputation in village life by giving some evidence for the ill-reputation of the suspected witches as a starting-point in accusations. Secondly, my purpose is to point out the social environment in which the accusations originated and to refer to some social dynamics behind them. Thirdly, I will try to provide an overview of the nature of the early modern law which allowed villagers' fears of *maleficium* to find expression in formal accusations, giving *all* members of the community the possibility of accusing and denouncing somebody as a witch. Fourthly, I will discuss in some detail the prominence of verbal excesses and misbehaviour as the reason for growing suspicions and as a common theme in witch accusations, together with their implications in other local offences. Then, I will take the discussion to a different level, to the big topic of this study: the aim of Protestant reformation and the possible influence of the 'reformed' ideas and the activities of the reformers on accusatory stories, confessions, persecutions, and on the content of witchcraft pamphlets.

Let us start by considering the importance of reputation in defining a witch and as a contributory factor in witch accusations. The depositions and accusatory stories at witch-trials reveal that, as historians have noted, the history of suspicions went in many cases back years or even decades before an accusation of witchcraft was brought against the suspected witch.<sup>1</sup> In the pamphlet account of the 1618 trial at Lincoln, it was recorded that "the whole course of (Joan Flower's) life gaue great

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Bever, "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power, in the Early Modern Community," *Journal of Social History* 35, 4 (2002): 955-988, p. 958; J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750* (London: Longman, 1999), 109-110; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), *passim*, esp. 628-680.

suspicion that she was a notorious Witch.”<sup>2</sup> In her examination, Grace Thurlowe, one of the informants of the St. Osyth trials in 1582, said that she had warned Ursley Kempe, saying to her, “Take heed Ursley, thou hast a naughtie name.”<sup>3</sup> At the same trial Ales Hunt, one of the informants and the accused witches at the same time, said that “she hath heard her mother say, that she the said Joan (Pechey) was skillfull and cunning in witcherie.”<sup>4</sup> Agnes Brown of Gilsborough, one of the witches executed at the end of the Northamptonshire trial in 1612, was “many yeeres before shee died both hated and feared among her neighbours: Beeing long suspected in the Towne where she dwelt of that crime (of witchcraft).”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, it is very clear from these examples that early modern English village was a place where, with ill-reputation being whispered and passed on, the community was could mar one’s reputation with a breath. In the circulation of the ‘message’ one rumour could give birth to several rumours but they all shared the same kind of *alarm* resounding in communal consciousness.

Such examples about the importance of suspicions also lead us directly to that issue which was so central to interpersonal tensions in the early modern English village which did not necessarily lead to legal action, to the issue concerning what has been described by Keith Thomas as ‘the tyranny of local opinion and the lack of

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<sup>2</sup> Anon., *The wonderful discouerie of the vwitchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Ioan Flower neere Beuer Castle: executed at Lincolne, March 11. 1618 Who were specially arraigned and condemned before Sir Henry Hobart, and Sir Edward Bromley, iudges of assise, for confessing themselues actors in the destruction of Henry L. Rosse, with their damnable practises against others the children of the Right Honourable Francis Earle of Rutland. Together with the seuerall examinations and confessions of Anne Baker, Ioan Willimot, and Ellen Greene, witches in Leicestershire* (London, 1619), C3.

<sup>3</sup> W. W., *A True and just Recorde of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches taken at St. Oses in the countie of Essex: whereof some were executed, and other some entreated according to the determination of Lawe. Written orderly, as the cases were tried by evidence, by W. W.* (London, 1582), A2.

<sup>4</sup> W. W., *A True and just Recorde* (1582), A4v.

<sup>5</sup> Anon., *The Witches of Northamptonshire. Agnes Browne, Arthur Bill, Joane Vaughan, Hellen Jenkenson, Mary Barber: Witches Who were all executed at Northampton the 22. of July last. 1612* (London, 1612), B2.

tolerance displayed towards nonconformity or social deviation.’<sup>6</sup> Here, therefore, it is necessary to examine social environment in which the accusations themselves originated. In contrast to Alan Macfarlane’s thesis that “by present-day standards, and perhaps those of other countries at the time, early modern England was an exceptionally peaceful and violence-free society,”<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Stone, referring especially to the rate of homicides outside the family, has come to the conclusion that “interpersonal violence was a recurring fact of rural and urban life”<sup>8</sup> during the period. Stone cites several historians who have noted the ‘violence-prone’ poor in early modern period and indicated that “hatred, fear and violence were endemic in rural England before the Industrial Revolution,” that the seventeenth-century village was characterized by “an atmosphere of contention, of chronic and sometimes bitter enmity,” and that in seventeenth-century people had to live “in these gossip-ridden, mean-spirited, endlessly litigious and generally rather nasty villages.”<sup>9</sup> According to Stone, what seems clear is that, if not in war, in daily life, “medieval English society was twice as violence-prone as early modern English society, and early modern English society at least five times more violence-prone than contemporary English society.”<sup>10</sup> In such a ‘violence-prone’ society where there was a wide variety of interpersonal conflicts, “where gossip thrived, where reputations were evaluated, where discussable news was a welcome entity ... there is little doubt that witchcraft suspicions were among the more avidly discussed of topics,”<sup>11</sup> and as Bever points

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 629.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Stone, “Interpersonal Violence in English Society 1300-1980,” *Past and Present* 101 (1983): 22-33, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Stone, “Interpersonal Violence in English Society,” 25.

<sup>9</sup> Stone, “Interpersonal Violence in English Society,” 28.

<sup>10</sup> Stone, “Interpersonal Violence in English Society,” 32.

<sup>11</sup> James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 163.

out, nearly every human relationship which went wrong might lead to a charge of witchcraft.<sup>12</sup>

Bringing a witch before the authorities or accusing her or him before a court was thought to be an effective way because it was commonly believed that ‘the witch’s imprisonment could be a widespread source of relief.’<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, when the communal fears and beliefs about witchcraft did not necessarily lead to legal action or when crime or deviant behaviour was not the subject of a court case, a range of options was available to deal with the local offender. Some of these options were often mixed with popular superstitions, resorted to in dealing with a witch or combating witchcraft, and part of the ‘unofficial counter-action’, ‘informal proceeding’ or ‘immediate popular justice’,<sup>14</sup> as Unsworth has termed it, and the reflection in witch-beliefs of that ‘violence’ characterizing early modern community. Our knowledge of pre-trial process mainly comes from the accusatory stories and the witches’ confessions at trials or the pamphlet accounts in narrative form and these stories reveal that forms of counter-action against suspected witches included beating, clawing, or scratching the witch, drawing of the blood from a witch in the hope of bringing relief to the bewitched person - the use of physical violence, in a word – or burning something belonging to the witch. At the 1579 trial in Chelmsford, Essex, for example, one of the witnesses against Mother Staunton said that “after a certaine woordes of anger betweene hym and her, he *raced her face with a Nedle*, what quoth she, haue you a Flea there: and the nexte night after, the

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<sup>12</sup> Bever, “Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power,” 958.

<sup>13</sup> Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 156.

<sup>14</sup> C. R. Unsworth, “Witchcraft Beliefs and Criminal Procedure in Early Modern England,” in *Legal Record and Historical Reality: Proceedings of the Eighth British Legal History Conference*, Thomas G. Watkin, ed. (London: Continuum International Publishing, 1989), 86.

saied Pratte was so greeuously taken with tormente of his Limmes.”<sup>15</sup> According to the pamphlet relating to the case of Alse Gooderidge in 1597, Thomas Darling, a young Derbyshire boy who was believed to have been possessed, was persuaded by the standers by to scratch Alse long suspected of witchcraft: “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.”<sup>16</sup> In 1621, Henry Goodcole recorded in his account of the conviction of Elizabeth Sawyer of Edmonton that in order “to finde out who should bee the author of this mischiefe, an old ridiculous custome was vsed, which was to plucke the Thatch of her house, and to burne it, and it being so burned, the author of such mischiefe should presently then come.”<sup>17</sup>

These were among the options that might be resorted to in order to force the witch to reveal herself or alleviate the witchcraft and actually included communal violence against the suspected witch. The communal sense of ‘fear’, the fear of having been ‘bewitched’, the potential anxiety in the face of ‘unnatural’ death of people or animals, the anger resulting from the interruption of domestic routine, or the assumed attitudes of nonviolence might sometimes turn out to be communally sanctioned practices of ‘physical violence’ in early modern English village, “a place filled with malice and hatred.”<sup>18</sup> As we have seen above, the community was ready

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<sup>15</sup> Anon., *A Detection of damnable driftes, practised by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex at the last Assizes there holden, whiche were executed in Aprill 1579. Set forthe to discouer the ambushementes of Sathan, whereby he would surprise vs lulled in securitie, and hardened with contempte of Gods vengeance threatened for our offences* (London, 1579), Avii.

<sup>16</sup> I. D., *The most wonderfull and true Storie of a certaine Witch named Alse Gooderidge of Stapenhill, who was arraigned and convicted at Darbie, at the Assizes there. As also a true Report of the strange Torments of Thomas Darling, a boy of thirteen years of age, that was possessed by the Devill, with his horrible Fittes and terrible apparitions by him uttered at Burton upon Trent, in the Countie of Stafford, and of his marvellous deliverance* (London, 1597), B-Bv.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch, late of Edmonton, her conviction and condemnation and Death. Together with the relation of the Diuells accesse to her, and their conference together* (London, 1621), A4-A4v.

<sup>18</sup> As quoted in Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 164.

to take action against the suspected witches and even to punish them in its own way before her persecution by the court or before the suspicions took the form of formal accusation. The situation was not so different for other local offences against communal norms and in terms of communal disapproval of these offences. In extreme cases, for instance, “(blatant disturbers of the peace or egregious nonconformists) might be run out of town” by parishioners: thus the inhabitants of Kington St Michael reported of a newcomer in 1619 that he had lately lived in Bathway in Somerset but had been “by the inhabitants excluded, by reason of his troublesome and lewd course of life and behaviour.”<sup>19</sup> In both cases, in case of suspicions of witchcraft and that of the unrest resulting from a variety of disruptive offences, it appears, the use of violence became a communally-sanctioned way to express fear and hatred and a wide range of people tended to use violence, as Amussen has suggested, “as a way to discipline or punish those by whom they felt wronged.”<sup>20</sup>

“Witch beliefs,” as Sharpe has argued, “were widespread and culturally patterned rather than being the product of individual credulity.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, when a member of the village community accused someone of being a witch, he or she also had the community behind him or her as in the case of Margaret Harkett of Stanmore according to which after the death of one of their neighbours, “the Townes men made complaint of her dealinge to the Justice, who commaunded one Maister Norwood a Gentleman in the Towne to goe search her house.”<sup>22</sup> Communal

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 31.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England,” *The Journal of British Studies* 34, 1 (1995): 1-34, p.4.

<sup>21</sup> Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 149.

<sup>22</sup> Anon., *The severall factes of Witch-crafte, approved and laid to the charge of Margaret Harkett, of the Towne of Stanmore, in the Countie of Middlesex, for the which she was arraigned and condemned at the Sessions house, before Tyborne this 19. of February. 1585*; case re-printed in Marion Gibson,

participation in enforcing the law was involved at every stage of legal action from the trials to public execution indeed. But how could it be possible? How could it become so easy for people to charge anyone with witchcraft before the courts? According to Norman Cohn, the answer to this question lies in the shift in the nature of medieval law. Cohn explains why there were hardly any *maleficium* trials during the Middle Ages, stating:

Almost throughout the Middle Ages – very generally until the thirteenth century, in some parts of Europe even to the fifteenth century – the accusatory form of criminal procedure obtained. That is to say, the legal battle was fought out not between society and the accused, but between the accused and a private person who accused him.<sup>23</sup>

During the Middle Ages, to charge anyone with *maleficium* was to take a very grave risk indeed because if the accuser failed to convince the judge he was likely to suffer as heavy a penalty as would have been visited upon the accused if he had been convicted.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, although “there were suspected witches in the neighbourhood, it was simply impossible to try them under that procedure.”<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, in England from the sixteenth century onwards, the country possessed a legal system which made it easier for common people to bring charges of *maleficium* before the courts.<sup>26</sup> After the passage of the statute which made witchcraft a felony in 1542, witch-trials in England gradually became characterized by the phenomenon Hirst and Woolley term ‘disorderly legality’. According to this:

Witchcraft trials are a part of conditions of ‘disorderly legality’. They are desperate measures and by their very form they undermine the possibility of creating a stable, useful and pacified population. Although conducted by authority, and serving as a means to enforce religious conformity, they threaten both political order and religious conformity. For if the courts of

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ed., *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000), 128.

<sup>23</sup> Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*, rev. edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 215.

<sup>24</sup> Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 215.

<sup>25</sup> Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 217.

<sup>26</sup> Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 218.



authority provide the theatre, popular accusations and the confessions of the accused determine the cast, and those accusations are not limited by considerations of social standing or outward belief. Beggar women can denounce merchants and councilors... Witch trials, like the disorder of festivals and organized licensed begging, threaten to give rise to an institutionalized anarchy in which popular forces rather than state agencies set the norms of conduct.<sup>27</sup>

Now the legal battle was being fought out, as implied before, between society and the accused rather than the accused and a private person who accused him or her and “the witch trial (as the climax of a cumulative process of community denunciation) furnished a setting for the expression of popular hostility”<sup>28</sup> and local suspicions. This brings us to the main concern of this chapter: the nature of the accusations and the witch figure described by the accusers and witnesses at witch trials and the role of Protestantism in influencing or re-shaping the witch beliefs and the representations of the witch figure.

Who was the witch? What did witchcraft mean to those who belonged to the same community as the witch? Can we expect an *unshakable* internal consistency from the stories describing meanings of witchcraft? It seems impossible to be able to give short and clear answers to these questions when we consider the number of publications documenting and commenting on contemporary witchcraft cases in early modern England, the bulk of the existing literature on witchcraft, the diversity in the traditional witch-lore of the Middle Ages and early modern period and, as Diane Purkiss has suggested, the ambiguity of the boundaries defining the term ‘witch’ in popular culture.<sup>29</sup>

In studying witchcraft, one should not forget that “the factual foundation of witchcraft prosecution, which directly triggered confessions, trials, records,

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<sup>27</sup> As quoted in Unsworth, “Witchcraft Beliefs and Criminal Procedure in Early Modern England,” 76.

<sup>28</sup> Unsworth, “Witchcraft Beliefs and Criminal Procedure,” 86.

<sup>29</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 183.

pamphlets and most of our information about witchcraft, is the accusation.”<sup>30</sup> It is generally agreed today that although the accusatory stories in the pamphlet accounts of the witch-trials in early modern England do not offer us a ‘fixed’ meaning for an act of witchcraft and the accusations are, in Gibson’s words, “extremely shaky,”<sup>31</sup> they nevertheless present a pattern followed by many of the accusers and witnesses, which make it easier for us to illustrate the recurring themes in such stories.

Accusatory stories cover a number of themes. The verbal aggression, the ‘abuse of language’ by the suspected witch and her ill-temperament are among the common themes of accusations along with the fear of *maleficium* and addressed repeatedly in pamphlet accounts which include the depositions of the accusers and witnesses at witch-trials. In most of these stories, the suspected witch frequently appeared as an ‘anti-social’ woman. Accusers and witnesses made references at every opportunity to the suspect’s habit of ‘scolding’, ‘cursing’, ‘brawling’, ‘murmuring’, ‘falling out’, ‘quarrelling’, etc. The image of the quarrelsome woman with a mischievous tongue is, if not the basis for, a conspicuous aspect of many of the accusations of witchcraft.

To illustrate this point, it would be useful to cite some examples from the accusations expressing anxiety in the face of ‘unruly’ women. At the witch-trial of 1579 at Chelmsford, Essex, “it was auouched that mother Nokes had saied that her housbande laie with one Tailers wife of Lamberd Ende, and *with reprochfull words reuiled her saying* at last; thou hast a Nurse childe but thou shalte not keepe it long, and presently thereupon the Childe died.”<sup>32</sup> Mother Staunton of Wimbush, one of

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<sup>30</sup> Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 79.

<sup>31</sup> Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Anon., *A Detection of damnable driftes, practised by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex at the last Assizes there holden, whiche were executed in Aprill 1579. Set forthe to discouer the*

the three witches arraigned at Chelmsford in 1579, reacted with *great anger* when the wife of one Robert Petty of Brook Walden denied her “divers things which she demanded at once.”<sup>33</sup> According to the pamphlet account of the witchcraft trials in 1582, Grace Thurlowe, who gave evidence against Ursley Kempe, said that “the said Ursley *fell out* with her, for that shee woulde not suffer her to have the nursing of that childe ... while some short time *after that falling out*, the childe ... fell out of the saide Cradle, and brake her neck and dyed.”<sup>34</sup> At the same trial Annis Letherdall, another accuser against the same Ursley, said that “Ursley (having been denied of “scouring sand”) seeing her (Annis’s) gyrl to carry some to one of her neighbours houses, *murmured* as the said childe said, that 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” and Elizabeth Bennet, giving evidence against Ales Newman, said that “shee being at Johnsons to have wool to spinne... mother Newman being come thither... to desire Johnson to give her xii. d. ... (Johnson) saying that hee could not helpe her with any, until he had collected more money, whereupon shee departed, and *used some harde speeches* unto him, and *seemed to be much angrie*.”<sup>35</sup> The author of the pamphlet account of the 1618 trial at Lincoln described Joan Flower, one of the women executed for the alleged crime of witchcraft at the end of the trial, as a “malicious woman, *full of oaths, curses, and imprecations irreligious*,” and her speech as “fell and envious.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Phillip Flower, daughter of the said Joan Flower, confessed during her examination that “shee heard her mother often *curse* the Earle and his Lady, and therevpon would boyle feathers and blood together,

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*ambushementes of Sathan, whereby he would surprise vs lulled in securitie, and hardened with contempte of Gods vengeance threatened for our offences* (London, 1579), Bii.

<sup>33</sup> *A Detection of damnable driftes, practised by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex* (1579), Aviii.

<sup>34</sup> W. W., *A True and just Recorde* (1582), B.

<sup>35</sup> W. W., *A True and just Recorde* (1582), A3, A6v.

<sup>36</sup> *The wonderful discouerie of the vvitchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Ioan Flower* (1619), C3.

vsing many *diuellish speeches* and strange gestures.”<sup>37</sup> At the 1645 trial in Kent, Elizabeth Harris, one of the suspects who also witnessed against another woman, said that “Goodwife Gardner hath *a very ill tongue*.”<sup>38</sup> In addition, Reginald Scot, in his highly skeptical treatise, observed: “If more ridiculous or abhominable crimes could have beene invented, these poore women (whose *cheefe fault is that they are scolds*) should have beene charged with them”<sup>39</sup> (my italics in all quotations in this paragraph).

It is very clear from these examples that certain members of the community, who moved from anger to scolding to threats to curses, were more likely to be denounced by other members of the same community. Having a scolding and threatening tongue and a quarrelsome temperament were among the traits attributed to witches, and therefore had close affinities with the accusations of witchcraft. On the other hand, the idea that certain people tended to abuse language to achieve their wicked ends did not emerge as the product of witch-trials; it was deeply rooted in popular culture and had other examples in England, though in a different context and sometimes with different implications. Other offences including the abuse of language, scolding and railing for example, continued to be punished throughout the early modern period on the basis of an indictable offence according to the common

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<sup>37</sup> *The wonderful discouerie of the vvitchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Ioan Flower neere Beuer Castle* (1619), F3.

<sup>38</sup> Anon., *The examination, confession, triall, and execution, of Joane Williford, Joan Cariden, and Jane Hott: who were executed at Feversham in Kent, for being witches, on Munday the 29 of September, 1645. Being a true copy of their evill lives and wicked deeds, taken by the Major of Feversham and jurors for the said inquest. With the examination and confession of Elizabeth Harris, not yet executed. All attested under the hand of Robert Greenstreet, major of Feversham* (London, 1645), 6.

<sup>39</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft, Wherein the lewde dealing of witches and witchmongers is notablie detected, the knaverie of conjurors, the impietie of inchanters, the follie of soothsaiers, the impudent falsehood of cousenors, the infidelitie of atheists, the pestilent practises of Pythonists, the curiositie of figurecasters, the vanitie of dreamers, the begger lie art of Alcumystrie, The abomination of idolatrie, the horrible art of poisoning, the vertue and power of naturall magicke, and all the conveiances of legierdemaine and juggling are deciphered: and many other things opened, which have long been hidden, howbeit verie necessarie to be known* (London, 1584), Chapter X.

law.<sup>40</sup> That is, in early modern culture, as Walker points out, “words were serious business”<sup>41</sup> and “verbal utterance was understood absolutely to be a form of action, not merely its weak, binary other.”<sup>42</sup> Women’s scolding, reviling and railing were considered as acts of ‘violence’.

The witch appearing in the examinations of accusers and witnesses was not only a figure who did harm by occult means to other people and their children or livestock; she was a ‘lewd’, ‘scolding’, ‘brawling’, ‘begging’, ‘cursing’, ‘swearing’ woman – a neighbour from hell. All scolding or cursing women may not have been witches in the eyes of the community, but most of the alleged witches were usually thought to be such kind of unruly women. Moreover, the distinctions between the types of ‘unacceptable’ behaviour and the contexts in which the labels of such kind of behaviour were applied were in many cases blurred and thus definitions overlapped in popular mind. No doubt the label of ‘witch’ encompassed far more than mere having a venomous tongue both in the legal meaning of the term and most probably in the opinion of ordinary people. Furthermore, as Bever observes, “suspects had not been in court for verbal excesses”<sup>43</sup> (or rather, *only* for verbal excesses) and in this respect, “the village witch appears to have been a different role than the village scold.”<sup>44</sup> Yet, in the accusers’ and witnesses’ examinations during the witch-trials, these offences became often indistinguishable. Similarly, in some cases when the accused were in court for ‘verbal excesses’, the accusations directed at loose-tongued women also referred to other offences along with verbal

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<sup>40</sup> For details about ‘scolding’ and its punishment, see David E. Underdown, “The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England,” in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>41</sup> Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 100.

<sup>42</sup> Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 99.

<sup>43</sup> Bever, “Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power,” 959.

<sup>44</sup> Bever, “Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power,” 959.

transgression as in a case in 1557 “when Robert Bayly and his wife were presented by the Somersetshire parish of Stoke Gifford as notorious scolds and cursers of their neighbours,” and it was suggested that “immediately after the said cursing some mischances follow of it.”<sup>45</sup> In the same way, because of the blurring and overlapping of the boundaries between local offences, such charges of disturbing the peace, disrupting harmony and order by quarrelling, brawling, fighting, too, “often embraced not only the stirring up of strife ... but also a variety of other offences such as irreligion, drunkenness and sexual immorality.”<sup>46</sup> Thus in 1624 the parishioners of Fittleton petitioned the justices to apprehend and bind over a certain Susan Browne on the grounds that she was a “woman of very evil life and conversation, raising of false rumours and fables of the parishioners...to their great disturbance.”<sup>47</sup> From these examples, we may conclude that the village community seems to have labeled the suspect a witch or the local offender a scold among many other things. The description of the witch figure in folk belief – as a manipulator of malignant powers or ‘as a malevolent intermediary’ in its broadest sense –<sup>48</sup> included almost all the visible manifestations of the proneness to disorder and indirect and sometimes direct violence. The alleged witches of various types, who were accused by their neighbours before the court, shared characteristics which marked them out as not only frightening evildoers having magical powers or using them to do harm, but also peace disturbers, trouble-makers and lewd, envious, malicious, angry, revengeful characters.

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 610.

<sup>46</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England*, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Certain cases of diabolic possession that involved a witch as intermediary being excepted, the witch figure, it appears, was thought to be ‘a malevolent intermediary’ between *nature* and *humans* because she was believed to stir up ‘unnatural’ diseases for men and beasts (not necessarily with the help of demonic powers, but rather by causing an unbalancing in nature through her evil deeds). For information about the witch figure in different cultures ‘as a malevolent intermediary’, see Venetia Newall, ed., *The Witch Figure: folklore essays by a group of scholars in England honouring the 75th birthday of Katharine M. Briggs* (London: Routledge, 2004).

Many studies on witchcraft, while referring to the depositions of the witnesses and accusers at the trials, have usually tended to explain the nature of or the reason for these accusations in terms of interpersonal conflicts within the community and the fear of *maleficium*.<sup>49</sup> Certainly, this explanation is still valid. However, I would like to approach the issue from another perspective, to see the other side of the coin, and to try to demonstrate that when these interpersonal tensions found expression before the court, the language used in describing the suspected witch was influenced as much by Protestant discourse (not in terms of demonic pact but in terms of ‘moralized’ aspect of the issue) as by the ‘real’ circumstances that led to accusations, and that certain themes in the depositions of witnesses appear to have developed under the influence of Protestant ideology and taken the form of witchcraft with the contribution of other elements. Therefore, we need to approach the ‘witch’ in such a way as to keep in play both the social and cultural version of the unruly woman, the historical event in which “interpersonal tensions” led to a public complaint or a formal charge being laid, and the interplay between the accusers and Protestant reformers.

In discussing the relationship of Protestant ideology to the accusatory stories at witch-trials, it is necessary to widen the focus from simply the pattern of court cases and their reflection in pamphlet accounts and to take into account English reformers’ activities at the time. Although a full-scale examination of their efforts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is evidently beyond the scope of this study, it is with these that this discussion must begin. Within this framework, Puritan attack on ‘common country disorders’ is one of the points that needs to be considered here. Protestantism, in accordance with its emphasis on ‘conscious’

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 528-612; Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, 211-233; Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33-78; Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 148-168.

faith, aimed at creating ‘refined civility’ and furthering ‘reformation of manners’ among the commoners by purifying them from their ‘misapprehensions’, ‘vulgar’ notions and misbehaviours. Therefore, “wherever they were found the godly tended to be involved in a campaign of moral activism... they waged an untiring war against idleness, drunkenness, swearing, sexual immorality and religious laxity” and “at the less elevated social levels ... the godly did (this) through their exercise of local office as constables, churchwardens and overseers of the poor.”<sup>50</sup> Especially before the civil wars, Puritans insisted on the need to preserve order and, in particular, to defend order from the consequences of man’s sinfulness. According to this, as Sharpe points out, “if nothing else, the regenerate individual, whether godly monarch, godly magistrate, godly minister or even godly parish officer, had a duty to discipline the unregenerate masses.”<sup>51</sup>

During the Reformation years, the printing press became Protestant reformers’ preferred medium. Printing centres were the primary producers of Reformation works by the Protestants and pamphlets were one of the speediest and most effective ways to disseminate Protestant ideas. While Protestant concepts of ‘order’, ‘communal harmony’ and ‘appropriate behaviour’ were intruding steadily into the village through ‘godly’ officers, the printing press continued to supply the means for the spread of ‘conscious’ faith. Puritans connected ‘ill manners’ with many great vices which were supposed to accompany them; such as sinfulness, and in its extreme form, witchcraft. Therefore, pamphlet accounts of witch trials, too, may have been meant to be used as a means of bringing the ‘subtleties’ of Protestant message to ‘less-subtle’ minds: although the commoners were not able to reflect, they might be instructed about conscious religion, won to the new ideas and

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<sup>50</sup> Ingram, “From Reformation to Toleration,” 104; see also, J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750* (London, New York: Longman, 1999), 217-219.

<sup>51</sup> Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England*, 217.



corrected that ‘faith alone could save’, through a popular attempt and in a popular form. Furthermore, by reading these pamphlets, a sinner might discover that he or she had sinned and still continue to sin in his or her actions and thoughts. However, the effectiveness of such an effort, as Parker notes, “hinged upon a critical question: how many people in early modern Europe could read?”<sup>52</sup>

The ability to read with understanding was confined for the most part to the ruling minority and the ‘mass of the people’ was oral in its communications. Although “the successful practice of the Protestant religion,” to a great extent, “required literate skills,”<sup>53</sup> other options were available to the reformers in explaining their message to the illiterate mass. English reformers were spreading their evangelical message and Reformation ideas by means of oral and visual media together with the printed one – through preaching, plays, engravings, cartoons, ballads, minstrels and informal discussions of the Scripture – to gain access to the *uneducated* in a way that combined text with image and sound.<sup>54</sup> As Haigh has emphasized,

Puritans knew that sin, ignorance and popery could only be kept at bay by preaching, catechizing and pastoral discipline ... In the absence of a satisfactory disciplinary structure, preaching and catechizing were the weapons available for conscientious ministers to convert the Catholics, confirm the Protestants and attract the ungodly to the ways of the Lord.<sup>55</sup>

One of the sermons aimed at developing reformed doctrines within this ‘moral activism’ and “appointed to be read in churches” is particularly revealing in terms of our discussion. Of the twelve sermons contained in the first Book of Homilies published in 1547, the one “against strife and contention” states:

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<sup>52</sup> Geoffrey Parker, “Success and Failure during the First Century of the Reformation,” *Past and Present* 136 (1992): 43-82, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> Parker, “Success and Failure of the Reformation,” 52.

<sup>54</sup> Alexandra Walsham, “‘Domme Preachers?’ Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Culture of Print,” *Past and Present* 168 (2000): 72-123, p. 76.

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Haigh, “Puritan Evangelism in the Reign of Elizabeth I,” *English Historical Review* 92, 362 (1977): 30-58, p. 30.

This day (good Christian people) shall bee declared vnto you, the vnprofitablenesse and shamefull vnhonestie of contention, strife, and debate, to the intent, that when you shall see as it were in a table painted before your eyes, the euillfaourednesse and deformitie of this most detestable vice, your stomackes may bee mooued to rise against it, and to detest and abhorre that sinne, which is so much to be hated, and pernicious, and hurt full to all men [...] Saint Iames saith, If yee haue bitter emulation or enuying, and contention in your hearts, glorie not of it: for *where as contention is, there is vnstedfastnesse, and all euill deeds* [...] The wisdom that commeth from aboue from the spirit of GOD, is chaste and pure, corrupted with no euill affections: it is *quiet, meeke, and peaceable*, abhorring all desire |&| contention: it is *tractable, obedient, not grudging* to learne, and to giue place to them that teach better for the reformation [...] For trueth it is, that stifnesse in maintaining an opinion, breedeth contention, brawling, and chiding, which is a vice among all other most pernicious and pestilent to common peace and quietnesse. And it standeth betwixt two persons and parties (for no man commonly doth chide with himselfe) so it comprehendeth *two most detestable vices*: the one is *picking of quarrelles, with sharpe and contentious words*: the other standeth in *froward answering, and multiplying euill wordes againe* [...] Now here consider that Saint Paul numbred a scoulder, a brawler, or a picker of quarrelles, among theeues and idolaters, and many times *there commeth lesse hurt of a theefe, then of a railing tongue*: [...] a theefe hurteth but him from whom hee stealeth: but *hee that hath an euill tongue, troubleth all the towne, where hee dwelleth, and sometime the whole countrey*. And *a railing tongue is a pestilence* so full of contagiousnesse, that Saint Paul willeth Christian men to forbear the company of such, and *neither to eate nor drinke with them* [...].<sup>56</sup>

According to Protestant reformers, knowledge of ‘the Word’ was central to Christianity and therefore, from the pulpit, people were ordinarily preached the Bible and they were instructed “A loude crying woman, and a scolde, shall be sought out to driue away the enemies” (*Ecclesiasticus* 26:27), “The crooked of mind do not prosper, and the perverse of tongue fall into calamity” (*Proverbs* 17:20), or a ‘virtuous’ woman “looketh well to the ways of her household and eateth not the bread of idleness” (*Proverbs* 31:27). In the second half of the seventeenth century, English Puritan William Gearing, in *A Bridle for the Tongue: Or A Treatise of Ten Sins of the Tongue* listed ten ‘sins of the tongue’ as following: “cursing, swearing,

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<sup>56</sup> “A Sermon against Strife and Contention,” in *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of the Late Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory; and now Thought Fit to be Reprinted by Authority from the King’s most Excellent Majesty, Anno MDCXXIII. To Which are Added the Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, Set forth in the Year MDCIII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1844) [Based on Christ Church copy of the 1623 edition], 124 (emphases added).

slandering, scoffing, filthy-speaking, flattering, censuring, murmuring, lying and boasting.”<sup>57</sup> Here it would also be worth mentioning that in 1624 Parliament passed an act against profane swearing and cursing.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, ‘godly ballads’ of the period, some of which played a central part in traditional festivities and created a constant interplay between ‘folk-singing’ and commercial ballad-writing,<sup>59</sup> condemned the sins of the age - quarrelsomeness, cursing, pride, lack of charity, hypocrisy, covetousness, and so on – and called for immediate repentance and urged people to pray for forgiveness.<sup>60</sup> They were being composed to help ‘poor souls’ amend their wicked lives.<sup>61</sup> Thus, as Pettegree has suggested, on the one hand, “the ballads, for all their simplicity of purpose and style, (were sketching) the basis of a coherent layman’s theology,” on the other hand, they supplied a means for English parishioners’ absorbing their messages as part of diverse entertainment culture into the social and cultural web of the village life.<sup>62</sup> It would not be wrong to say that this was true even for the broadside ballads telling in their own terms the fate of victims of the witch persecution in England. One example is a ballad entitled *Damnable Practises of three Lincolne-shire Witches* which, after telling its listeners a great deal about the ‘damned deeds’ of the three

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<sup>57</sup> William Gearing, *A Bridle for the Tongue, Or, A Treatise of ten Sins of the Tongue* (London, 1663), a2.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 600.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Barry, “Literacy and Literature in Popular Culture: Reading and Writing in Historical Perspective,” in *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850*, Tim Harris, ed. (Houndmills, London: Macmillan, 1995), 82.

<sup>60</sup> Ian M. Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 461.

<sup>61</sup> The author of *A Looking-Glass for a Christian Family*, for example, warns people: “Do but observe these lines that I have pen’d / I hope ’t will be a means your Lives to mend / ... / The Lord his judgements he doth on us send / Because we don’t our wicked lives amend / ... / The Glutton shall with hunger pine away / Drunkards the more they thirst the more they may / Swearers and those that do delight there in / Besure in heaven shall never favour win;” see, Anon., *A Looking-Glass for a Christian Family or A Warning for all people to fear God. Good People, in this Glass you may behold the Joys and Comfort the Righteous are in, the wicked being accursed for evermore: Likewise the great cause the Lord sends such sore Judgments among us for our Sins and Wickedness, and worser he will send i f we repent not in time* (London, 1642?).

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 75.

witches ‘full of wrath’ and with ‘mumbling mouths’, three ‘swearing and blaspheming wretches’, concludes with the following verses similar to a prayer and with an emphasis on ‘fear of God’: “Have mercy Heaven, on sinners all, / and grant that never like / Be in this Nation knowne or done, / But Lord in vengeance strike: / Or else convert their wicked lives / which in bad ways are spent: / The feares of God and love of Heaven, / such courses will prevent.”<sup>63</sup>

As for the witchcraft pamphlets published at the time, they were likewise used in ‘the dissemination of the ideological message of the godly’ and they presented bizarre and violent acts apparently for moral instruction besides providing, in some cases, entertainment for their audience and exploiting popular discourses and personal experiences of witchcraft.<sup>64</sup> As Stavreva indicates, “the representation of witchcraft was confined primarily to the genre of the pamphlet – this printed version of the sermon,”<sup>65</sup> and “the witch-hunting press was working hand in hand with the judicial system. The two institutions strove to expose the perverters of the cultural order, to raise civic vigilance, and purify the Reformed community.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, in these pamphlets, the disturbing speech acts and behaviour of the witches – their cursing, scolding, mumbling, brawling, lewdness etc. – was presented as a sign of ‘moral perversion’, ‘criminal depravity’ and malevolence or as the reason for their being more likely to be tempted by the devil. Thus the author of the pamphlet dated 1619 said:

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<sup>63</sup> Anon., *Damnable Practises of three Lincoln-shire Witches, Joane Flower and her two Daughters, Margaret and Phillip Flower, against Henry Lord Rosse, with others the Children of the Right Honourable the Earl of Rutland, at Beauer Castle, who for the same were executed at Lincolne the 11. of March last* (London, 1619). This is the ballad version of the pamphlet entitled *The wonderful discoverie of the vvitchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Ioan Flower neere Beuer Castle: executed at Lincolne, March 11. 1618* (London, 1619) and it is evident that the ballad was composed in order to reach more audience.

<sup>64</sup> Kirilka Stavreva, “Fighting Words: Witch-Speak in Late Elizabethan Docu-fiction,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30:2 (2000): 309-338; p. 322-325.

<sup>65</sup> Stavreva, “Fighting Words,” 319.

<sup>66</sup> Stavreva, “Fighting Words,” 322.

There is no murmuring nor repining against God, but quietly to tolerate his inflictions, whensoever they chance ... The punishments of the wicked are so many warnings to all irregular sinners to amend their liues, and to auoid the iudgement to come, by penitency and newnesse of life.<sup>67</sup>

And for the same reason, Goodcole reported that when he asked Elizabeth Sawyer, “a very ignorant woman” in his words, “By what meanes came you to have acquaintance with the Diuell, and when was the first time that you saw him?” she replied,

The first time that the Diuell came vnto me was, when I was cursing, swearing and blaspheming ... and when he, namely the Diuel came to me, the first words that hee spake vnto me were these: *Oh! Haue I now found you cursing, swearing, and blaspheming? Now you are mine.*<sup>68</sup>

Then Elizabeth Sawyer, this ‘very ignorant woman’, somehow attempted to moralize her own situation (but it is evident that she actually became the mouthpiece of Goodcole in his reporting), saying: “The tongue of man is the glory of man, and it was ordained to glorifie God: but worse then brute beasts they are, who haue a tongue, as well as men, that there with they at once both blesse and curse.”<sup>69</sup> Equally relevant to the issue is the speech of Mother Upney, one of the convicted witches at the 1589 trial in Essex and the one who showed remorse for ‘her wicked and detestable life’ and died ‘repentant’ at the end of her trial. The anonymous author of the related pamphlet reported:

... one Maister Ward a learned devine, being desired by the Justices, did exhort these wicked women to repentance, and persuaded them that they would shewe unto the people the trueth of their wickedness, and to call upon God for mercy with penitent hartes. And to aske pardon at his hands for the same: some fewe prayers they saide after the preacher, but little els ... Note, that *Mother Upney being inwardlye pricked and having some inward feeling in conscience* cryed out saying: that she had grievously sinned, and the devil had deceived her, and that she had twice given her soule to the Devill, yet by the meanes of Gods spirite working in her, and the paines which Maister Ward tooke with her, she seemed very sory for the same, and *died very*

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<sup>67</sup> *The wonderful discoverie of the vvitchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Ioan Flower neere Beuer Castle* (1619), G2v.

<sup>68</sup> Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch* (1621), C.

<sup>69</sup> Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch* (1621), Cv.

*penitent, asking God & the world forgiveness, even to the last gaspe, for her wicked and detestable life.*<sup>70</sup>

Joan Cunny, another witch convicted at the same trial, confessed that “she sent her saide sprites, to hurt Maister Kitchin Minister of the saide towne, and also unto one George Coe of the saide towne shoemaker, to hurt him likewise: but they could not and the cause why they could not, as the saide sprites told her, was because they had at their coming *a strong faith in God*, and had invocated and called upon him, that *they could doo no harme*”<sup>71</sup> (my italics). Richard Harrison, one of the ‘learned’ informants of the St Osyth trials in 1582 suggested his wife, who believed to have been bewitched by one Annis Herd, “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 added: “what will the people say, that I being a Preacher shoulde have my wife so weake in faith?”<sup>72</sup> With the Reformation, “prayer, faith and a sound understanding of the meaning of temptation became the most important weapons an individual could deploy against the Devil.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore, according to the Protestant

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<sup>70</sup> Anon., *The apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches arraigned and by Justice condemnde in the Countye of Essex the 5 day of Julye last past. 1589 With the manner of their diuelish practices and keeping of thier spirits, whose fourmes are heerein truelye proportioned* (London, 1589) (emphases added).

<sup>71</sup> *The apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches arraigned and by Justice condemnde in the Countye of Essex* (1589). Not surprisingly, those who had “a strong faith in God” were almost always socially superiors to the accused. The tendency of the reformers to consider those ‘low in birth’ as ‘low in mind, low in morality and debased in habit’ at the same time revealed itself in many cases. One example of this can also be seen in another pamphlet dated 1612, which states: “Agnes Brown of Gilsborough ... of poore parantege and poorer education, one that as shee was born to no good, was for want of grace never in the way to receive any, ever noted to bee of an ill-nature and wicked disposition, spightfull and malicious,” in *The Witches of Northamptonshire* (London, 1612), B2.

<sup>72</sup> W. W., *A True and just Recorde* (1582), F3 (emphases added). The educated and godly believed and emphasized that ‘a lively faith in Christ’ could be a sufficient counter-measure in combating witchcraft. A detailed discussion of this belief was provided by George Gifford, a Puritan preacher of the time, in a treatise written in a dialogue form and entitled *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (London, 1593). On the other hand, as Sharpe points out, although this attitude – trust in God alone and invocation of his help – was, to a large extent, present among the population as well, “as might be expected, putting one’s trust wholly in God seems to have been more common the higher the position of the supposed sufferer in the social hierarchy”; *Instruments of Darkness*, 157.

<sup>73</sup> Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

reformers, it appears, those accused of witchcraft, and even those who accused them, *misinterpreted* all the meaning.

It is also worth stating at this point that at many trials or during pre-trial proceedings, the examinations of the suspects turned to be a 'religious' test by which the degree of 'conscious' religion or religious conformity was examined. The following excerpts from two pamphlet accounts in narrative form would illustrate this point:

... Robert Toone, the boy's uncle (the boy who was thought to have been possessed), and his schoolmaster ... took her aside ... demanded of her when she received the Communion: she sayd a twelve month agoe. And asking what she received, she answered, her damnation. They asked her whether she knew what she said: she answered againe, what shuld I receive but my damnation. They caused her to say the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, which she huddled up wyth much adoo: but when she came to these words in the Lord's Prayer, *And lead us not into temptation*; and in the Creed, either to *Iesus Christ, The Holy Ghost, or The Catholicke Church*, she would not say anie of those words.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, it was documented in the pamphlet of 1593 concerning the case of the witches of Warboys that:

The schoolers enquired about her seruice of God, and profession of her faith. But all that they could get of her, was, that her God would deliuer her, her God would defend her, and reuenge her of her enemie, always using the phrase of my God wil doo this and that for me: which being noted by one of them, he asked her if she had a God alone, or if she did not serue the same God that others did: She aunswered, yes that she did: yet much adoe they had to bring her from the phrase of my God, to say the God of heaven and earth.<sup>75</sup>

These are illustrations of the claim that Protestant discourse found its commentary in the evidence offered at the witch-trials and they highlight the fact that a number of key issues of the Protestant ideology were interwoven into the

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<sup>74</sup> I. D., *The most wonderfull and true Storie of a certaine Witch named Alise Gooderidge of Stapenhill, who was arraigned and convicted at Darbie, at the Assizes there. As also a true Report of the strange Torments of Thomas Darling, a boy of thirteen years of age, that was possessed by the Devill, with his horrible Fittes and terrible apparitions by him uttered at Burton upon Trent, in the Countie of Stafford, and of his marvellous deliverance* (London, 1597), Bv.

<sup>75</sup> Anon., *The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys arraigned, conuicted and executed at the last Assises at Huntingdon, for the bewitching of the fiue daughters of Robert Throckmorton Esquier, and diuers other persons, with sundrie Diuelish and griuous torments* (London, 1593), E3v-E4.

statements in witchcraft pamphlets. As Green points out, authors like Goodcole, in their attempt to warn people how to avoid the like sins,

were trying not simply to exploit a popular style of publication by grafting unto it doctrines with which many readers might not have been familiar, but also to ‘gloss, exploit, and codify certain pre-existing and free-floating notions about the world, God, sin and the devil’, and to enlist these too for *true religion*.<sup>76</sup>

As a result of the intention of ‘codification’ for ‘true religion’, sometimes the confessions of the suspected witches were, evidently and maybe naturally, first prompted during their examinations, and then distorted, patterned, “translated and securely enclosed within a text authored by a man of learning, and social authority ... for communal legitimization.”<sup>77</sup>

It is also against this background that we should evaluate the content of the depositions made to the trial courts. The evidence from depositions at witch-trials reveals that the vigorous language used by the godly evidently impressed itself on many listeners, and was sometimes echoed in the depositions of ordinary people who combined in their accusations the fear of *maleficium* with that of disorder. Consequently, although legally, witchcraft was defined as *maleficium*, witches were being charged not only with willfully inflicting harm, but also with causing disturbance through their unruly activities or behaviours denounced by the reformers and the commoners alike. The accusations of witchcraft against those who could not control their tongue and sinned with their mouth demonstrated a combination of the image of the village scold, the continuing belief in the efficacy of hostile utterances in popular sentiment and radical Protestant attitude to the ‘sins of the tongue’ and to other ‘mundane sins’ such as sexual immorality and idleness. The witch figure in the accounts was a complete antithesis of the ‘peaceable’ ‘obedient’ individual and the

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<sup>76</sup> Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England*, 428 (emphases added).

<sup>77</sup> Stavreva, “Fighting Words,” 319.



‘good fellow’ living an ‘amended’ life and craving for a more ‘refined’ living according to conservative Protestant moralists. The accusers, consciously or not, moved the Protestant message to the courtrooms. “Each story which an accuser (told) ... (was) always tailored to its hearer,”<sup>78</sup> and here the ‘hearer’ was the reformer. In turn, the accusations, like the confessions of the witches, were moralized both by the authorities and by the pamphleteers who reconstructed the trial accounts of those stories in accordance with Reformation ideas. The result was a *manipulated* image of the witch.

Given the “convincing evidence of the impact of Puritanism on local law enforcement”<sup>79</sup> in terms of legislation and actual prosecution especially before the civil wars, and “the extremes of Puritan moralism” which “brought (the dissolute and unruly among the poorer ranks of society) into abrasive contact with neighbours of all sorts,”<sup>80</sup> it cannot be denied that the reflection in accusatory stories of the suspected witch’s anti-social behaviour seems to have resulted, at least to some extent, from the influence of the godly. For the same reason, we could even go further and say that the inciting influence of Puritan moralism on the village community may have caused its own measures to work against itself by creating a more hostile, more suspicious, more violent atmosphere; far from eradicating ‘strife and discord’ and helping to create and maintaining peace and communal harmony, it may just have made the situation worse, causing a decline in neighbourliness. Therefore, the influence of this ‘oppressive’ moralism may not have gone far beyond creating ‘learned’ reflexes in the face of disorder in general and the suspicions of witchcraft in particular, especially in places where Puritan preachers were more likely to be looked to for religious direction. The evidence for Essex, for example,

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<sup>78</sup> Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 79.

<sup>79</sup> For details see Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England*, 219.

<sup>80</sup> Ingram, “From Reformation to Toleration,” 105.

suggests that a high level of witchcraft accusations between villagers was an “indicator of social disintegration and anomy in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England.”<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the godly ministers, in some cases, even contributed to the popular sentiment, that is, the common belief that the imprecations hurled by the witches at people were followed by some harm. Thomas Cooper, an orthodox Protestant clergyman, vicar of a Coventry parish, for example, instructed his parishioners how to spot a witch and said, ““the effect of cursing’ sufficient grounds to investigate a suspected witch, ‘for when a bad tongued woman shall curse a partie, and death shortly follow, this is a shrewd token that shee is a witch, because witches are accustomed to execute their mischievous practices by cursing and banning’.”<sup>82</sup> His speech both informed the definition of unacceptable behaviour and showed it to be a trait that might be attributed to witchcraft. (On the other hand, ironically enough, a Puritan minister was said in 1618 “to have hurled curses from the pulpit at those who walked out of his lengthy sermons.”<sup>83</sup>)

Having a ‘bad tongue’ was not of course the precondition of or the only indicative of being a witch, nor was it sufficient to be charged with and found guilty of witchcraft, at least according to the law. Yet, the scolding, quarreling, cursing woman and her ‘evil’ influence was so conspicuous a feature of the accusation stories that it seems to correspond to something important in the lives of those who repeated them. No doubt ‘bad tongued’ women were among the groups which displayed deviant behaviour in the eyes of their co-parishioners. Yet beyond that, they were also among the ‘dissolute’ and ‘unruly’ that the godly tended to oversee and reform. Moreover, as stated before, the tendency to associate such traits as scolding and quarrelling with witchcraft to the degree that it led to formal witch

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<sup>81</sup> Stone, “Interpersonal Violence in English Society,” 31.

<sup>82</sup> Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 154.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 603.

accusations was most probably affected, and even supported by the Puritan discourse. As a result, the displeasure of the common people with such kind of women and its reflection in witch-accusations were echoing something of the Puritan voice. In this sense, it is evident that the accusers who accused certain members of their community of being a witch by counting the habit of scolding and cursing as one of the traits attributed to witchcraft provided the godly with such an evidence that could be considered and used as a potent deterrent to would-be criminals in their 'campaign of moral activism' and the 'transformation of manners'; for this kind of unruly women posed a threat not only to the village life, but also the peace of the whole country with their "other lewd intents and purposes contrary to the laws of Almighty God, to the peril of their own souls, and to the great infamy and disquietness of this realm."<sup>84</sup>

To turn to the nature of accusations, specific charges were brought against a woman who had been recognized as 'disorderly' – to whom the label 'witch' had already been attached, and deemed fitting to malevolence. The statements of witnesses which labeled individual women as 'ill-tongued', 'quarrelsome', 'angry', 'scold', 'lewd' etc. repeated the normal themes of witchcraft in England on the one hand and, consciously or not, constructed a convenient language within the terms of the godly on the other. The villagers, while accusing someone of witchcraft, borrowed words of Protestant discourse with which they, to some extent, had become 'familiar' through sermons preached in their villages by godly ministers, through popularized Protestant ballads and, maybe most of all, through the spread of news in witchcraft pamphlets, and then applied them to their stories, adding some other details, and maybe gave them new significations.

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<sup>84</sup> *An Act against conjurations enchantments and witchcrafts* (1563); re-printed in *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, Barbara Rosen, ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 54-56 (based on the version published in *The Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. IV, pt. I, 1819).

A careful examination of the depositions of the accusers reveals that the occasions on which a woman might be said to have scolded, cursed, murmured, or quarreled in her talk were various, but they had in common her disorderly behaviour in public social relations, in a way that made her the target of suspicions. On the other hand, it seems, the accusations including statements about the suspected witch's ill-temperament, her anger and her 'fallings out' with neighbours, or her problematic speech and verbal aggression, gave too strong a sense of the suspect's original role in the events – as opposed to the role she acquired when the events were *redescribed* for the authorities, giving the suspect a particular type of role and her acts and speech a particular sense perhaps foreign to direct intention of the accused and which rendered her more guilty in the incident in the eyes of the authorities. During the process through which the existing suspicions were reinforced or confirmed, as Gaskill points out, "witnesses needed to make a convincing case to men whose task it was to evaluate the evidence before taking appropriate action."<sup>85</sup> Clearly, until then, certain members of the community had already decided whether the suspect was a witch or not. They did not come before the court in order to have their suspicions confirmed or refuted; rather they wanted the suspect to be punished as she or he deserved, not to be reintegrated into society. Therefore, the narratives of the witnesses at trials, while the events that had taken place were being described, mirrored those of printed accounts, sermons preached at churches and 'godly' ballads beside the memory of past events. Thus, the Protestant stress on the 'reformed' individual in the community, the importance of faith over good deeds, and even the devil's intervention in human affairs in everyday life as a tempting force and for evil purposes in some way found an expression in the

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<sup>85</sup> Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*, 230.

accusations which presented the accused as thief, beggar, lewd, drunk, etc., or rather, the accusations were formulated accordingly.

How were the accusations formulated accordingly? In the accusations, the accused was almost always depicted as solely responsible for her anti-social activities in such a way that even the alleged victim's "overt hostility and denial of those norms of neighbourliness and communal solidarity which the age held so dear"<sup>86</sup> was either justified or disregarded. What the suspected witch had been refused by the alleged victim was not 'charity', at least in theory, because she was already in the habit of either begging or stealing and the suspected witch, like other local offenders, were not eligible for or worthy of charity; and even if she had not been refused, it was evidently because of the alleged victim's fear of the supposed witch or in order to prevent any possible retaliation. Or because the victim from whom the accused had demanded something was as poor as her, she / he could not give her what she wanted. Otherwise, the suspected witch had often been denied of what she asked for because of her ill-reputation. Either the one who caused strife was the witch herself or the reason for the 'falling out' or the actual circumstances of the conflict were not mentioned at all while the reports of the examinations and confessions enlisted the witches' acts one after another. Thus her desire for revenge or act of *maleficium* was shown to have arisen just from her 'evil will', from her envious, spiteful, malicious nature, from her corrupted state of mind that did not allow any resistance to envy, resentment and grudges, that was easily overcome by fury, not from the need for self-defence against her offenders, and therefore, she was rendered a motiveless and inherently evil avenger. Above all, she did "seeke for vengeance / which to the Lord belongs, / Who will when he thinkes fitting / revenge

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<sup>86</sup> Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 167.

his seruants wronges.”<sup>87</sup> When she complained of people’s maltreatment and insults in her examination, her remarks were most probably considered as slander or defamation against those she was supposed to respect, obey or be in peace with, which rendered her behaviour even more culpable because slander, too, was among the most serious ‘sins of tongue’. In brief, the suspected witch found herself, in any case, at a dead end. Early modern courts and the popular press tied a story of interpersonal conflict at local level to a larger narrative of individual and communal reform at national level by repeatedly referring to the alleged witch’s immoral and anti-social activities. Almost everything the witch said or did was criminalized. In other words, “using the negative example of the witches, the pamphlets marked the social limits beyond which individuals could not use their speech and bodies as they saw fit.”<sup>88</sup>

Let us see some examples from the witchcraft experiences recorded in the pamphlet accounts and which seem to confirm the claims made above. At the trial in 1579 in Chelmsford, Essex, it was reported that “the saied Mother Staunton, came on a tyme to the house of one Robart Petie of Brookewalden, and beyng denied by his wife diuerse thynges, whiche she demanded at one, and also charged with the *stealing* of a Knife from thence, she wente her waie *in great anger*” and that “the wife of the house (of Robart Cornell of Suersem) *alwaies suspectyng her to bee a Witche* denied her requeste, and barred the doores against her.”<sup>89</sup> In 1585 it was reported that Margaret Harkett “came into a Gentlemans ground called Maister Mash of Stanmore, where *shee was stealinge of Wood*, and the Baily takinge her

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<sup>87</sup> *A Looking-glasse For Murtherers and Blasphemers; wherein they [...] Gods judgement showene vpon a Keeper neer Enfield C[...] desperately shot [...] Man that intended to haue stolne Deere, [...] This was done on Monday night, the xii. day of Iune, being the same day [...] Tempest was in London* (I. T.: London, 1626).

<sup>88</sup> Stavreva, “Fighting Words,” 332.

<sup>89</sup> *A Detection of damnable driftes, practised by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex* (1579).

with the manour, made her to leave it behinde her: and gave her two or three small blowes over the Backe not hurtinge her: whereat shee sayd hee should repent it.”<sup>90</sup>

At another trial in Chelmsford in 1589, apparently through the pamphleteer’s intervening to attack the suspected witch, it was reported that “this Joane Cunny, *living very lewdly, having two lewd daughters*, no better than naughty packs, *had two Bastard Children*: being both boyes, these two children were cheefe witnesses.”

Joan Upney, one of the women accused at the same trial, said that “she ranne away (from a neighbours’ house), because she heard John Harrolde and Richard Foster say she was a witch, such other woordes.”<sup>91</sup>

At St. Osyth trials in 1582, Clerk Richard Harrison said that his wife “did suspect one Annis Herd *a light woman, and a common harlot to have stolen her duckelins*” and William Bonner gave evidence against Elizabeth Bennet and said that “*Elizabeth Bennet and his wife were lovers and familiar friends, and did accompanie much together.*” At the same trial, Joan Pechey, one of the suspected witches was also accused of an incestuous relationship with her son, which she denied, but her son, “the saide Phyllyppe being 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.” Robert Sonnevett, another informant of the St. Osyth trials, said that “dwelt with him the daughter of Elizabeth Ewstace, and that for some *lewde dealynges, and behaviour by her doone*, hee saieth, he used some *threatening speeches unto her, being his servaunt.*”<sup>92</sup>

Margaret Landish, one of the Essex witches accused in 1645, alleged malice and an old grudge against her at her trial, refused to confess that she was a witch, and at one

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<sup>90</sup> *The severall factes of Witch-crafte, approved and laid to the charge of Margaret Harkett, of the Towne of Stanmore, in the Countie of Middlesex, for the which she was arraigned and condemned at the Sessions house, before Tyborne this 19. of February. 1585*; case cited in Marion Gibson, *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000), 126.

<sup>91</sup> *The apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches* (1589).

<sup>92</sup> W. W., *A True and just Recorde* (1582), F2v, C6 (emphases added).

point made “*a strange howling* in the court to the great disturbance of the entire bench.”<sup>93</sup> According to the 1593 pamphlet relating the workings of the Warboys witches on the Throckmorton family, the children’s uncle, Cambridge scholar Henry Pickering, said to Mother Samuel, the chief suspect in the possession of the Throckmorton children, threateningly: “...there was no way to prevent the judgements of God but by her confession and repentance; which if she did not do in time, he hoped one day to see her burned at the stake, and he himself would bring fire and wood, and the children should blow the coals” and Mother Samuel responded: “I had rather (sayd she) see you dowsed over head and ears in this pond!”<sup>94</sup> ‘Learned’ Master Pickering’s verbal attack was, of course, passed over in silence as in many other cases and Mother Samuel’s counterattack was presented as a sign of her ‘evil-will’, ‘disobedience’, and ‘unruliness’.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, it had a deeper significance than just angry words; it conveyed the curse of an alleged witch and further reinforced suspicions that Mother Samuel had bewitched the Throckmorton children.

In the final analysis, the witnesses’ or accusers’ depositions which focused on or implied the disorderliness of the accused apparently acquired the status of ‘moral judgments’ against the suspects by the intervention of the authorities. Many examinations gave some clue about, in Parker’s words, “the extent to which ordinary

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<sup>93</sup> Jim Sharpe, “Women, Witchcraft and the Legal Process,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, Darren Oldridge, ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 295.

<sup>94</sup> *The most strange and admirable discouerie of the three Witches of Warboys* (1593), E4.

<sup>95</sup> There are many references to Mother Samuel’s disturbing way of speech in the pamphlet account, but especially the following part seems to reveal the anxiety of her ‘superiors’ in the face of her ‘unruly’ speech and their perception of threat: “... the Schoolers desired to speake with her ... but she was very loud in her answeres and impatient, not suffering any to speak, but her selfe; one of them desired her to keep the womans virtue and be more silent: she answered, that she was born in a mill, begot in a kill, she must have her will, she could speak no softier. The greatest part of her speech, was rayling words against Ma. Throckmorton and his children so to play the wantons in accusing of her and bringing her name into question, often repeating, that the childrens fits was nothing but wantonness in them and if they were her children, she would not suffer them so to escape without punishment, one after the other,” in *The most strange and admirable discouerie of the three Witches of Warboys* (1593), E3v.



people were touched by Protestantism.”<sup>96</sup> Protestant discourse found an expression in the accusations of witchcraft in its ‘vulgar’ form and in the statements of the pamphleteers who, in reporting the witch trials, both attacked the alleged witches in their own terms (e.g. ‘this *ungodly* woman’<sup>97</sup> or ‘a plaine *Atheist*’)<sup>98</sup> and wrote about the reformer’s task:

to terrify secret offenders by open transgressors’ punishments, to withdraw honest natures from the corruption of evil company, to diminish the great multitude of wicked people, to increase the small number of virtuous persons, and to reform all the detestable abuses which the perverse wit and will of man doth daily devise.<sup>99</sup>

From pamphlet accounts concerning the witch trials and sometimes pre-trial proceedings generated and disseminated knowledge of what was significant to English reformers along with the extent of witchcraft practices. By the publication of these pamphlets, not only the reality of witchcraft, but also the necessity of obedience, a unified social order and repentance were constantly reaffirmed and Protestant ideology vindicated by exploring the complete antithesis of these concepts. Thus, the stereotype of the ill-tongued vengeful and quarrelsome witch in the accusations in early modern England represents a fusion of two distinct images. The first, deeply rooted in folk-culture, and made up of elements defining communal values, was a product of the communal life which emerged from common displeasure evoked by inappropriate behaviour, a product of a set of beliefs and attitudes about conformity and deviance in the community. It was older than the other, the ultimate negative example which was a reflection of the conservative Protestant discourse, which was later ‘read’ into neighbourhood disputes, which was

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<sup>96</sup> Geoffrey Parker, “Success and Failure During the First Century of Reformation,” *Past and Present* 136 (1992): 43-82, p. 44.

<sup>97</sup> *The severall factes of Witch-crafte, approved and laid to the charge of Margaret Harkett* (1585); case re-printed in Marion Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 126.

<sup>98</sup> *The wonderful discoverie of the vvitchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Ioan Flower neere Beuer Castle* (1619), C3.

<sup>99</sup> W. W. *A True and Just Record* (1582), A3.

recorded over and over for moral and reformatory purposes and which conveyed more powerful and more complex messages, underlining the 'unregenerate' spiritual condition of the unreformed and their lack of conscience and understanding more than a social and cultural conflict, placing far more emphasis on the former than the latter, far more emphasis on 'rebellion against God' than disturbing behaviour in community.

## CHAPTER III

### THE IDEA OF THE 'FAMILIAR' IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH WITCHCRAFT

The main theme of the previous chapter has been disorder created by the witch figure and how it was perceived at two different levels. The issue has been treated from two perspectives, from the perspective of ordinary people and that of Protestant reformers, together with the investigation of the possible interplay between them. On the other hand, as implied in the discussion there, the suspected witches were not in the courtrooms only because of their verbal transgressions or quarrelsome temperaments. Therefore, here we shall turn our gaze to the 'supernatural' dimension of early modern English witchcraft, mainly focus on the idea of the witch's familiar, try to understand what the witch's familiar *may* have meant to the accusers and the accused and to explain the prominence enjoyed by the familiars in the pamphlet accounts of the witch trials in early modern England. This chapter will also deal with what the idea of the familiar *may* have conveyed in the opinion of the Reformed authorities. Consequently, the discussion will be presented in two parts. The first part will examine some aspects of the idea of the familiar, especially animal familiars, on a popular basis. The second part will examine the

(somewhat ambiguous) Reformed ideas about and commentary on the belief in witches' animal familiars.

The 'appearance of the devil to the suspects in the shape of an animal' or as an animal-like being is one of the constant repetitions and one of the best documented beliefs in accounts of English witchcraft, and therefore, it deserves close attention in relation to popular culture at the time. Our knowledge about animal familiars mainly comes from the witch confessions and the depositions of the accusers which were published in the pamphlet accounts of the witch-trials. Although the term *familiar* has usually been defined as 'a demon in the shape of an animal' which constantly accompanied a witch for the purpose of carrying out spells and bewitchments, with regard to the early modern perceptions of the familiar, in it were included many other implications as will be discussed below.

The first aspect to point out here is the possible origins of the idea of the familiar. It seems difficult to be certain about how and when this idea crept into the common imagination. James Sharpe says that although the origins of the belief in familiars "lay in the activities of élite magicians and sorcerers in the Middle Ages, who were frequently alleged to operate with the assistance of a demonic spirit, [...] it evidently had entered the popular consciousness" by the time of English witch trials.<sup>1</sup> Kieckhefer also mentions a Munich handbook written in the fifteenth-century for necromancers which "repeatedly instructs the spirits to appear in a pleasant, nonthreatening form," and one fifteenth-century German manuscript in which it is stated that "the Devil will come in the form of a black dog and will answer all questions."<sup>2</sup> In addition to the belief in minor demons "often taking the form of

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<sup>1</sup> James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161-162.

familiars and deriving from the elves, fairies, and kobolds of folklore,”<sup>3</sup> popular stories of shape-shifting purveyed by Caesarius of Heisterbach in the thirteenth century and other similar medieval stories in which Satan and the lesser demons might appear in human form or in animal guise played the greatest part in the formation of the idea of the familiar in early modern popular culture.<sup>4</sup> Wherever the idea of the familiar may have had its roots, today many scholars consider familiars to be one of the most important folk elements in the witch idea, a product of the popular mind rather than the theological debates about witchcraft in early modern England, and a phenomenon virtually unique to the English form of witchcraft.<sup>5</sup>

“Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth,” said Walter Benjamin, “is the source from which all storytellers have drawn.”<sup>6</sup> Those who were accused of witchcraft and who accused people of witchcraft were, in a sense, ‘storytellers’ who continued the tradition of story-telling in the courtrooms. They combined their personal experiences with local tales, beliefs, and traditions, and embroidered them with their imagination in their stories. Their imagination was shaped by what they saw, what they heard, what they personally and communally experienced, what they believed in, and most of all, *how* they thought and *how* they made sense of the world they lived in. The lore of the past and their ordinary experience were interpenetrated in their accusations and confessions. But what does all this have to do with familiars? Animals were indispensable to early modern common people in their daily lives, and it was from such everyday experience that a

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russel, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 18.

<sup>4</sup> For some related examples from Caesarius’s book, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, see Norman Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*, rev. edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 24-30.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Russel, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, 52; Clive Holmes, “Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines in Early Modern England,” in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, Steven L. Kaplan, ed. (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 94.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in his *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., Harry Zohn, trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969): 83-110.

significant part of the witchcraft stories was founded, together with common suspicions, fears and anxieties. A careful examination of pamphlet accounts of witchcraft trials in early modern England reveals that the animals chosen as ‘spirits’ and companions of witches were not chosen on an arbitrary basis. They were all part of both the everyday ‘experience’ and an inherited world view and reflections of traditional and popular beliefs.

Taking a look at the picture of early modern village life in England reveals that it was not only oxen and cows, but many other animals, too, which were essential to the villagers. Keith Thomas has said: “People’s actual experience of animals, on the farms and in their houses, conflicted with theological orthodoxies of the time [...] Just as popular attitudes to wild nature presupposed that men, plants and wild creatures were inextricably bound up in one great community, so human relations with domestic animals were much closer than official religion implied.”<sup>7</sup> It was a time when animals lived much closer to people than they do today and “dwelling in such proximity to men, these animals were often thought *as individuals*.”<sup>8</sup>

What I suggest is that one of the reasons why the domestic beasts, these “subsidiary members of the human community,”<sup>9</sup> figured so prominently in witchcraft accounts was apparently the significant role they played in the village life of early modern England. In many cases, the confessions and accusations were shaped within the framework of this village life. Many elements of that life were integrated into the witchcraft stories. Naturally, English-style witch beliefs, like those in the Continent, were “modified according to the level of complexity in the

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<sup>7</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 93-94.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 95 (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 98.

society where they operated”<sup>10</sup> and manifested themselves in accusations and confessions accordingly. The animal familiars were the products of the reality of rural life and one of the elements of oral culture, rather than the reflections or variants of the Continental notions about devil-worship. Many, if not all, of the deeds the familiars performed were interconnected with the basic conditions of rural life as part of the “fantasies described by witches” that “usually concerned the staples of life.”<sup>11</sup>

There are many examples in the trial accounts would support this suggested connection between village life and the features of the suspected witches’ familiars. The witches of the first witch trial to appear in a pamphlet account, Elizabeth Francis and Mother Waterhouse, confessed that they fed Sathan the cat with “bread and milk” and when Mother Waterhouse was “moved by poverty to occupy the wool” to keep the cat, Sathan the cat turned into a toad and now she “kept in the pot without wool.”<sup>12</sup> Joan Cunny, at the 1589 trial at Chelmsford, said that she had “two spirits in the similitude and likeness of two black frogges” and kept them “in a box”, and fed them with “white bread and milke.”<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Stile, one of the suspected witches accused at the Windsor trial in 1597, said that “shee went on a time to olde Windesore to the bedmaker to beg milk which shee could not haue because the maid was milking but at her return shee said her Rat had prouided bothe milk and creame.”<sup>14</sup> At the 1645 trial in Kent, Elizabeth Harris said “the Divell did appeare to her in the forme of a Muse... she called the Divell her Impe” and “she saw it

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<sup>10</sup> Jacqueline Simpson, “Witches and Witchbusters,” *Folklore* 107 (1996), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 74.

<sup>12</sup> John Phillips, *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chenssforde in the Countie of Essex* (London, 1566), A-B-Bii.

<sup>13</sup> Anon., *The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches* (London, 1589).

<sup>14</sup> Anon., *A Rehearsall both straung and true of heinous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile, alias Rockingham, Mother Dutten, Mother Devell, Mother Margaret, fower notorious witches apprehended at Windsore in the Countie of Barks, and at Abington arraigned, condemned and executed on the 26 daye of Februarie last anno 1579* (London, 1579), Diii.

apparent that her Impe was the cause of that mans (Goodman Chilman of Nuenham who “said that she stole a Pigge”) death.”<sup>15</sup> One of the alleged witches, who was taken at St. Oses in 1582 and gave evidence against another woman, said that “one Margaret Grevell... had foure Impes or spirites – called Robin, Jacke, William, Puppet alias Mamet - and they were like unto blacke Cats” and that the said Margaret used them to “plague beasts and people unto death” and gave them “Beere and Breade for the labour.”<sup>16</sup> At the same trial, Ales Manfield said that “mother Gravel told her, that she had caused her impes to destroy severall brewinges of beere, & batches of bread.”<sup>17</sup> Consequently, it is clear that witchcraft stories centering on the witch-familiar relationship and the witch figure feeding or rewarding her familiar spirit with ‘bread’ and ‘milk’, “principal sustenance of the poorer sort of people,”<sup>18</sup> in exchange for its service or using it to interrupt agricultural or domestic procedures such as baking or brewing, or causing ailments in neighbours’ livestock, which were among the most commonly shared fears, reflect some aspects of the village life, refer to the close attachment between rural people and animals and exemplify how daily experience was integrated into the witch-lore.

The picture above reveals that most of the narratives about the suspected witches’ familiars were similar to each other in their content. Sometimes related to a general airing of witch beliefs inside and outside the courtrooms and sometimes through the memories of the key figures in earlier episodes, one seems to have borrowed from the others, and sometimes to have added other bits to them. The

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<sup>15</sup> Anon., *The Examination, Confession, Triall, and Execution, of Joane Williford, Joan Cariden, and Jane Hott* (London, 1645), 5.

<sup>16</sup> W.W., *A true and just Recorde, of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, Taken at St. Oses in the Countie of Essex* (London, 1582).

<sup>17</sup> W.W., *A true and just Recorde* (1582).

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 98.



same picture also makes clear an important aspect of the accusations and confessions: the accusers and the accused alike shared same ideas, values, attitudes, beliefs, and fears. It is evident that accepting the ‘reality’ of witchcraft meant accepting the agency of spirits at the same time. Witchcraft required a type of communication and alliance with evil forces to gain magical powers and to do harm to people and their animals by means of those powers.

To be able to understand the idea of the familiar in early modern English village, we also need to understand how the villagers made sense of the world they lived in. Everything in that world, whether it be an animal, a plant, or any other *nonhuman* being, had a moral meaning originating in the general belief system of their culture, because it taught them virtue and sin, and depicted spiritual or supernatural realities through its form or parts and through its symbolic and emotional value, and thus everything had an allegorical significance. All animals were part of a mystical and moral teaching internalized by society and were included in God’s marvelous design. They were “living reminders of virtues to be imitated and vices to be shunned.”<sup>19</sup> This understanding led to the division of animals according to what they connote at, that is, as ‘virtuous’ and ‘vice’ animals, obviously sometimes being influenced by their being carnivorous<sup>20</sup> and herbivorous or their being at the human level (such as dogs and cats) or sky level (such as eagles, vultures).<sup>21</sup> Moreover, these animals showed people, in their daily life too, their present situation and their destiny in the future, just like a mirror reflecting both *life* and *death*.

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Harrison, “The Virtues of Animals in Seventeenth Century Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59, 3 (1998): 463-484, p.466.

<sup>20</sup> The most frequently mentioned of the familiar animals in the accounts were carnivores. Among them were dogs, cats, toads, and ferrets.

<sup>21</sup> Apart from owls and crows (with all their negative connotations), the familiar animals mentioned in the confessions and accusations were very rarely those at sky level.

How is one to relate these ‘anthropomorphic’ perceptions - the tendency of people to conceive the activities of the external world as the counterpart of their own - to the idea of the familiar in English witchcraft in early modern period?<sup>22</sup> The most common forms of familiars or familiar spirits appeared in the accounts of witchcraft were dogs, cats, toads, and ferrets, but owing to limitations of space, this study cannot examine each animal in the witches’ menagerie in detail. However, it should be stated that some animals, for example the lamb, in this case probably because of the association with Christ, were very rarely seen as demonic familiars in witch accusations and confessions.

Keith Thomas has suggested that, although the dog was one of the most favoured of all animals in early modern England,<sup>23</sup> dogs, like some other ‘domestic’ animals, were associated with the evil, amoral, and unapproved. He has pointed out:

The Eastern view of dogs as filthy scavengers had been transmitted via the Bible to medieval England and was still widely current in the sixteenth century. The Book of Revelation suggested that at the Resurrection dogs, like other unclean beings, would be excluded from the New Jerusalem. Some commentators thought this meant ‘men of dogged impudency and maliciousness’, but most took it literally [...] The dog, said a Jacobean preacher, was an emblem of greed and shamelessness: ‘a most unclean and filthy creature which goeth publicly and promiscuously to generation’. Dogs were filthy, beastly, quarrelsome creatures... a symbol of man’s baser parts: he represented gluttony, lust, coarse bodily functions, and general disruptiveness.<sup>24</sup>

*The Ashmole Bestiary*, written about four hundred years before the beginning of the witchcraft trials in England, seems to have foreshadowed one of the central ideas about the witch figure in connection with dog symbolism, the idea that she renounced God and turned to sin to gain what she desired, or rather to gain nothing

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<sup>22</sup> On ‘anthropomorphic’ perceptions in early modern period, see Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), esp. 4-8, 121-125.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 101.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 105.

(because, at the gallows, she was all alone; she was abandoned, even ridiculed, by Satan she had trusted in). In this bestiary it was claimed that

The dog's ability to heal wounds by licking them represents how the wounds of sin can be cured by confession. The dog returning to its vomit signifies those who make confession but then return to their sinful ways. The dog dropping the meat it has to try to gain the meat it sees is like foolish people who give up what they already have for the illusion presented by desire, and so lose what they have without gaining what they desire.<sup>25</sup>

As Thomas Keightley nicely put it a hundred and twenty-five years ago, "the mind of the peasant or the savage... when unusual phenomena excite his attention, ascribes their production to the immediate agency of some of the inferior beings recognized by his legendary creed."<sup>26</sup> British folk tales and mythology were full of ominous, monstrous, otherworldly dogs from the Black Shuck of East Anglia to Cŵn Annwn of Wales and the Moddey Dhoo of the Isle of Man that haunted hill-country, roads, and churchyards and even whose appearance was enough to invoke sickness or death.<sup>27</sup> When the accused told that a/the 'devil appeared unto them in the likeness of a black dog', they *may* have drawn from the myths about 'otherworldly' dogs that symbolize death and the dead. This idea of the 'enemy within and outside'<sup>28</sup> was woven into the witchcraft stories, not only with regard to the dogs, but many other domestic animals as well, transforming the close companions of the country-folk or the animals both wholly 'familiar' and mysterious

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<sup>25</sup> *The Ashmole Bestiary* (Peterborough?, early 13<sup>th</sup> century), <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast181.htm> (accessed August 25, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Keightley, *The World Guide to Gnomes, Fairies, Elves & Other Little People* (New York: Gramercy, 2000), 1.

<sup>27</sup> On the folklore of black dogs, see Theo Brown, "The Black Dog," *Folklore* 69 (1958): 175-192; Bob Trubshaw, "Black Dogs: Guardians of the Corpse Ways," <http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/bdogs.htm> (accessed March 23, 2008); Katharine M. Briggs, *British Folktales* (New York: Dorset Pres, 1977), 115-118 or her *British Folk- Tales and Legends: A Sampler* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 135-138.

<sup>28</sup> 'enemy within' because dogs were among domestic animals and therefore associated with *life*; 'enemy outside' because they also signified the unknown, the otherworld, and the danger outside household, and therefore associated with *death* as animals so close to the ground.

at the same time into ‘metaphorical witches’ and ‘metonymical devils’.<sup>29</sup> It appears, therefore, the idea of magic, when reduced to its essence, began with a strong belief in the extraordinary power of metaphor and metonymy. These animals changed, in a sense, into the antitheses of both the livestock and domestic animals, just as the witch figure became the antithesis of acceptable individual because of the suspicion, fear and anxiety within community. In the eyes of the villagers, it appears, both the witch - as an evil individual - and her familiar - as an evil animal - were the dissonant components which disturbed the harmony of the village life.

A similar idea implying the fusion of elements acquired from fairy tales and those of demonic familiars appears in the 1619 account. Joan Willimot, one the three women associated with the Flowers in their practices and executed in Leicester in 1619, was apparently not quite a witch, but rather a cunning woman and told a ‘fairy’ story before the justices of the peace, directly saying that her familiar spirit was “a Fairy blown into her.” Although Joan Willimot’s story was quite atypical in its content, compared to the other stories told at English witch-trials, it nicely exemplifies how a mind filled with folk-tales of the past could use or re-use these stories under certain circumstances and how ideas might be interwoven in popular mind: a Fairy-Spirit who asks for Joan’s soul in exchange, not for doing harm to others, but for helping her find out who were ‘stricken’ and ‘forspoken’. During her examination Joan said:

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<sup>29</sup> Inspired by Lévi-Strauss’ idea that “if birds are metaphorical human beings (because their world is literally parallel to human society) and dogs are metonymical human beings (because, although they do not form an independent society, they are part of human society), cattle may be thought of as metonymical inhuman being...”: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 207. Here I use the phrase ‘metaphorical witches’ in the sense that the animal familiars were *like* the suspected witches themselves - dangerous neighbours, that is, familiars who resided inside the community as part of it and were thought to act as mothers to their familiars (as will be discussed in the following pages), and the phrase ‘metonymical devils’ in the sense that the animal familiars, even if they were not always necessarily called ‘the Devil’, were thought to have something of the Devil and his malice; they were little devils, if they were devils at all.

... that shee hath a Spirit which shee calleth *Pretty*, which was given vnto her by *William Berry* of *Langbolme* in *Rutlandshire*, whom she serued three yeares; and that her Master when hee gaue it vnto her, willed her to open her mouth, and hee would blow into 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 stood vpon the ground in the shape and forme of a Woman, which Spirit did aske of her her Soule, which shee then promised vnto it, being willed thereunto by her Master. Shee further confesseth, that shee neuer hurt any body, bud did helpe diuers that sent for her, which were stricken or fore-spoken: and that her Spirit came weekly to her, and would tell her of diuers persons that were stricken and forespoken...<sup>30</sup>

Another aspect of the belief about the familiars was that they were said to have caused illnesses and deaths by touching, scratching people and their beasts, or sometimes just appearing to them. This brings to mind the general belief in ‘elves’ and ‘elf-shot’. Kieckhefer tells of some early medieval monks who “would not have thought of themselves as dabbling in the magical arts,” but “would use mandrake for its mysterious curative powers, and they might also use charms to drive away the *elves that were causing sickness*.”<sup>31</sup> At this point we may also mention a treatise on medicine, the *Lacnunga*, from the eleventh century, in which many “prescriptions are from European folk culture: that of Anglo-Saxons themselves, or of Celts or the Norsemen,” and which claims that “one of the most important sources of illness is the *mischief-making of elves*, whom Christian theologians and moralists would identify with demons,” and “tells how to cure ‘elf-shot’, the disease caused by invisible but all too perceptible assault of these elves.”<sup>32</sup> To return to our subject in

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<sup>30</sup> *The Wonderfvl Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Ioan Flower neere Beuer Castle: Executed at Lincolne, March 11, 1618* (London, 1619), E3v-E4. The same inventive Joan said at another point that “Gamaliel Greeke of Waltham in the said County Shepheard, had a spirit like a white Mouse put into him in his *swearing*; and that if hee did looke vpon any thing with an intent to hurt, it should be hurt” (E4v) (emphasis added); here we should also notice, in connection with the discussion of the first chapter, the emphasis on the ‘unrestrained tongue’ as the reason for exposure to the influence of the Devil. For the possible similarities to be found between beliefs in the witch’s familiar and contemporary fairy beliefs, see Emma Wilby, “The Witch’s Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland,” *Folklore* 111 (2000): 283-308; her article is mainly concerned a comparison of English familiars with Scottish fairies.

<sup>31</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 58 (emphases added).

<sup>32</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 65 (emphases added).

connection with the beliefs about elves, their activities, and elf-shot, witchcraft accounts are full of details about sicknesses and deaths caused by the alleged witches through the agency of their familiar spirits, and the descriptions of those who were suddenly struck by an illness, attributed this ‘unnatural’ situation to witchcraft, and testified to their experience of the witch’s *maleficium*. Elizabeth Francis, for example, “willed him (her shape-shifting familiar, here Satan the cat) to touch his (Andrew Byles who “would not marry her after he had abused her”) body, which he forthwith did wherefore he died.”<sup>33</sup> And afterwards, Elizabeth’s husband, after he “had touched it (Satan the toad) with his foot, was forthwith taken with a lameness whereof he cannot healed.”<sup>34</sup> Joan Cunny of the 1589 trial “confesseth, that she sent her said spirits to hurt the wife of John Sparrow.”<sup>35</sup> At the same trial, Joan Upney “saith that one day she left a Toade under the groundsill at Harrolds house, and it pinched his wife and sucked her till she dyed.”<sup>36</sup> Ursley Kempe of the St. Osyth trial in 1582 “confessed that shee had four spirites... the two hee spirites were to punishe and kill unto death, and the other two shees were to punishe with lameness, and other diseases of bodily harm: and also destroy cattell.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, according to the account of the confession of Elizabeth Sawyer executed in 1621, she confessed “the Divell in the shape of a dogge... would always bring vnto me word what he had done for me, within the space of a weeke, he never failed me at that time; and would likewise do it to Creatures and beasts two manner of wayes, which was by *scratching or pinching of them*.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chenssforde in the Countie of Essex* (1566), Aii.

<sup>34</sup> *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chenssforde in the Countie of Essex* (1566), Aiii.

<sup>35</sup> *The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches* (1589).

<sup>36</sup> *The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches* (1589).

<sup>37</sup> W.W., *A true and just Recorde, of the Information etc.* (1582).

<sup>38</sup> Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discouerie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch, late of Edmonton* (London, 1621), C2 (emphases added).

Especially the last example in this group refers to an important feature attributed to the familiars by the so-called witch herself. It is clear that familiars sometimes treated people the same way as the suspected witches were treated by people. Just as the community combated the occult power of the witch and punished the suspected witch by its own methods, scratching her, beating and clawing her, drawing blood from her, in a word, as indicated in the previous chapter, using physical violence against her, so the witch's familiar used similar methods against those the witch thought to have wronged her and wanted to take revenge upon and against their beasts. As Purkiss points out, "these women made familiars in the image of the grim world in which they found themselves."<sup>39</sup>

In some cases, the familiar spirits might appear as mischievous beings, as in the stories of the Lancashire witches. One of them was about a spirit "in the shape of a black cat" and its act of "pushing this examine (Demdike) into the ditch"<sup>40</sup> and the other about "the devill in the likenesse of a beare" which "pulled this examine (Chattox) down" when "this examine would not then speake unto him."<sup>41</sup> One of the most detailed and most fantastic accounts on familiars came from Elizabeth Clark, the first victim of Mathew Hopkins, 'the Witch-Finder General' in the time of the English Civil War. She confessed to having a few familiars: "an Impe like to a Dog, which was white, with some sandy spots, and seemed to be very fat and plumpe, with very short legges... the name of that Impe was Jarmara"; "another Impe, which she called Vinegar Tom, in the shape of a Greyhound with long legges"; "the next Impe should be a black Impe... in the shape of a Polcat, but the

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<sup>39</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 139.

<sup>40</sup> Potts, *The Wonderful Discoverie* (1612), E.

<sup>41</sup> Potts, *The Wonderful Discoverie* (1612), E3.

head somewhat bigger”; “one more called Sack and Sugar... a black rabbit.”<sup>42</sup> Her long-legged, greyhound-like imp, Vinegar Tom also had “an ox’s head and broad eyes” and could turn itself into “a headless four-year old child,”<sup>43</sup> that is, it was a highly grotesque creature.

These examples from the pamphlet accounts of the witch trials show that the idea of the familiar in the shape of an animal was enriched with new contributions to its essence and mixed with popular and folkloric elements. As one delves into the tales about animals, it becomes clear that many elements of these stories also occur in witchcraft accounts. Moreover, in a culture nourished so much by the tales about hobgoblins, pixies, elves, fairies etc. genuinely, it is really difficult to determine which aspects of the familiars were considered really devilish by the folk describing them and which ones were bits of the folk-tales. It would not be wrong, therefore, to say that the idea of the familiar has many ramifications indeed. Briggs has also pointed out this ‘interpenetration’ between popular stories and has said:

It is sometimes difficult to decide whether a tale is told about a bogie, a black dog, a devil or a fairy. In Somerset, *Bogie* is one name for the devil, but in general bogies, bug-a-boos and so on are frightening and mischievous spirits — minor devils, if they are devils at all. They sometimes appear as black dogs, but they have the power of shape-shifting, which the black dogs have not... Nuckelavee is one of the most evil and diabolical of the bogies, and it may be doubted whether Vinegar Tom is a bogie or a minor devil.<sup>44</sup>

To draw a general conclusion from all this, it can be said that the representation of the Devil in physical form provided ordinary people with a means whereby certain features of supernatural beings might be anchored into their everyday life. Furthermore, when translated into material symbols like animals,

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<sup>42</sup> Anon., *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).

<sup>43</sup> *A True and Exact Relation of the Severall Informations* (1645). Here it would be useful to give the *OED*’s definition of *imp*: (4) A ‘child’ of the devil, or of hell —a.applied to wicked men, and to petty fiends or of evil spirits; b.a little devil or demon, an evil spirit; especially in the seventeenth century, one of those with which witches were supposed to be familiar (2nd edition, 1989).

<sup>44</sup> Katharine Briggs, *British Folktales* (New York: Dorset, 1977), 121.



they, without doubt, became easier to communicate and comprehend. The popular mind had a tendency to ‘domesticate’ the Devil, perhaps in order to release the fear that might result from seeing him as the Prince of Darkness, a much more terrifying portrayal. Transforming the Devil into animal familiars may also have been, perhaps unconsciously, intended to render him less powerful in his destructiveness. Thus the boundary between the Devil and demonic spirits or his animal-shaped subordinates was blurred in folklore. This distinction was also the one whose existence, if any at all, in popular culture was hardest to prove.

From here on my argument will mainly focus on what animal familiars *may* have meant to the ‘Reformed’ authorities, ministers, and theologians. Since, apart from those in the pamphlet accounts of witch trials, there are very few direct references to the concept of ‘animal familiars’ or ‘familiar spirits’ in early modern English sources, the discussion in this part will be basically confined to personal inferences or interpretations.

With this in mind, let us begin with a relevant observation about the use of the term ‘animal familiar’ or such terms as ‘dog familiar’, ‘cat familiar’ etc. An examination of the witchcraft statutes, pamphlet accounts of witch trials and the divines’ writings reveal an important aspect of the English witchcraft and its relation to the idea of the ‘animal’ familiar: the reluctance of the learned to refer to *evil spirits* as ‘animal familiars’ or ‘imps’. While such terms as ‘familiar’, ‘imp’, ‘demon familiar’, ‘spirit’ and ‘the Devil’ were usually being used by the accusers and the accused at the trials *interchangeably*, the legislators, interrogators, ministers or other members of the learned tended to use the word ‘spirit’ or ‘Devil’ almost *invariably*. Goodcole, for instance, wrote: “Elizabeth Sawyer, not hauing the feare of God before her eyes, but moued and seduced by the Diuell, *by Diabolicall helpe*, did out

of her malicious heart ... would therefore thus reuenge her self on them.”<sup>45</sup> The references made in law and in the statements of the learned concerned ‘evil spirits’ only, not the animal forms assumed by familiars at the trials. The act of 1604 made reference to ‘entertaining and feeding *evil spirits*’; it did not use the phrase ‘animal familiars’. Animal familiars formed no part of the contemporary theologian’s beliefs and writings, either.

In view of these observations, the first aspect we need to point out here is that Protestantism did not deny that the Devil had the power to appear in physical form. Calvinist divine, James Calphill, for example, believed that Satan’s demons “appear to men in divers shapes, disquiet them when they are awake; trouble them in their sleeps, distort their members; take away their health; afflict them with diseases.”<sup>46</sup> Puritan divine William Perkins thought that Satan’s power was “not so large, as to create a bodie, or bring againe a soul into into a bodie,”

yet by his dexteritie and skill in naturall causes he can worke wonderfully. For he is able, having gathered together fit matter, to ioyn member to member, and to make a true bodie either after the likenesse of a man, or *some other creature*: and having so done, to enter into it, to move and stir up and downe, and therein visibly and sensibly to appear unto man.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, in ballads used in attempts to call the sinful to ‘amend their lives’ and to repentance, the Devil usually appeared as a physical entity and was painted, ironically enough, as a black horned monster with broad eyes, crooked claws or cloven feet, that is, as the grotesque creature of the ‘vulgar’ opinion. Similarly, some emblem books contained visual images in which diverse animals

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<sup>45</sup> Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discouerie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch, late of Edmonton, her conviction and condemnation and Death. Together with the relation of the Diuells accesse to her, and their conference together* (London, 1621), Bv (emphases added).

<sup>46</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 562.

<sup>47</sup> William Perkins, *A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft so farre forth as it is reuealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience. Framed and deliuered by M. William Perkins, in his ordinarie course of preaching, and now published by Tho. Pickering Batchelour of Diuinitie, and minister of Finchingfield in Essex. Whereunto is adioyned a twofold table; one of the order and heades of the treatise; another of the texts of Scripture explained, or vindicated from the corrupt interpretation of the aduersarie* (Cambridge, 1608), 31 (emphases added).

were associated with evil or the Devil.<sup>48</sup> By printing the woodcuts of the familiars described by the witches during their examinations, the pamphlet accounts of the witch trials, too, may have created a similar impression on people who read or saw them. Moreover, it is evident that in depicting the Devil as a physical entity, such ballads, in Johnstone's words, the 'populist' literature in which the Devil featured prominently, may necessarily have heightened, or at least contributed to, sensitivity, especially among the uneducated, to the physical manifestations of the Satan to which people were exposed by reading aloud, oral transmission or illustration.<sup>49</sup>

Although, as we have seen, the physical manifestation of the Devil was accepted in Protestant culture, it was constantly emphasized by zealous Protestants and Puritans that the invisible tempting Devil and his practice of internal temptation were even more dangerous than the Devil as a 'physical entity.' Johnstone suggests that "whereas the medieval remit of the Devil had included temptation as one of the variety of activities with which he might afflict mankind, Protestants elevated it into the single most important aspect of his agency, which virtually eclipsed all others."<sup>50</sup> Thus, Hugh Latimer remarked in a sermon: "the devil knoweth all ways how to tempt us ... in so much that we can begin nor do nothing, but that he is at our heels and worketh some mischief, whether we be in prosperity or adversity, whether we be in health or sickness, life or death; he knoweth how to use the same to his purpose."<sup>51</sup> In accordance with the post-Reformation stress on humankind's innate sinfulness and a spiritual Devil, Reverend Thomas Cooper declared that because of

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Thomas Jenner, *The Ages Of Sin, Or, Sinnes Birth & Groweth With The Stepps And Degrees Of Sin, From Thought To Finall Impenitencie* (London, 1655).

<sup>49</sup> Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

<sup>50</sup> Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> As quoted in Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, 76.

“our own cursed nature ... we are sathan’s slaves naturally.”<sup>52</sup> Puritan Henry Holland, referring to the unseen satanic hold over the world, wrote: “There are two spiritual kingdoms in this world which have continual hatred & bloody wars, without hope of truce for ever. The lord and king of the one, is our lord Jesus, the tyrannical usurper of the other, is Sathan.”<sup>53</sup> The same idea could also be found in the baptismal service according to which the priest should ask the godparents: “Doest thou forsake the devil and all his workes, the vaine pompe and glorye of the world, with al covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not folow, nor be led by them?”<sup>54</sup> In his *Cases of Conscience* (1607), William Perkins, combining the possibility of the appearance of the Devil in physical form with the emphasis on temptation, noted that “physical encounters with devils could take place in certain locations, but this was because houses and other buildings could suffer from spiritual intrusions as a parallel to internal temptation.”<sup>55</sup>

We can find in witch confessions and accusations of witchcraft many examples which reinforce and correspond especially to the point about liability to error and sin and moral perversion into which ‘physical encounters with devils’ were fitted and through which we can understand what Protestant writers meant by the depravity of human nature and proneness to sin. Here we should also remember that, as discussed in the previous chapter, the pamphlet accounts of witch trials were, in many cases, apparently arranged in accordance with Protestant ideology. In 1589, for instance Joan Prentice confessed that she had first encountered the Devil in the form of a ferret in the alms house and when the ferret said to her “I must have some of thy blood,” Joan “willingly graunting, offered him the forefinger of her left

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<sup>52</sup> Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 84.

<sup>53</sup> As quoted in Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 88.

<sup>54</sup> ‘The Ministracion of Baptisme to be Used in the Church’, in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1559), [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/Baptism\\_1559.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/Baptism_1559.htm) (accessed August 15, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, 76-77.

hand.”<sup>56</sup> In 1619 it was recorded that “when the Divell perceived the *infidious disposition* of this wretch (John Flower) and that she and her daughters might easily bee made instruments to enlarge his Kingdome, he came neerer unto them, and in plaine termes to come quickly to the purpose, offered them his service.”<sup>57</sup> In 1612, Thomas Potts recorded in his account about the trials of Lancashire witches that “Alizon Device sayth ... her grandmother ... did sundry times in going and walking together as they went begging persuade and advise this examinee to let a devil or familiar appear to her; and that she, this examinee would let him suck at some part of her ... And so *not long after these persuasions* ... there appeared unto her a thing like unto a blacke dogge.”<sup>58</sup> In each of these cases and in many others, the suspected witches’ moral weakness not allowing any resistance to temptation was presented as an important factor stirring up the Devil.

The second thing we need to understand is what Protestant reformers thought about the popular belief in the appearance of the Devil in animal form. As the first part of this chapter makes clear and, as Holmes points out, according to English popular belief, “the witch’s power is in part a function of her ability to co-opt the forces of the *animal world*.”<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, the importance attributed to animal familiars by popular belief was often ridiculed and found embarrassing by zealots.<sup>60</sup> Puritan preacher George Gifford, for instance, asked: “Doe you think Sathan lodgeth in an hollow tree? Is hee become so lazie and idle? Hath he left off to bee as a

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<sup>56</sup> *The Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches* (1589), B-Bv (emphasis added).

<sup>57</sup> Anon., *The wonderful discoverie of the vvitchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Ioan Flower neere Beuer Castle: executed at Lincolne, March 11. 1618 Who were specially arraigned and condemned before Sir Henry Hobart, and Sir Edward Bromley, iudges of assise, for confessing themselues actors in the destruction of Henry L. Rosse, with their damnable practises against others the children of the Right Honourable Francis Earle of Rutland. Together with the seuerall examinations and confessions of Anne Baker, Ioan Willimot, and Ellen Greene, witches in Leicestershire* (London, 1619), C4v (emphases added).

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Potts, *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London, 1612), C (emphases added).

<sup>59</sup> Holmes, “Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines,” 94 (emphasis added).

<sup>60</sup> Holmes, “Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines,” 97.

roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour? Hath he put off the bloodie and cruell nature of the firie dragon, so that he mindeth no harme, but when an angrie woman intreate him to goe kill a cow or a horse?"<sup>61</sup> His own answer to the question is that "it is even of subtilite." Puritan pastor Richard Bernard's answer contained a curious assertion and an attack upon the commoners. According to him, "Satan (was) socially discriminating: to the rich and educated he appears in human guise, to the base, sordid, filthy and blockish ... he cometh in the baser formes."<sup>62</sup> In 1621 Henry Goodcole, minister of the Word of God, in his account about the case of Elizabeth Sawyer of Edmonton, expressed his embarrassment at seeing and hearing in "most base and false Ballets, which were sung at the time of our returning from the Witches execution ... such ridiculous fictions of her bewitching Corne on the ground, of a *Ferret and an Owle dayly sporting before her*, of the bewitched woman brayning her selfe, of the Spirits attending in the Prison." To Goodcole, all these were "fitter for an Ale-bench then for a relation of proceeding in Court of Iustice."<sup>63</sup> The author of the pamphlet account of the 1618 witchcraft trial in Lincolnshire, like Gifford, first mentioned "the monstrous *subtilty* of the Diuell" and then wrote contemptuously:

... steppeth forth the Diuell, and not onely sheweth them the way, but prescribeth the manner of effecting the same, with facility and easinesse, assuring that hee himselfe will attend them in some familiar shape of Rat, Cat, Toad, Birde, Cricket, &c: yea effectuate whatsoever they shall demaund or desire, and *for their better assurance and corroboration of their credulity*, they shall haue palpable and forcible touches of sucking, pinching, kissing, closing, colling and such like: wherevpon, without any feare of God or Man, knowledge of Christ, hope of redemption, confidence of mercy, or true

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<sup>61</sup> George Gifford, *A dialogue concerning witches and witchcrafts. In which is laide open how craftely the Diuell deceiue not onely the witches but many other and so leadeth them awrie into many great errors.* By George Gifford minister of Gods word in Maldon (London, 1593), Cv.

<sup>62</sup> Holmes, "Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines," 97.

<sup>63</sup> Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discouerie of Elizabeth Sawyer* (1621), A3v (emphases added).

beleefe that there is any other thing to bee looked after but this present World...<sup>64</sup>

Such statements, of course, reflected a genuine concern about popular misapprehensions, but they were also a response to the popular mind's reluctance to give up providing as proof of witchcraft the animals kept by the suspected witch and implicitly or explicitly criticized the belief in animal familiars. In the view of these considerations, it is evident that it was no coincidence that the suspected witches' animal familiars were never seen in the courtrooms because they were all 'vanished away' before the trials. When the Queen's attorney, during the examination of Agnes Waterhouse, one of the convicted witches of the 1566 Chelmsford trial, asked her: "Can you make it (her dog familiar) come before us now, if ye can we will dispatch you out of prison by and by," Agnes said: "I cannot ... now I have no more power over him." According to the pamphlet account of the 1579 Chelmsford trial, Mother Smith, one of the accused witches at the trial, kept three "Spirites" in bottles and pack. On the testimony of her son, "the house was commaunded to bee searched. The bottles and packe were found, but the Spirites were vanished awaie."<sup>65</sup> In 1589 Joan Prentice confessed that after she had said to her ferret: "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," the ferret "vanished away suddenly, and never came to her sithence."<sup>66</sup> Many of the confessions pointed out that the familiars disappeared never to return. No doubt it would be awkward, or highly 'ridiculous', for

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<sup>64</sup> *The wonderful discoverie of the vvitchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower* (1619), B3-B3v (emphases added).

<sup>65</sup> Anon., *A Detection of damnable driftes, practised by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex at the last Assizes there holden, whiche were executed in Aprill 1579. Set forth to discover the ambushmentes of Sathan, whereby he would surprise vs lulled in securitie, and hardened with contempte of Gods vengeance threatened for our offences* (London, 1579), A6v.

<sup>66</sup> Anon., *The apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches arraigned and by Justice condemnede in the Countye of Essex the 5 day of Julye last past. 1589 With the manner of their diuelish practices and keeping of thier spirits, whose fourmes are heerein truelye proportioned* (London, 1589).

prosecutors and ministers to bring a dog, a cat, a ferret, a toad, etc., before the court as the physical manifestation of the Devil the greatest enemy of mankind and the true faith, or as demonic agents. Moreover, such an attempt would weaken the strength of the central focus on the Devil's power of temptation that led people to sin and minimize the importance of the great spiritual battle fought against this power by reducing it to a story of animal farm while also strengthening some suspected witches' 'blasphemous' belief that "at their request, and to pleasure them by fulfilling their wrath, their Spirits do lame and kill both men and beasts."<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, it seems that the traditional focus on physical demons – animal familiars - in English witchcraft narratives and the local 'experience' with them became an excuse for judicial need to discover evidence of the witch's satanic activity. "Prosecutors and ministers," notes Johnstone, "were prepared to accept evidence of these spirits as a useful confirmation of the involvement of the diabolic, but equally prevalent was a notion of overt demonic seduction which accorded more closely to their expectations of the crime."<sup>68</sup> Thus the way was opened for the acceptance of this aspect of the popular beliefs about witchcraft, creating an enforced alliance of the 'learned' with the 'uneducated' which, to some extent, resulted from the need to confirm the supposed witchcraft of the suspect.

In connection with the issue presented above, now I would like to point out the not-so-well-recognized but equally relevant side of it. In spite of the fact that these highly folkloric elements of English witchcraft – the animal familiars - were accepted as evidence by the court, it is evident that the learned tradition did not entirely see domestic and wild animals as active agents in diabolic deeds of the witches. What I suggest is that the popular commentary of the idea of familiar was

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<sup>67</sup> Gifford, *A dialogue concerning witches and witchcraftes* (1593), D2v.

<sup>68</sup> Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, 148.



not less disturbing to the divines for reasons other than its reduction of Satan's and his minions' much more dangerous spiritual power and practice of internal temptation to "paltrie" actions of "cats, mise, toads and weasels."<sup>69</sup> It seems that the distanced approach to the animal familiars of the representatives of the learned tradition did not merely result from the popular mind's unwillingness for adopting the idea of the satanic compact, either; it was also closely related to the country folk's attachment to animals and to the Protestant emphasis on the human status. In other words, it was related to some kind of conflict: while the learned contemporaries' perception of animals was decidedly anthropocentric, the fantasy world of English witchcraft was decidedly anthropomorphic because it involved the attribution of human characteristics to animals as much as investing them with profound and mystical meanings.

Within this framework, first of all, it would be necessary to recall that these two specific terms, 'anthropocentrism' and 'anthropomorphism', were not in use at the time. Yet early modern thought, as implied above and as will be discussed below, presented debates which answer to the definition of these concepts in their modern sense.<sup>70</sup> In early modern England, Protestant anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism of the 'vulgar' appeared as two different ways of representation. It is from this difference that we can understand two different approaches to animals at the time, which has a direct bearing upon our present inquiry.

"In the early modern period its (Christianity's) leading English exponents, the preachers and the commentators," says Thomas, "were undoubtedly

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<sup>69</sup> "such paltrie vermine, as Cats, Mise, Toads...": Gifford, *A dialogue concerning witches and witchcraftes* (1593), C2.

<sup>70</sup> According to *OED* (2nd edn., 1989), the first use of the two terms – the first one in the sense of 'regarding man as the central fact of the universe, to which all surrounding facts have reference' and the second in the sense of 'ascription of a human attribute or personality to anything impersonal or irrational' – can be found in the nineteenth century.

anthropocentric,” and he continues: “A reader who came fresh to the moral and theological writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could be forgiven for inferring that,” besides strongly emphasizing the weakness of man and minimizing the sufficiency of natural human powers, “their main purpose was to define the special status of man and to justify his rule over other creatures.”<sup>71</sup> The doctrine of human uniqueness, and related to this doctrine, the idea that “man stood to animal as did heaven to earth, soul to body, culture to nature”<sup>72</sup> was put forward by the learned at every opportunity. In order to account for the anthropocentrism in the early modern period, Harrison suggests a variety of interrelated factors, such as the collapse of symbolist mentality of the Middle Ages or the appearance on the religious landscape of this-worldly Protestantism with its attendant ethic.<sup>73</sup>

Protestant theologians thought “man was the only religious animal, the sole possessor of an immortal soul. This was the only distinction between man and brutes.”<sup>74</sup> In their relationship to animals, ‘base’ people were crossing a boundary which could not be crossed or were constantly shifting boundaries. “For at a popular level religion had never been regarded as inaccessible to animals ... Many early modern farmers continued to regard their domestic animals ... as essentially within the covenant,”<sup>75</sup> which was, no doubt, taken as an insult to *true religion*. From the perspective of the divines, the mass of the people behaved like irrational beings, that is, like ‘brute beasts’ not endowed with understanding and judgment, like animals to which they lived so close. They were so ignorant and wretched that they were not

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 24-25.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 35.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Harrison, “Subduing the Earth: Genesis 1, Early Modern Science and the Exploitation of Nature,” *The Journal of Religion* 79, 1 (1999): 86-109, p. 96.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 137.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 137.

even aware of their wretchedness. Unlike a true believer, they were so obsessed with external symbols that they could not understand the importance of internal proofs.

The Reformed thinkers thought of animals (and other ‘natural objects’) as instruments of humans in that they were for human use and should be read for their implications for human society and for their practical utility rather than their allegorical or symbolic meanings and functions.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, the ‘misguided’, ‘ignorant’, and ‘credulous’ mass of people was still treating animals as symbols, and even beyond that, as source of knowledge which had popular sanction but was not sanctioned by orthodoxy or the representatives of authority. As explained in the first part of this chapter, they, like their ancestors in the Middle Ages, still believed that “this visible world teaches us about that which is invisible, and ... this earthly scene contains patterns of things heavenly”<sup>77</sup> and, of course, infernal, whereas they needed to *literally* and unambiguously exercise dominion over the ‘visible’ by maintaining the boundaries. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that such an understanding – the ‘literalist’ mentality of Protestant reformers - which denied that animals were rational and moral agents or tokens of spiritual truths would also, even if implicitly, deny the possibility that they were demonic agents. However, although rarely, some voices within the learned tradition, too, might refer to the Devil or demonic agents in the guise of an animal. In September 1621, for instance, Sir Simonds D’Ewes, a Puritan lawyer, recorded in his diary that “all ships docked at Plymouth had been destroyed by a storm that followed the appearance of the Devil in the form of a black dog.”<sup>78</sup> Such references made by the learned may have originated in the interpretation of the Beast as the symbol of Antichrist, but apparently contained folkloric elements at the same time. On the

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<sup>76</sup> Harrison, “Subduing the Earth,” 97.

<sup>77</sup> Harrison, “Subduing the Earth,” 97.

<sup>78</sup> Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, 7.

other hand, as the example makes clear, even if the Devil took animal form in such stories, that animal was highly different from the witches' animal familiars, the creatures that might be kept in their houses and nourished with bread and milk.

Protestant theologians constantly criticized the popular mind which was not able to discriminate between human and animal status. In the opinion of Perkins, for example, even the best actions of those who lacked conscience, 'the assurance of the separation from the beast',

are sinnes, euen their buying and selling, their speech and silence, yea their praying and seruing of God. For *they do these actions either of custome, or example, or necessitie, as beasts do, & not of faith: because they know not Gods will touching things to be done or left vndone.*<sup>79</sup>

According to this, to do something out of 'custom, or example, or necessity' (without any trace of conscience or without the dictates of reason) was not different from doing something out of instinct or just following natural inclinations (as the beasts apparently do), would turn someone into a beast. In brief, the image of the beast appearing in the writings of the Reformed thinkers carried many negative connotations contrary to its opposite, conscious 'human-ness', as Fudge puts it, and some people's lack of conscience also meant their lack of humanity and led them to stand closer to 'animality',<sup>80</sup> undermining human status placed at the head of the natural world according to the great chain of being.

Common people, because of their lack of conscience (according to the divines), made very little distinction between themselves and their beasts. Anything was possible in their world because no concept had a clear-cut meaning in their mind. Thus they could even endow their beasts with a soul and allocate them various degrees of feeling and rationality. As a result, the witch figure, too, as part of the

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<sup>79</sup> William Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience: Wherein is set downe the nature, properties, and differences thereof: as also the way to Get and keepe good Conscience* (Cambridge, 1596), 43 (emphases added).

<sup>80</sup> Fudge, *Perceiving Animals*, 48-50.

community of shared values and attitudes, did not draw a definite boundary line between the world of human beings and that of animals. But apart from ordinary experience with them, she tried to use them for her evil purposes. It would not be wrong to say, therefore, that in the world of the villagers, this may have been one of the points that both made her 'different' from other members of the community and turned her animals into 'familiar spirits' (both to the accusers and sometimes to the witch herself because she was convinced of her own magical powers and naturally tended to see these animals as 'evil spirits'). Some of the witch confessions present us with details by which we can treat the anthropomorphism of the 'vulgar' in this context and understand why the learned, and therefore, the 'civilized', may have been disturbed by the relationship between the witch and her companion into which a great deal of everyday experience was absorbed.

To illustrate this point, in the pamphlet account of the 1612 Lancashire trials, Thomas Potts, clerk at the trials and author of the pamphlet, recorded:

(Alizon Device) met with a peddler on the high-way, called colne-field, neere unto colne: and this examine demanded of the said peddler to buy some pinnes of him; but the said peddler sturdily answered this examine that he would not loose his packe; and so this examine parting with him: presently there appeared to this examine the blacke dogge ... which black dogge spake unto this examine in English, saying; what wouldst thou have me to do unto yonder man? To whom this examine said, what canst thou do at him? And the dogge answered againe, I can lame him.<sup>81</sup>

This passage is noteworthy because of the anthropomorphism it reveals. Alizon Device's confession involves attributing characteristics of the human mind to a demonic spirit or to an animal. Here the familiar is not simply an instrument of evil, but becomes the thinking, plotting counterpart of evil-minded human. Moreover, the passage also indicates another idea that runs through most of the stories concerning the familiars: the witch and accuser, who, in terms of mentalities, "inhabited the

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<sup>81</sup> Potts, *The Wonderful Discoverie* (1612), Cv.

same magical universe,”<sup>82</sup> gave the everyday a higher meaning, the commonplace secret significance, and related the supernatural to the natural, the ‘unfamiliar’ to the ‘familiar’, and of course, the ‘human’ to the ‘animal’.

Another recurring theme in witchcraft narratives concerning the familiars was their act of sucking blood from the witches. At early modern English witch trials, the ‘unnatural’ feat at which the familiar (or pet animal) sucked was from the beginning regarded as physical evidence against the accused alongside other indications of guilt used as proofs. The first English trial pamphlet published in 1566 contained statements about the notion of blood-sucking familiars. During the trial of Agnes Waterhouse, the Queen’s Attorney asked her, “when did thy cat suck of thy blood,” and she said “never.” But then “the jailer lifted up her kercker on her head and there was diverse spots in her face and one on her nose.” Questioned again, she confessed: “not this fortnight.”<sup>83</sup> In the pamphlet accounts of the trials, the place where the witch was sucked varied. Joan Prentice’s ferret, for example, sucked her sometimes on the forefinger of her left hand and sometimes on her left cheek.<sup>84</sup> At the 1582 trial in St. Osyth, Thomas Rabbet, Ursley Kempe’s eight-year-old son, said that her mother’s spirits “sucked blood of her upon her armes and other places of her body.”<sup>85</sup> And in 1621, Elizabeth Sawyer confessed, “the place where the Diuell (her dog familiar) suckt my bloud was a little aboue my fundament.”<sup>86</sup>

Concerning these blood-sucking familiars, Thomas reminds us that “the employment of vampirish familiars for magic purposes had been encountered in medieval legend.”<sup>87</sup> Similarly, Bailey suggests that the blood-sucking familiars

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<sup>82</sup> Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*, 36.

<sup>83</sup> *The Examination and Confession of Certain Witches* (1566).

<sup>84</sup> *The Apprehension and Confession of three notorious Witches* (1589).

<sup>85</sup> W.W., *A True and Just Record* (1582).

<sup>86</sup> Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discouerie of Elizabeth Sawyer* (1621), C3.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 530.

“seems to have been based on popular folklore stretching back to the ancient belief in the vampiric creature known as the *strix*, an indication, perhaps, of how most lay people envisioned demonic threats.”<sup>88</sup> One of the most illuminating explanations about this belief comes from Holmes who points out:

In England, the familiars’ sucking from the witch’s teat is a ‘diabolical sacrament and ceremony to confirm the hellish covenant’, an inverted communion and a parody by which the witch is reminded of the original compact when Satan had drawn her blood to sign that document. Yet the basic notion of the animal companion rewarded with blood is of popular origin. And, by incorporating this aspect of local ‘experience’, English intellectuals were obliged to explain what was, on the face of it, so strange an action.<sup>89</sup>

If the incorporation of this notion ‘of popular origin’ had resulted, to some or great extent, from obligation, then we need to understand what ‘so strange an action’ may have meant to English intellectuals in case of non-obligation. Such an approach leads us necessarily to the issue of the importance of human body for the ministers or theologians of the Reformation. In his sermon *The Bread of Life* (1616), Thomas Granger, preacher of the word, said: “... mans body is the grave, and destruction of all things, though in another consideration it be the perfection of all things; for as much as it is the Centre of all things, and for the sustenance and maintenance whereof, the world, with the fulnesse thereof, was created.”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, in *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles* (1595), William Perkins wrote:

mans body by creation, was made a temple framed by Gods own hands for himselfe to dwell in; therefore our duth is to keepe our bodies pure and cleane, and not to suffer them to be instruments, whereby to practise the sinne of the heart ... For the more filthie a mans body is, the more fit it is to be a dwelling place for sinne and Satan.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 130.

<sup>89</sup> Holmes, “Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines,” 99.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Granger, *The bread of life, or Foode of the regenerate A sermon preached at Botterwike in Holland, neere Boston, in Lincolnshire. By Thomas Granger, preacher of Gods word there* (London, 1616), B2.

<sup>91</sup> Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole, or Creed of the Apostles: according to the tenour of the Scriptures, and the consent of Ortodoxe Fathers of the Church* (Cambridge, 1595), 53.

Perkins also wrote in *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration* that God “hath made mee for his owne image, hauing a reasonable soule, body, shape; where he might haue made me a Toad, a Serpent, a Swine, deformed, franticke.”<sup>92</sup>

When analyzed within the framework of the ‘human body’ discourse, it appears that the suspected witches were frequently upsetting the normal distinction that was made between human and animal, this time by allowing their ‘animal’ familiars to suck their blood. Even worse was that the witch figure was desecrating God’s image by stripping a human being of his or her human status, by reducing a human being to animal status and by elevating animals to human status. And it is very likely that in the eyes of the Reformers craving for the subordination of the wilderness in nature in order to restore it to its original perfection,<sup>93</sup> the suspected witches’ anthropomorphic attitude towards their animal familiars revealed their untamed and unmanageable nature, that is, their nature not different from that of their beasts. Their anthropomorphism also allowed for the animalisation of humans and thus paradoxically destroyed human status at the same time. Profoundly convinced of the degree and order in the chain of being, firmly persuaded of man’s superior position to that of animals, some Reformed thinkers must have thought how they – the witches - could suffer so ludicrous a humiliation as to be sucked by the baser animals.

Related to village-level witchcraft beliefs, although Purkiss’ suggestion that “anxieties about the borderline between humans and animals, between clean and unclean, translate into the elaborate fantasy of the witch and her suckling familiar”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Perkins, *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration Whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace* (London, 1595), E3v(??).

<sup>93</sup> For the Protestant ideology of the ‘subordination of nature’ based on the biblical imperative ‘have dominion’, see Peter Harrison, “Subduing the Earth: Genesis 1, Early Modern Science and the Exploitation of Nature,” *The Journal of Religion* 79, 1 (1999): 86-109.

<sup>94</sup> Purkiss, *Witch in History*, 241.



seems to be true, it is important to note that this suggestion overlooks the possibility that such a borderline (between clean-human body and unclean-animal body, pure-human body and impure-animal body) may not have existed at all in the world of the common people who ran every day over the same paths with their animals, toiled with them in the fields, and lived with them in their houses. Therefore, anxieties about this allegedly uncrossable boundary must mostly have been those of the ‘more sophisticated’ mind. The witch figure who fed and cared for her familiars, understood as small demons, may have been perceived as a malevolent anti-mother<sup>95</sup> by her neighbours and their children, or sometimes by her own children as in a case recorded in the 1582 St. Osyth trial. The author of the pamphlet recorded the information given by Thomas Rabbet, son of Ursley Kempe, one of the accused, against her mother as follows:

The saide Thomas Rabbet saith, that his said mother Ursley Kempe alias Grey hath foure severall spirites, the one called Tyffin, the other Titty, the third Pigine & the fourth Jacke... Titty is like a little grey Cat, Tyffin is like a white lambe, Pigine is black like a Toad, and Jacke is black like a Cat... he hath seen his mother at times to *give them beere to drinke, and of a white Lofe or Cake to eate*, and saied 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...*<sup>96</sup>

In similar stories, the accusers did say almost nothing implying any transgression of boundaries between *human* and *animal*; their main concern was rather over the image of ‘bad mother’ or ‘lewd woman’ according to the place of the teat on which the animal familiars were supposed to suck, and therefore, on social role of mother or moral principles of woman. On the other hand, the anxieties of the common people about the witch figure nurturing her familiar instead of her child, that is, the anxieties about the figure of ‘bad mother’ was somewhat different from

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<sup>95</sup> For the discussion of the witch figure as the representative of ‘bad mother’, see Purkiss, *Witch in History*, 119-140.

<sup>96</sup> W.W., *A True and Just Recorde* (1582), A3v (emphases added).

those of the learned; in their thought, the witch's act, most probably, meant the humiliation and abasement of human body, destruction of God's image; her transgression was not only about being a good mother or a bad one, it was also about being a human or an animal, about the preservation of 'purity' of body and soul.

Consequently, there was something in the focus on physical experience with familiars and the idea of the animal familiar itself that turned upside-down the conception of the body as the temple of the soul and man's privileged position in the universe, since it reduced human status to animal status and elevated animals to human status. Considered within a wider theological framework, the idea itself emerged as one of the worst forms of pride humans could exercise because it was aimed at undermining divine purpose that God appointed animals to serve humans. The idea of the animal familiar referred to the removal of boundaries between the species - human and animal; between symbolism – which was more appropriate to the life experience of the villagers - and actual meaning; and to the replacing of instinct for reason, brutishness for virtue. That was completely in contrast with the idea of 'spiritual and mental perfection', but the result was, in fact, the same: the witches, corrupted *in soul and body*, made themselves animals, dehumanized themselves while humanizing animals. Therefore, the idea of the familiar had something to do with the undisciplined mind which was unfit for the perception of moral matters.

What conclusions can be drawn from all this? The mind of the peasant was strong to retain images once deeply impressed upon it and allowed for access to past thoughts and deeds which brought moral dangers in a different sense (in the context of the Reformation) and it also allowed for credulities and for the representation of things which were imagined and fictionalized but to which literal meanings were

attributed and which were no longer present in the reformed mind. All the same, it is clear that familiars were the 'invisible proofs' of an almost 'unprovable crime', act of *maleficium*, and the court's acceptance of their existence as proof of witchcraft referred to an interesting compromise between Protestant attitudes and popular beliefs.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PENDLE WITCHES OF 1612: A NOTABLE CASE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH WITCHCRAFT

In the year 1612, one of the most famous witch trials of early modern England took place in Lancashire.<sup>1</sup> The Lancashire witch-trials were so famous and widely publicised at the time that “if one could have asked information on the subject from a Londoner of 1620,” notes Notestein, “he would have probably have heard little about witchcraft in general, but a very great deal about the Lancashire, Northampton, Leicester, Lincoln, and Fairfax trials.”<sup>2</sup> Two old women, Elizabeth Southernns and Anne Whittle, better known in the community they lived in as Old Demdike and Old Chattox, were the protagonists of this celebrated story. Both of them apparently lived on the profits of their so-called powers of magic. Many members of the same community came to them to seek their aid, and thus, convinced of their own magical powers, they turned their magical practices into

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 537; Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 156; James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 280; see also his “Introduction: the Lancashire Witches in Historical Context” to *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, Robert Poole, ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 1-19.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England* (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 120.

some kind of trade and source of eking out a living, which created an atmosphere of rivalry between the two women reflected in their confessions and accusations against each other, together with the evidence given against them during the trials. Instead of trying to deny the guilt attributed to them, they themselves even contributed to the stories about their dangerous powers. In a sense, they became the victims of their own credulity and superstition. Not only Old Demdike and Old Chattox, but also Alison Device, Old Demdike's granddaughter, and Anne Redferne, Old Chattox's daughter, were committed to Lancaster to stand trial. After Old Chattox and Old Demdike were sent to gaol, on Good Friday 1612, according to the evidence of Jennet and James Device, grandchildren of Old Demdike, a great feast of witches, among whom there were three male witches, was held at Malking Tower, Old Demdike's house. In the meantime, some justices were sent to Lancaster for the trial of Elizabeth Device, Old Demdike's daughter, James Device, Elizabeth Device's son, Alice Nutter, Katherine Hewitt, John Bulcock, and Isabel Robey. These people, together with three other witches of Samlesbury, were tried at the assizes of Lancaster before Sir James Altham and Sir Edward Bromley. Six other witches were also tried at the same time and place. The trial of the Pendle witches which started on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1612 took only a few days. Those known as the Pendle witches – Old Chattox, Elizabeth, James, and Alison Device, Anne Redferne, Alice Nutter, Katherine Hewitt, Jane and John Bulcock, and Isabel Rowley – were sentenced to death and the trial ended on the 20<sup>th</sup> with their public execution at Lancaster. Elizabeth Southern, *alias* Old Demdike, died in Lancaster Gaol while awaiting her trial. The three Samlesbury witches whose trials took place at the same assizes and before the same judge were all acquitted of the crime because they were thought to be the 'victims of a Catholic plot'.

This study aims to explore some important aspects of the Lancashire witch trials in 1612, to understand what made the case of the Lancashire witches somewhat different especially from the preceding ones, and to indicate how the reputation of the county as a ‘stronghold of Catholic survivalism’ at the time may have affected the formulation and presentation of the evidence at the Lancashire witch trials in such a way as to draw attention to the link established between a range of magical activities of the accused and ‘old’ Catholic teaching. In this chapter, I will examine some of the new emphases in the confessions and accusations: the Good Friday meeting; the meaning attributed to the communion bread and ‘the way they received it’; bones stolen from the church graveyard; the more active and self-assertive attitude of some of the accused; the heavy use of image magic; the heavy emphasis on the appearance of the Devil in human form, and the use of charms. The confessions and accusations about the suspected witches’ meeting on Good Friday, the communion bread, and the graveyard robbery will be analyzed in connection with the idea of ‘inversion’ woven into the stories at the trials of the Pendle witches and as part of the ‘logic’ lying in the basis of witchcraft beliefs, at least in this region. In addition, this study will also be an attempt to understand how all this evidence against the Pendle witches might have been interpreted by the hearer, the Protestant reformer, within and outside the courtroom.

Let us begin with a general overview of the major source upon which we are dependent for most of our knowledge of the 1612 Lancashire witch-trials. The account of the trials came with an official backing. Thomas Potts, clerk of the court, had been instructed by the judges to collect and publish the evidence and confessions concerning the trials.<sup>3</sup> Upon this, the report called for was published

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfyll Discouerie of witches in the countie of Lancaster VVith the arraignment and triall of nineteene notorious witches, at the assizes and general gaole deliuerie*,

almost a year after the trials under the title of *The Wonderfvll Discoverie of Witches in the Covntie of Lancaster*. Potts' work contained a statement by one of the judges, Edward Bromley, according to which he had overseen the report which had been written by the clerk at the sessions.<sup>4</sup> In the content of his documentation, Potts provided information about the factors which led to the prosecutions, pre-trial examinations, indictments and confessions, along with summaries of the actual trials. As in other pamphlet accounts, we again need to be satisfied with the choice of detail of the author, not being certain enough if the speeches of the accused and the accusers were reported verbatim. Nevertheless, Potts' work, it appears, is more organized and detailed than many other pamphlet accounts of witch trials which preceded his and were highly fragmented. In his work, Potts discussed the cases of twenty-one accused witches in total. This was the first time the number of those tried for witchcraft by the same court was that large.<sup>5</sup> Potts was aware of this and wrote: "So infinite a multitude came to the Arraignment & tryall of these Witches at Lancaster, the number of them being knowen to exceed all others at any time

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*holden at the castle of Lancaster, vpon Munday, the seuenteenth of August last, 1612. Before Sir Iames Altham, and Sir Edward Bromley, Knights; barons of his Maiesties Court of Exchequer: and iustices of assize, oyer and terminor, and generall gaole deliuerie in the circuit of the north parts. Together with the arraignment and triall of Iennet Preston, at the assizes holden at the castle of Yorke, the seuen and twentieth day of Iulie last past, with her execution for the murther of Master Lister by witchcraft. Published and set forth by commandement of his Maiesties iustices of assize in the north parts* (London, 1613). According to the account, James Altham and Edward Bromley confirmed that "vpon the Arraignment and triall of these Witches at the last Assizes and the Generall Gaole-deliuerie, holden at Lancaster, wee found such apparent matters against them, that we thought it necessarie to publish them to the World, and thereupon imposed the labour of this Worke vpon this Gentleman, by reason of his place, being a Clerke at that time in Court, imploied in the Arraignment and triall of them," A2.

<sup>4</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvll Discouerie*, A3. Bromley's statement reads: "After he had taken great paines to finish it, I tooke vpon mee to reuise and correct it, that nothing might passe but matter of Fact, apparant against them by record. It is very little he had inserted, and that necessarie, to shew what their offences were, what people, and of what condition they were: The whole proceedings and Euidence against them, I finde vpon examination carefully set forth, and truely reported, and judge the worke fit and wortie to be published."

<sup>5</sup> Another notable trial which took place in Essex in 1582 involved fourteen persons. See W. W., *A True and just Recorde of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches taken at St. Oses in the countie of Essex: whereof some were executed, and other some entreated according to the determination of Lawe. Written orderly, as the cases were tried by evidence, by W. W.* (London, 1582).

heretofore, at one time to be indicted, arraigned, and receiue their tryall.”<sup>6</sup> Even more unusual than the number of the suspects charged with witchcraft was that of those executed at the end of the Lancashire trials. As Potts’s *Wonderfvll Discouerie* reveals and as Sharpe points out, the hanging of ten (or eleven if we count Jennet Preston’s execution in York) witches at one go was a very unusual incident for England.<sup>7</sup>

In his narrative, Potts, emphasizing their peculiarities, physical appearance and deformities, sometimes demonstrates his own credulity and sounds as superstitious as the accusers and the accused themselves, as in the following examples:

This Anne Whittle, alias Chattox, was a very old withered spent & decreped creature, her sight almost gone...In her Witchcraft, always more ready to doe mischief to mens goods, then themselues. Her lippes euer chattering and walking: but no man knew what.<sup>8</sup>

...This odious Witch (Elizabeth Device) was branded with a preposterous marke in Nature, euen from her birth, which was her left eye, standing lower then the other; the one looking downe, the other looking vp, so strangely deformed, as the best that were present in that Honorable assembly, and great Audience, did affirme, they had not often seene the like.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, in dealing with the Lancashire witches, we have the advantage of reading an account by an author reporting a scene that he, at least to some extent, witnessed personally as the clerk at the trials. Moreover, through his detailed report of the trials and not in spite of, but thanks to, his own credulity, it becomes easier to learn about the popular notions of witchcraft, popular imagination and superstitions in early modern Lancashire. His work, although not in detail, provides some information about the popular reliance upon cunning folk, popular remedies and

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<sup>6</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvll Discouerie*, B.

<sup>7</sup> Sharpe, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>8</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvll Discouerie*, D2.

<sup>9</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvll Discouerie*, F4.



practices, and popular discrimination between beneficial magic and malicious witchcraft.

The 1612 trials in Lancashire can be discussed both as a ‘case study’ which reflected the popular ideas about the activities of witches and as an *exceptional* trial during which some ‘atypical stories’ were told, compared to those told at previous trials. On the one hand, the Pendle witches shared many of the common characteristics of English witches; on the other hand, they had their own peculiarities. Consequently, there were some new emphases both in their stories and the content of the indictments which were mainly centred around offences concerning cursing, scolding, spoiling brewing, livestock-damage, in some cases in conjunction with other acts of *maleficium* like mortal physical torments inflicted by the witch or mysterious and terrifying illnesses leading to death at preceding trials, while those at this trial involved diabolic practices such as image magic and stealing skulls from the graveyard as well as the above-mentioned popular suspicions of traditional kind. The world of *maleficium* and the world of magic, maybe for the first time in the accounts of English witch trials, so clearly came together at their trial, and their confessions, in some measure, went beyond stereotyped ones. As Notestein points out,

We have all the elements here of a mountain feud ... we have clay images and Satanic banquets. The battles were to be fought out with imps of Hell as participants and with ammunition supplied with the Evil One himself ... Here were charmers and ‘inchanters’, experienced dealers in magic, struggling against one another.<sup>10</sup>

These are all what made their case one of the most celebrated ones among the early modern English witch-trials.

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<sup>10</sup> Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft*, 122-123.

To begin with, the 1612 trial was one of the trials in which the idea of ‘inversion’ featured prominently. This trial demonstrates that the notion, to quote Clark, that “witches did everything backwards”<sup>11</sup> was established in popular culture. Clark suggests that this idea manifested itself especially in the writings of the learned demonologists and in romantic fiction.<sup>12</sup> The accusations and confessions at this trial indicated that this idea was not confined to the learned mentality; the belief that witchcraft might be practised to cause, or rather to create some kind of inversion found an expression in popular mind as well. The story of ‘Good Friday’ meeting of the Pendle witches was one of the most apparent indications of the belief in witches’ potential for or intent on turning things upside-down, in this example especially by making use of the *holy* for *unholy* purposes. Here I need to stress that I do not use the word ‘inversion’ to refer to what really happened on that Good Friday night, but as the equivalent of what was reconstructed in the minds of the accused and the accusers during the days following their meeting and in their stories they told before the justices at their trials. In other words, in following pages, I will not deal with witches riding beasts backwards or reversing the Lord’s Prayer by repeating it backwards in their spells and charms, though such notions were popular. I will rather discuss an idea of inversion which was applied to the circumstances and manifested itself not during but after the experience, that is, the idea and knowledge of it and its reflection in popular imagination, and try to show that the emphasis on the Good Friday meeting was not haphazard; the evidence given about that night was determined by their knowledge of the *holy*.

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<sup>11</sup> Stuart Clark, “Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft,” *Past and Present* 87 (1980): 98-127, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> Clark, “Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft,” 101.

As stated before, while some members of the two families were in Lancaster Gaol waiting for their trials, others came together on Good Friday night in 1612.

According to Potts:

they... laboured a speciall meeting at Malking Tower in the Forrest of Pendle, vpon Good Fryday, within a week after they were committed, of all the most dangerous, wicked, and damnable Witches in the County farre and neere. Vpon Good-fryday they met, according to solemne appoyntment, solemnized this great Feastiull day according to their former order, with great cheare, merry company, and much conference.<sup>13</sup>

This reported meeting was “one of the first approximations to the sabbat to be found in an English source.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, many elements of the Continental-style sabbath night of witches were lacking from the meeting night of the Pendle witches. In their confessions, there was no mentioning of the flying witches who anointed themselves with magic salve, of the Devil who presided over the sabbath and whose fundament was kissed by the witches, or of sexual orgies.<sup>15</sup> Within the framework of our discussion, it would be worth quoting the information given about that night at the trials which conveyed the atmosphere at Malking Tower, or rather, the meaning attributed to that night when it was reconstructed in the mind of the accused and the accuser, and to whose main details various witnesses agreed remarkably:

Elizabeth Device:

confesseth that vpon Good-Friday last, there dined at this Examinate house, called Malking-Tower, those which she hath said are Witches, and doth verily think them to be Witches... also confesseth, in all things touching the Christening of the Spirit, and the killing of Master Lister of Westbie... but denieth of any talke was amongst them the said Witches, to her now remembrance, at the said meeting together, touching the killing of the Gaoler, or *the blowing vp of Lancaster Castle*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvl Discoverie*, C3.

<sup>14</sup> James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 99.

<sup>15</sup> For details about the Continental-style sabbath night, see Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*, revised edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 144-161.

<sup>16</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvl Discoverie*, G3 (emphases added). Notestein has noted an important detail in this story: “The gunpowder plot, seven years earlier, no doubt gave direction to this plan, or perhaps it would be better to say, gave the idea to those who confessed the plan,” *A History of Witchcraft*,

Jennet Device, a child of about nine years of age and daughter of the said Elizabeth Device, gave evidence against her mother, sister and brother, and said that:

...vpon Good Friday last there was about twentie persons (whereof onely two were men, to this Examinate's remembrance) at her said Grandmother's house, called Malking-Tower aforesaid, about twelve of the clocke: all which persons this Examinate said mother told her, were Witches, and that they came to giue a name to Alizon Device's Spirit, or Familiar, sister to this Examinee, and now prisoner at Lancaster. And also this Examinee saith, that the persons aforesaid had to their dinners Beefe, Bacon, and roasted Mutton... And lastly, she this Examinee confesseth and saith, That her mother had taught her two prayers: the one to cure the bewitched, and the other to get drinke.<sup>17</sup>

James Device said that:

On Good-Friday last, about twelue of the clocke in the day time, there dined in this Examinate's said mother's house, at Malking-Tower, a number of persons, whereof three of men, with this Examinee, and the rest women; and that they met there for three causes following (as this Examinate said mother told this Examinee). The first was, for the naming of the Spirit, which *Alizon Device*, now prisoner at Lancaster, had: But did not, name him, because shee was not there. The second was, for the deliuerie of his said Grandmother, olde *Demdike*; this Examinate's said sister *Alizon*; the said *Anne Chattox*, and her daughter *Redferne*; killing the Gaoler at Lancaster; and before the next Assises to blow vp the Castle there; and to that end the aforesaid prisoners might by that time make an escape, and get away. All which this Examinee then heard them conferre of... And this Examinee further sayth, That all the Witches went out of the said House in their owne shapes and likenesses. And they all, by that they were forth of the dores, gotten on Horsebacke, like vnto Foales, some of one colour, some of another; and *Prestons* wife was the last: and when shee got on Horsebacke, they all presently vanished out of this Examinate's sight. And before their parting away, they all appointed to meete at the said *Prestons* wiues house that day twelue-moneths; at which time the said *Prestons* wife promised to make them a great Feast...<sup>18</sup>

Potts, as he frequently did, added to these Good Friday accounts his own comment about their activities, saying: "And here they parted, with resolution to execute their deuillish and bloudie practises, for the deliuerance of their friends,

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123, n.2. I suggest that it would be even better to say, the gunpowder plot gave an idea to those who tried them about how the plan 'to blow up Lancaster Castle' might be interpreted.

<sup>17</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfull Discouerie*, G3v-G4.

<sup>18</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfull Discouerie*, G4-G4v.

until they came to meet here, where their power and strength was gone.”<sup>19</sup>

Actually, apart from the aim of naming the spirit of Alison Device there was almost nothing ‘devilish’ or supernatural about their meeting, there was no mentioning of any demonic practices, magical activities or act of sorcery. However, what made their behaviour inverted was their ill-will, their aim to do harm and planning such activities on a day when people commemorated the crucifixion of Christ and therefore on a day of mourning, praying, meditation, quietness, and to some extent, abstinence. The central idea was that they planned *unholy* activities on such a *holy* day. What they did was at most creating an atmosphere of imitation, and most probably, they did not feel as if they turned over the order of things by any devilish practices or as if they were mocking belief and custom, but they certainly did so in the eyes of the accusers and the court that tried them. That is to say, even if there was no *act* of inversion, there was the *idea* of it in people’s mind, and the evil-doing through turning things upside-down first began in the mind. It was through this mental state that they themselves sounded convinced of their act of deviance when what happened that night was reconstructed at court. In this Good Friday example, what was turned upside-down was the holiness of that special day. On such a day, people did not plan to kill someone or name a demonic spirit; they prayed and baked bread marked with cross.<sup>20</sup> Their meeting on that day for unholy purposes referred to the contamination of the sacred. This meeting meant the elevation of vice over virtue, in mind if not in practice. Thus, the Good Friday ceremony was reversed, being turned out to be a sabbath-like night, and the so-called witches’ desire for practicing more powerful and less compromising activities put them into a devastating connection with what was adopted as independent motives, showing

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<sup>19</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfull Discouerie*, H.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Hutton, “The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore,” *Past and Present* 148 (1995): 89-116, p. 101.

them (not only in the mind of the learned, but also in popular mind) as criminal, religious, and moral adversaries of the ‘approved’, ‘holy’, ‘communal’ causes.

Here it is necessary to emphasize that we are talking about a traditional society in a rural and community setting. And in a traditional society formed of similar segments, the members of that society are knit together by shared values and beliefs, homogeneous elements, or in Durkheim’s words, by “similarities,” “collective sentiments” or “common consciousness.”<sup>21</sup> Since in pre-industrial societies, the most widely shared beliefs, as will be mentioned below in connection with our discussion, were the religious ones, and considering the role that religion and mythology have in shaping the attitude of the community towards the approved vs. the unapproved (the rule vs. the exception, the normal vs. the pathological, the proper vs. the improper, etc.), when I speak of any expression referring to the idea of inversion, I also mean the reversal of these established ‘religious’ beliefs, values and a common heritage, whether it be based on common superstitions or not. Accordingly, when the accused and the accusers confessed to a meeting which had taken place on Good Friday night, they also gave some clue about the ‘unapproved’ behaviour and the understanding of religious deviance and error in the community they lived in. Furthermore, the inherited or acquired superstitions of the country folk, when nurtured by a sense of fear and anxiety, taught them to believe in “the unevenness of the time” and the existence of lucky and unlucky days, and to believe that “a sin committed on a holy day was worse than one committed on at some other time,”<sup>22</sup> and “Friday, as the day of the Crucifixion, was thought unlucky for any

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<sup>21</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, trans. by W. D. Halls (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 37-39. For Durkheim’s concept of “mechanical solidarity” (of traditional communities), see *ibid.*, 31-67.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 740.

venture, whether marrying, making a journey or even cutting one's nails."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, there was a prevalent belief that the devil and his legions usually preferred Fridays to appear to mankind.<sup>24</sup> It was again the result of a similar belief that led Old Demdike to confess during her examination that "*upon a Sabbath day in the morning this examine having a litle child upon her knee, and she being in a slumber, the sayd spirit appeared unto her in the likenes of a browne dogg.*"<sup>25</sup> These examples also indicate that superstitions themselves were sometimes founded on the logic of inversion. When taken within this framework, the inversion in question appeared as part of a conceptual system rather than a concrete experience.

A further example related to the forms of inverted behaviour lays in James Device's confession about the Communion. This time the idea of 'religious error' runs through the story more evidently. The male witch, James Device, added to the story with his imagination again and continued to give evidence against the members of his family:

He saith, that vpon Sheare Thursday was two yeares, his Grand-Mother *Elizabeth Sothernes*, alias *Demdike*, did bid him this Examine goe to the church to receiue the Communion (the next day after being Good Friday) and then not to eate the Bread the Minister gaue him, but to bring it and deliuer it to such a thing as should meet him in his way homewards: Notwithstanding her perswasions, this Examine did eate the Bread: and so in his comming homeward some fortie roodes off the said Church, there met him a thing in the shape of a Hare, who spoke vnto this Examine, and asked him whether hee had brought the Bread that his Grand-mother had bidden him, or no? Whereupon this Examine answered, hee had not: and thereupon the said thing threatened to pull this Examine in peeces, and so this Examine thereupon marked himselfe to God, and so the said thing vanished out of this Examinates sight. And within some foure daies after that, there appeared in this Examinates sight, hard by the new Church in Pendle, a thing like vnto a browne Dogge, who asked this Examine to giue him his Soule...<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 740. For details about ominous times in medieval and early modern popular culture, see *ibid.*, 735-751.

<sup>24</sup> Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 145.

<sup>25</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvl Discoverie*, B2 (emphases added).

<sup>26</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvl Discoverie*, H3-H3v.

In the account given above the statement that contains the idea of inversion is the one about the use of the communion bread. Thomas tells us that “the first Edwardian Prayer Book insisted that the bread should be placed by the officiating minister direct in the communicant’s mouth, because in past times people had often carried the sacrament away and ‘kept it with them and diversely abused it, to superstition and wickedness’.”<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, assuming that James Device was telling the exact truth before the court, by asking her grandchild not to eat the communion bread, but to give it to a familiar spirit, Elizabeth Southernns apparently committed an impious error, because

...if with a true penitent heart, and lively faith we receive that holy Sacrament; for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we be one with Christ, and Christ with us. So is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily. For then we be guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ our Saviour; we eat and drink our own damnation, not considering the Lord’s body; we kindle God’s wrath against us; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death.<sup>28</sup>

So, one wonders what Old Demdike’s intent to use a holy sacrament ‘improperly’ might indicate, but the reversal of a sacramental ritual and the “*destruction of both of bodye and soul*”<sup>29</sup> – a symbolic warning which, as Thomas has observed, many must have taken literally at the time.<sup>30</sup> Clark argues that “in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a predisposition to see things in terms of binary opposition was a distinctive aspect of a prevailing mentality.”<sup>31</sup> When analyzed within this context, the people incriminated as witches displayed a tendency towards deviating from the religious principles of routine life, towards the ‘binary opposition’ of these

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 38-39.

<sup>28</sup> *The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion: As Written in the “Book of Common Prayer”, being the 1604 Edition*, [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/Communion\\_1559.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/Communion_1559.htm) (accessed May 10, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> *The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper*.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 561.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, “Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft,” 105.



principles, if not a general awareness of the inversion they created. The accused and the accusers may never have expressed that the improper use of the Communion was aimed at practicing demonic magic or that they were planning to abuse it in order that they might conjure any demon. They, however, certainly implied that they believed the power of the *holy*, which came from God, might be used (or rather abused) to feed evil spirits, which was, no doubt, taken as an insult to Christianity by the hearers at the trial. As Kieckhefer points out, regarding the use of religious substances and artifacts for magical purposes, outside the parameters of official church usage, “whatever religious meaning these holy objects had, they were immediate sources of potential power”<sup>32</sup> in the mind of ordinary people and the mention of the intent to abuse these holy objects at the trial dealt with here, it seems, was one reflection of contemporary assumptions as to what was displeasing and deviating, just as in the example of Good Friday meeting. Moreover, Elizabeth Southern’s subverting a shared ritual whose purpose was to affirm the religious order together with church attendance may have been perceived as a threat to that order because of her potentially disruptive intent for “receiving the holy sacrament unworthily” and thus preparing her own “damnation.”<sup>33</sup>

The incriminating evidence, which included human bones stolen from the Newchurch graveyard and a clay image used by James Device to cause the death of a neighbour, is similarly related to the profane vs. the sacred relationship and exemplifies another popular belief about how witches behave and how magic works.

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 80.

<sup>33</sup> News about how an individual was thought to be able to become a witch was, no doubt, spreading fast. After publicized and widely dispersed geographically, the stories of the key figures at the trials were, in many cases, adapted to new circumstances. It would be possible during subsequent years to find the echoes of the above-mentioned story about magical properties attributed to the communion bread in popular consciousness. In 1638, for instance, a Devon girl would declare: “When anie that would be witches did receive the communion, they shoulde drinke the wyne and keep the breade and take it to the next bodie they met with; and that sholde be a tode.” As quoted in Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 152.

During his examination, James Device “saith that twelve yeares agoe, the said Anne Chattox at a Buriall at the new Church in Pendle, did take three scalpes of people, which had been buried, and then cast out of a grave, as she the said Chattox told this Examinee; and tooke eight teeth out of the said scalpes, whereof she kept foure to her selfe, and gave other foure to the said Demdike, this Examinees grandmother.”<sup>34</sup> Within this (profane vs. sacred) relationship, the accused, Elizabeth Southernns and Anne Whittle, in a sense, defiled the spiritual and religious symbols by intending to employ them in their ‘wicked’ pursuits. As the above-quoted extract from James Device’s confession demonstrates, there was a belief among people that it was by means of the *sacred* that one could cause something *evil* to happen or do harm to other people. In other words, the efficacy of the practice of *maleficium* was tied to the existence of the sacred or of something having a mysterious and holy quality. According to this, the two accused women both violated the sanctity of the church and desecrated the cemetery,<sup>35</sup> which also implied the relative reversal of the rules, customs and traditions of the community they lived in, by their act of irreverence toward the dead, and they disturbed the order of things by plundering the graves. In addition, when the increasing anxiety of Protestant theologians’ over death and their rejection of an interactive community of the living and the dead<sup>36</sup> (based on the rejection of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory) is taken into

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<sup>34</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, E3v. The account continues as follows: “... which foure teeth now shewed to this Examinee, are the foure teeth that the said Chattox gave to his said grandmother, as aforesaid; which said teeth haue euer since beene kept, vntill now found by the said *Henry Hargreines* & this Examinee, at the Westend of this Examinees Grand-mothers house, and there buried in the earth, and a Picture of Clay there likewise found by them, about halfe a yard ouer in the earth, where the said teeth lay, which said picture so found, was almost withered away, and was the Picture of *Anne, Anthony Nutters* daughter; as this Examinees Grand-mother told him,” E4.

<sup>35</sup> Ronald Hutton, referring to exorcism as ‘one of the standard services offered by local magicians and cunning folk’, suggests that ‘handfuls of graveyard earth – literally, consecrated ground – featured commonly, being regarded as particularly effective’: “The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore,” 94.

<sup>36</sup> Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1988), 13; Lisa McClain, *Lest We be Damned: Practical Innovation and the Lived Experience Among Catholics in Protestant England, 1559-1642* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 252.

consideration, it becomes evident that the attempt to link the dead with the living or, in a special way, to include the community of the dead to the world of the living by robbing a church graveyard for magical purposes must have presented additional evidence against the accused at the trial. Above all, James I's witchcraft statute of 1604, unlike the Elizabethan statute enacted in 1563 which reserved the death penalty for some categories only and did not include any mention of the punishment to be imposed upon a person accused of 'taking bones of people from a graveyard', stated that:

if any person or persons... take up any dead man, woman or child out of his, her or their grave or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone or any other part of any dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm or enchantment... then that every such offender or offenders, their aiders abettors and counsellors... shall suffer pains of death as a felon or felons, and shall loose the privilege and benefit of clergy and sanctuary.<sup>37</sup>

When the Good Friday meeting at Malking Tower, James Device's confession about the communion bread, and the human bones stolen from the church graveyard are evaluated together, it can be seen that they all refer to the idea of inversion and represent certain religious errors, contrary not only to the 'Reformed' idea, but also to the 'popular' religious tradition.

Now we shall turn our attention to the Pendle witches' assertive attitude towards their own 'skills', in other words, their self-assured confidence about possessing supernatural powers. The 1612 Lancashire trials were one of those in which image magic as a magical technique figured prominently. Perhaps in no other trial which preceded this one was the considerable use of sympathetic magic based on the principle that "likes produce likes" or that "an affect resembles its cause"

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<sup>37</sup> *An Act against conjuration witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits* (1604); re-printed in *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, Barbara Rosen, ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 57-58 (based on the version published in *The Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. IV, pt. 2, 1819).

emphasized so clearly and repetitively.<sup>38</sup> In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer tells that this principle is called “the Law of Similarity” and “charms based on the Law of Similarity may be called Homoeopathic or Imitative Magic.”<sup>39</sup> At the trial of the Lancashire witches, the stress was on image magic, “the most notorious of sympathetic techniques”<sup>40</sup> and a special kind of magic in which the action carried out on the image is transferred to the person represented. During her examination, Elizabeth Southernns, *alias* Old Demdike, being convinced of her own magical powers and aware of the results of the magical actions she performed (although her practices were most probably ‘unconscious’ imitations of ritual magic performed outside the established and authorised religious rituals and remnants of medieval superstition), gave the recipe for “taking a man’s life away by witchcraft.” She:

confesseth, and sayth, that the speediest way to take a mans life away by Witchcraft, is to make a Picture of Clay, like vnto the shape of the person whom they meane to kill & dry it thorowly: and when they would haue them to be ill in any one place more than an other; then take a Thorne or Pinne, and pricke it in that part of the Picture you would so haue to be ill: and when you would haue any part of the Body to consume away, then take that part of the Picture, and burne it. And when they would haue the whole body to consume away, then take the remnant of the said picture, and burne it: and so therevpon by that meanes, the body shall die.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Among the preceding pamphlet accounts of witch-trials, only the Windsor case contains a direct mention of image magic. The section which deals with it reads as follows: “The manner of their enchantments, whereby four of the persons aforementioned were murdered was thus - Mother Dutton made four pictures of red wax, about a span long, and three of figures broad, for Langford, for his maid, for Master Gallis and for Switcher; and the said Mother Dutton, by their council and consort, did stick an hawthorn prick against the left sides of the breasts of the images, directly where they thought the hearts of the persons to be set whom the pictures, the same pictures did represent, and thereupon within short space, the said four persons, being suddenly taken, died”: *A Rehearsal both strange and true, of heinous and horrible acts committed by Elizabeth Stile, Alice Rockingham, Mother Dutton, Mother Devell, notorious Witches, apprehended at Windsor in the County of Berks* (London, 1579), D3.

<sup>39</sup> James George Frazer, *Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, new edn. (Sioux Falls, SD: Nuvision Publications, 2006), 15.

<sup>40</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 82

<sup>41</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfyll Discouerie*, B3. For other references to image magic, see *ibid.*, D4v, E3v, E4, F2, O2v. In the pamphlet account of the 1589 trial in Essex, John Cunny’s confession too, as another exception in terms of village-level witchcraft, contained a certain form of magical practice, concerning magic circle, one of the main elements of ritual magic in conjuring spirits and was recorded as follows: “This Examine saith and confesseth... that she learned this her knowledge (of witchcraft) in the same, of one mother Humfrye of Maplested, who told her that she must neele down upon her knees, and make a Circle on the ground, and pray unto Sathan the cheefe of the Deuills, the forme which praier that she then taught her, this Examine hath now forgotten, and that then the

It seems that the use of image magic, which is rarely referred to in English sources of the period in spite of its widespread existence for hundreds of years, had popular sanction in the Pendle Forest and revealed a shared understanding of the supernatural which would not be easily uprooted. The belief in the efficacy of manipulating an object to affect something else had so firm a hold there that in the second half of the nineteenth century journalist and antiquary-folklorist John Harland wrote, concerning the Pendle Forest, that “two hundred years have since (the Lancashire witch trials) passed away, and yet the old opinions survive... Clay or wax images, pierced through with pins and needles, are met in churchyards and gardens, where they have been placed for the purpose of causing the death of the persons they represent.”<sup>42</sup>

It was not only Old Demdike who *really* practiced magic and traded on the fear she engendered. The rivalry between the two families was reflected in most of the accusations during the trials. Old Chattox was said to have sold her guarantee to do no harm in return for a fixed annual payment of “one aghen-dole of meale.” During her examination, Alizon Device, giving evidence against Chattox, said that:

... her father called John Device, being afraid, that the said Anne Chattox should doe him or his goods any hurt by witchcraft; did covenant with the said Anne, that if she would hurt neither of them, she should yearely have one aghen-dole of meale; which meale was yearely paid, until the yeare which her father died in, which was about eleven yeares since: her father upon his then death-bed, taking it that the said Anne Whittle, alias Chattox, did bewitch him to death, because the said meale was not paid the last yeare.<sup>43</sup>

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Spirits come unto her, the which she put in practice about twenty yeeres since,” in *The apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches arraigned and by Justice condemned in the Countye of Essex the 5 day of Julye last past. 1589 With the manner of their diuelish practices and keeping of thier spirits, whose fourmes are heerein truely proportioned* (London, 1589).

<sup>42</sup> John Harland and T. T. Wilkinson, *Lancashire Folk-lore: Illustrative of the Superstitious Beliefs and Practices, Local Customs and the Usages of the People of the County Palatine* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1867), 164.

<sup>43</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvl Discouerie*, E4.

The Pendle witches' belief in their own maleficence and their asserting themselves by means of the fear they created also brings us to the issue that has been frequently emphasized by contemporary scholars of witchcraft, the issue that reputation for witchcraft, in some cases, might provide the suspected witches with power they could wield against the community they lived in.<sup>44</sup> Here Old Demdike and Old Chattox, who both had reached the verge of advanced age of eighty and were evidently in a state of extreme poverty, tried to survive with their families principally on the fear they created among their neighbours by the assumption of that 'unlawful' power which commerce with evil spirits was supposed to bring about. If the former had skill in image magic, the latter could dig up the 'scalpes' of the dead and make their teeth serviceable to her unhallowed purposes. They seem to have evaluated every opportunity to play on their reputations to maintain their positions or to ensure a monopoly over the things that made their neighbours comply with their requests to prevent the implied threat of injury by witchcraft. Thus, the son-in-law of one of these two women, as stated above, had sought protection from Old Chattox, the allegedly most powerful witch of the rival family, by paying her blackmail on an express 'covenant' that she should exempt him from her charms and witchcrafts. Consequently, the case of the two key figures of the story appeared as one of the clearest examples, and perhaps the most extreme one, that confirm the validity of the discussion about the suspected witches who made use of their reputation as a means of power.

Another aspect through which we can distinguish the confessions and accusations of the Lancashire witches from the testimony at previous trials was the

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<sup>44</sup> For the discussion of this issue, see Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 145-170; Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 70-73; Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 150-152; Edward Bever, "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in Early Modern Community." *Journal of Social History* 35, 4 (2002): 955-988, esp. pp. 958-959.

heavy emphasis on the appearance of the Devil in human form. In witch accusations and confessions in England, the Devil's identification became increasingly certain by the seventeenth century and the Lancashire case contained one of the most evident examples of this situation. In the depositions and confessions of the accused and the accusers at the 1612 Lancashire trials, the devil or the familiar spirits of the accused appeared to them in various forms, including the human form. That the Devil might assume human form was not, of course, a new idea in the seventeenth century; the stress on the depiction of the Devil in human form at the trial in question, however, indicates a shift in the nature of the evidence against the alleged witches. Contrary to the Protestant conception of the Devil as a spiritual force and in spite of Protestant reformers' greater emphasis, as mentioned in the previous chapter, on "the Devil's *invisible* subversive agency" and his practice of "*internal* temptation" as the most dangerous aspect of the Devil, it appears that an older tradition which emphasized the physicality of the Devil lived on with vitality in popular culture during and after the Reformation as well.<sup>45</sup> The physical popular Devil was so deeply rooted in popular culture that one Puritan minister of the period complained: "The populace were so conditioned by the grotesque of the traditional mystery plays that they feared no harm from Satan until he appeared before them with the requisite horns and cloven feet."<sup>46</sup>

As for the case of the Lancashire witches, it seems that the Devil - although not for the first time nor the last - joined his animal-shaped subordinate demons in tempting the accused to commit sin, going beyond his custom of appearing in animal shapes and assuming human form. He was depicted not just as an imp or a vicious demon in a variety of animal guises, but as a quasi-human entity like Anne Whittle's

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<sup>45</sup> Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2-6 (emphases added).

<sup>46</sup> As quoted by Johnstone in *The Devil and Demonism*, 7.

(Old Chattox's) own spirit which also had the power to transform itself into diverse animals from a brown dog to a bear. During her examination she:

confesseth, and sayth, That about fourteene or fifteene yeares agoe, *a thing like a Christian man* for foure yeares together, did sundry times come to this Examinee, and requested this Examinee to giue him her Soule: And in the end this Examinee was contented to giue him her sayd Soule ... the *Deuill* then *in the shape of a Man*, sayd to this Examinee: Thou shalt want nothing; and be reuenged of whom thou list. And the *Deuill* then further commaunded this Examinee, to call him by the name of Fancie...<sup>47</sup>

The same Chattox's evidence against Margaret Pearson, another suspected witch, also included the mention of 'a Spirit', a grotesque figure furnished with cloven foot:

The wife of one Pearson of Paddiham, is a very euill Woman, and confessed to this Examinee, that shee is a Witch hath *a Spirit* which came to her the first time *in likenesse of a Man, and clouen footed*, and that shee the said Pearsons wife hat 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 vpon his Horse or Mare, vntill the said Horse or Mare died...<sup>48</sup>

And according to the confession of Elizabeth Southernns, alias Demdike, 'a spirit or devil' appeared to her in the shape of a boy clothed with a half-black half-brown coat:

Elizabeth Sowthernns confesseth, and sayth... as she was coming homeward from begging, there met this Examinee neere vnto a Stonepit in Gouldshey in the sayd Forrest of Pendle, *a Spirit or Deuill in the shape of a Boy*, the one halfe of his Coate blacke, and the other browne, who bade this Examinee stay, saying to her, that if she would giue him her Soule, she should haue any thing that she would request.<sup>49</sup>

Popular notions concerning the Devil's appearance with cloven foot (of a goat) alongside with other characteristics attributed to the satyrs of Roman mythology or to Pan, had their roots in the Middle Ages. As Thomas has pointed out, the physical description of the Devil had been frequently used by medieval

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<sup>47</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvl Discoverie*, D3 (emphases added).

<sup>48</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvl Discoverie*, S4v (emphases added).

<sup>49</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvl Discoverie*, B2 (emphases added).



preachers to enliven their sermons and helped to form the popular conception of Satan which has been more or less retained in art until the present day.<sup>50</sup> Actually, it is not surprising to encounter in the report of the Lancashire witch trials the depiction of the Devil in the form of a man with cloven foot from which the hideous and grotesque creature of the medieval stage and mystery plays was derived, given the fact that Lancaster staged a Corpus Christi play as late as 1603<sup>51</sup> though the English Reformation put an end to these plays, and that the two central figures at the trial of the Pendle witches – Elizabeth Southernns and Anne Whittle – were almost eighty when they were accused of witchcraft, which reinforces Diane Purkiss’ suggestion that “Elizabeth Southern, at least, might actually have seen one” of these extremely popular miracle and mystery plays.<sup>52</sup>

The belief in the appearance of the Devil in physical form and/or with cloven foot, and the tales about it, as stated before, were old, though this kind of description was rarely found in the depositions at English witch trials<sup>53</sup> in which animal familiars as the witches’ main sources of temptation and malefic assistance played the prominent role. What was novel in this story manifested itself in Chattox’s later confessions. According to this, after Old Demdike had died in the gaol awaiting her trial, Old Chattox confessed that:

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 560.

<sup>51</sup> For the related document, see David George, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Lancashire* (Toronto & London: University of Toronto Press, 1991). It reads: “... there was a Play at Skinners Hall, which lasted eight dayes (saith Stow) to heare which, most of the greatest Estates of England were present. The Subiect of the play was the sacred Scriptures, from the creation of the world. They call this, Corpus Christi Play in my countrey, which I haue scene acted at Preston, and Lancaster, and last of all at Kendall, in the beginning of the raigne of King Iames; for which the Townesmen were sore troubled; and vpon good reasons the play finally suppress, not onely there, but in all other Townes of the kingdome,” 29.

<sup>52</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 158.

<sup>53</sup> For another example of the appearance of the Devil in human form with cloven foot, see Anon. *The examination of John Walsh before Maister Thomas Williams, commissary to the Reuerend father in God William Bishop of Excester, vpon certayne interrogatories touchyng wythcrafte and sorcerye, in the presence of diuers ge[n]tlemen and others. The .xxiii. of August. 1566* (London, 1566).

about fourteene yeares past she entered through the wicked persuasions and counsell of Elizabeth Sothern, alias Demdike, and was seduced to condescend & agree to become subject unto that devilish abominable profession of witchcraft: soone which, the devill appeared unto her in the liknes of a man, about midnight, at the house of the sayd Demdike: and thereupon the sayd Demdike and shee went foorth of the said house unto him; whereupon the said wicked spirit moved this examine, that *she would become his subject*, and give her soul unto him: the which at first, she refused to assent unto; but after, by great perswasions made by the sayd Demdike, *shee yielded to be at his commandement and appointment*: whereupon the sayd wicked spirit then sayd unto her, that hee must have one part of her body for him to sucke...<sup>54</sup>

As her confession demonstrates, Chattox made a pact with the Devil and this is the first English confession of an oral contract with Satan. Therefore, it appears that the notion of the satanic pact of the learned demonology had been, to some extent, internalized by popular culture by the seventeenth century. This is not a new idea; previous studies on English witchcraft have mentioned this discriminating aspect of the 1612 Lancashire trials.<sup>55</sup> However, another way of looking at the picture above is to evaluate all the evidence including any reference to the appearance of a/the devil together. Then it would be clear that Potts' careful arrangement of the confessions at the 1612 trials reveals more than the emphasis on the demonic pact. According to this, by including the confession about the appearance of the Devil with cloven foot in his account, he may have aimed to draw attention to the persistence of the 'vulgar' notions and religious ignorance of these people living in one of the 'dark corners of the realm' (as will be pointed out in the following pages in more detail), and at the same time by providing the proof of the demonic pact in the same account he may have wished to emphasize, in accordance with the Protestant idea, that it was the ignorance of these people and the lingering residues

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<sup>54</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfyll Discouerie* (emphases added).

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Clive Holmes, "Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines in Early Modern England," in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, Steven L. Kaplan, ed. (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 101; Sharpe, "Introduction: the Lancashire witches in historical context," 11; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 528.

of 'heathenism' in this county that made them the servants of Satan. In other words, Potts' account put the emphasis on the traces of 'popery' and 'paganism' as much as on the satanic pact with the Devil, both of which were among the elements which defined Protestant attitudes towards the crime of witchcraft.

This brings us, though indirectly, to another feature of the Lancashire witches. Potts' account reveals that the evidence about the use of charms (in the words of Thomas Potts and those who tried the alleged witches) or prayers (in the words of those who were accused of witchcraft) figured prominently in the confessions and accusations of the trials of 1612. In fact, the use of prayers or lines from the Bible as 'counter-magic' seems to have been common to healers of all sorts in previous centuries as well. It is possible to find in source materials on 'medical magic' in the Middle Ages many references to prayers (as part of the 'common tradition' of magic) which were used to cure or protect against diseases caused by 'supernatural' forces or by sorcerers.<sup>56</sup> For example, many healing and protective formulas in a leechbook written as early as tenth century contain the use of the Creed, the Paternoster, and the cross to enhance the power of herbs used against 'elf disease'.<sup>57</sup> Here it would be useful to see another example showing how the belief in the miraculous efficacy of prayers for healing was conveyed to early modern period and fit into the popular culture of that time: in 1566, Elizabeth Mortlock, a 'cunning' woman from Cambridgeshire, described a common method of magical diagnosis and her cure of children troubled by the 'fairy' to the church court at Ely as follows:

Five Paternosters in the worship of the five Wounds of our Lord, five Aves in the worship of the five Joys of our Lady, and one Creed in the worship of the blessed Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost... and the holy Apostles, in the vulgar tongue. Which done, she measureth the girdle or band of any such

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<sup>56</sup> For "the common tradition of medieval magic," see Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 56-94.

<sup>57</sup> For examples of these formulas which include references to the 'Christian' elements, see Karen Louise Jolly, ed., *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 154-167.

persons being sick or haunted, from her elbow to her thumb, craving God for Saint Charity's sake that if they be haunted with a fairy, yea or no, she may know, and said that if it be so the band will be shorter and her cubit will reach further than commonly it doth.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, the trial documents of the 1612 Lancashire case refer to the use of charms which notably incorporated traditional religious terminology. Many preceding accounts, like that of the trials of 1612, include mention of the use of spells and charms by the accused but without giving any detail. Potts' *Discoverie*, however, is quite unique in its inclusion of the 'charms' themselves in full. Anne Whittle's account, in which she claimed to have used the following charm "to helpe drinke that was forspoken or bewitched" and said that "shee vsed this Prayer for amending of it," proved the traditional nature of this method, reproducing a similar narrative and combining it with some other elements. It would not be wrong to see Anne Whittle's 'charm' as a sort of mixture of such common superstitions as the belief in the efficacy of the 'evil eye' and the power of the tongue as the instruments of enchantment with Christian elements. She mixed her way of 'alternative' remedy with the use of standard prayers known throughout Christian society:

Three Biters hast thou bitten,  
The Hart, ill Eye, ill Tonge:  
Three bitter shall be thy Boote,  
Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost  
a God's name.  
Fiue Pater-nosters, fiue Avies,  
and a Creede,  
In worship of fiue wounds  
of our Lord.<sup>59</sup>

"A prayer," says Thomas, "was a form of supplication: a spell was a mechanical means of manipulation... In practice, however, the distinction was repeatedly blurred in the popular mind," and he also suggests that the (medieval) Church itself nourished and even encouraged the use of prayers when healing the

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<sup>58</sup> As quoted by Thomas in *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 217.

<sup>59</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfyll Discoverie*, E2v., E3.

sick or gathering medicinal herbs, adding that “confessors required penitents to repeat a stated number of Paternosters, Aves and Creeds, thereby fostering the notion that the recitation of prayers in a foreign tongue had a mechanical efficacy.”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Scribner states that “the Pater Noster, along with the sign of the cross and its invocation of the Trinity, were held by Catholic and Protestant alike to be formulas of great magical potency which found continual usage throughout the medieval and early modern period.”<sup>61</sup> Consequently, we can see that Anne Whittle, like most of the members of the same community, believed in the curative and protective power of prayers, and what she did was in fact nothing but to repeat her previously acquired knowledge of prayers and combine it with traditional, inherited superstitious beliefs, and thus, to re-use a verbal formula which was believed to have magical force in order to show her ability as healer. In other words, she did not invent her own charms; she, like “the rural magicians of Tudor England, inherited them from the medieval Church” and “their formulae were largely derivative products of centuries of Catholic teaching.”<sup>62</sup>

Anne Whittle’s charm was not the only one brought to light in the Lancashire trials of 1612: in the records of the trials we have another instance of the blurring of the boundaries between ‘supplication’ and ‘manipulation’ in the mind of the populace. The nine-year-old Jennet Device, who was acquainted with the ‘magical’ practices of the members of her family:

... in the very end of her Examination against the said James Device, confesseth and saith, that her mother taught her two Prayers: the one to get drinke, which was this. *viz. Crucifixus hoc signum vitam Eternam. Amen...* And shee further said, That her brother James Device, the Prisoner at the Barre, hath confessed to her this Examine, that he by this Prayer hath gotten drinke: and that within an houre after thye saying the said Prayer, drinke hath

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 46.

<sup>61</sup> Robert W. Scribner, “The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the ‘Disenchantment of the World’”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 3 (1993): 475-494, p. 489.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 47-48.

come into the house after a very strange manner. And the other Prayer, the said James Device affirmed, would cure one bewitched, which shee recited as followeth. viz.

**A Charme**

*Vpon Good-Friday, I will fast while I may  
Vntill I heare them knell  
Our Lords owne Bell,  
Lord in his messe  
With his twelue Apostles good,  
What hath he in his hand  
Ligh in leath wand:  
What hath he in his other hand?  
Heauens doore key,  
Open, open Heauen doore keyes,  
Steck, steck hell doore.  
Let Crizum<sup>63</sup> child  
Goe to it Mother mild,  
What is yonder that casts a light so farrandly,  
Mine owne deare Sonne that's nailed to the Tree.  
He is naild sore by the heart and hand,  
And holy harne Panne,  
Well is that man  
That Fryday spell can,  
His Childe to learne;  
A crosse of Blew, and another of Red,  
As good Lord was to the Roode,  
Gabriel laid him down on sleepe  
Vpon the ground of holy weepe:  
Good Lord came walking by,  
Sleep'st thou, wak'st thou Gabriel,  
No Lord I am sted with sticke and stake,  
That I can neither sleep nor wake:  
Rise vp Gabriel and go with me,  
The stick nor the stake shall neuer deere thee.  
Sweete Iesus our Lord, Amen.<sup>64</sup>*

The quotation is a long one, but it is scarcely possible to shorten what is so peculiarly illustrative of the merging of religious elements and popular practices of magic. It is evident again from the account above that the inhabitants of the Pendle region, like many of those from other regions, applied their religious knowledge, especially their knowledge of the old Catholic tradition, to their idea of magic and

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<sup>63</sup> "The *chrism* was the white cloth placed over the brow of a newly-baptized child in the Roman Catholic service. When children died within the month they were called *chrisoms*," Eliza Lynn Linton, *Witch Stories* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1861), 273.

<sup>64</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfvl Discoverie*, K-Kv-K2.

counter-magic and showed a tendency to see prayers or someone or something holy as having mechanical, amending, or protective effect. These two ‘prayers’, as the child witness called them, had been taught her by her family *for magical purposes* (which turned them into ‘charms’), “as other children might learn prayers or recipes”<sup>65</sup> in order to ask for *God’s* help. Moreover, as the first prayer referring to ‘the sign of the cross’ and used by Jennet’s mother ‘to get drink’ indicates, they in some cases continued to pray in Latin, which must have meant to the Reformers that these people had not been ‘reformed’ yet or they showed resistance, consciously or not, to the aim of the Reformation. After all, it was a time when praying in Latin was usually interpreted by Protestant ministers as evidence of Catholic survivalism or dubious tendencies.<sup>66</sup>

The second prayer which young Jennet Device told the court her mother had taught her, which was recorded by Potts and said to have been used ‘to cure one bewitched’, is apparently, to quote Scribner’s words, a “Christianized form”<sup>67</sup> of a counter-charm like Anne Whittle’s. This prayer too exemplifies the common belief in the healing power of a prayer referring to Christ, other biblical or Christian figures, biblical stories, sacred signs, etc. On the other hand, it must have been recorded, despite its length, to draw attention to its Catholic content, which includes

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<sup>65</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 146.

<sup>66</sup> We can see a similar anti-Catholic implication about the language of prayer in the pamphlet account of the trial of 1566 in Essex. During her examination, Agnes Waterhouse, when asked “whether she was accustomed to go to the common prayer or divine service, said yea,” and when demanded “what prayer she said” and “whether in laten or in english,” she said “the Lord’s prayer” and “in laten” because “Satan (her familiar) would at no time suffer her to say it in English”: *The Examination and confession of certaine wytyches at Chensforde in the countie of Essex : before the Quenes Maiesties judges, the xxvi daye of July, anno 1566, at the assise holden there as then, and one of them put to death for the same offence, as their examination declareth more at large* (London, 1566), Bii; and also in that of Elizabeth Sawyer’s trial in 1621 according to which, when she was asked “did not he (devil in the form of a dog) bid you pray to him the Divell, as he thought you?,” she answered: “... he charged me then to pray no more to Iesus Christ, but to him the Diuell, and the Diuell taught me this prayer, *Santibicetur nomen tuum*”: Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch, late of Edmonton* (London, 1621), C4v (not surprisingly, Elizabeth Sawyer’s prayer which she used to call her familiar was the corrupted form of a line from the Lord’s Prayer, the line which says *Sanctificetur nomen tuum*)

<sup>67</sup> Scribner, “Reformation, Popular Magic and Disenchantment,” 481.

intense images of Christ's bodily suffering such as nails and holy tree (as in the line of Anne Whittle's charm referring to Christ's 'five wounds'). Such prayers were most likely to be associated with witchcraft because of their Catholic content and to be interpreted as traces of a misguided religion by Protestant reformers. Looked at from the perspectives of the Reformers who exalted a 'word-based' religion, they were still under the influence of an 'image-based' one and maintained their traditions based on Catholic teaching.

However, to the community resorting to them, these prayers or charms may not have necessarily or merely represented the continuance of Catholic belief and practice; they may have just meant to be a way of revealing their cultural heritage and referred to their common assumptions about the power of the words and about the virtue in their repetition. The use of prayers or charms in their daily activities such as brewing of ale, making butter, milking or the like, was, most probably, a way of revealing the associations of their lifetime habits which must have given them a sense of identity, and even security. Their relative independence of the very ideologies that the godly were trying to teach and impress upon them - their 'ignorance' and 'superstitious beliefs', in the words of the Protestant clergymen - may have caused them not to be able to grasp the nature of the charges laid against them in the court. On the other hand, the very nature of their confessions - from that about the Good Friday meeting to the use of communion bread to resorting to prayers and even the Devil himself in the form of a *Christian* man - refers to an important feature of the village community: to them, Christianity provided a whole way of apprehending the world, a foundation upon which all their, as Laslett has put it, 'beliefs' and 'half-beliefs' were built. According to this:

[...] the *unreflective villager* seems not to have noticed any inconsistency within the range of his beliefs and half-beliefs (such superstitions as



witchcraft). Christianity had a grasp of their subjective life, which is difficult for us to imagine ... Not everyone was equally devout, of course, and it would be simple-minded to suppose that none of these villagers ever had their doubts. Much of their devotion must have been formal, and some of it mere conformity. But *their world was a Christian world* and their religious activity was *spontaneous*, not forced on them from above.<sup>68</sup>

However, as implied before, some aspects of the Lancashire witch-trials of 1612 allow us to evaluate them within religious anxieties of the period. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the way the commoners lived Christianity, that is, living it 'spontaneously' or according to 'custom and necessity', was a great error to Protestant reformers who continuously emphasized the importance of 'conscious' religion. The difficulty in transforming the traditional attitudes and beliefs in the county of Lancashire, overcoming the country folk's addiction to their old customs and making them adopt different attitudes and values in accordance with Protestant religion has been frequently alluded to in both primary and secondary sources dealing with the Reformation process in England. The culture and religion of the 'common sort' living there has been many times branded as 'popish'. One of the most revealing writings in terms of our discussion is John White's *Way to the True Church* in which White, as chaplain to King James and vicar of the Lancashire parish of Eccles for a while, just three years before the trials of the Pendle witches, gave a picture of 'the religious state of the *commons*' at the time, pointed out the religious ignorance and superstition in which the masses tended to live, and wrote:

[...] the prodigious ignorance whereto they fall that live in Papistry; for, as their Church commendeth it, so their people follow it most desperately; even in the chieftest things touching their salvation. I will not speak how unable they are to render account of their faith, to understand the points of their Catholicism, to judge of all things lawful and unlawful, and such like, - I will only mention what I saw and learned, dwelling among them, concerning the saying of their prayers, for what men is he whose heart trembleth not to see simple people so far reduced that they know not how to pronounce or say their daily prayers? Or so to pray that all that hear them shall be filled with

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<sup>68</sup> Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: Further Explored*, 3rd edn. (London: Methuen, 1983), 71 (emphases added).

laughter, and, while superstitiously they refuse to pray in their own language with understanding, they speak that which their leaders may blush to hear ... And it cannot be answered that these are the customs of a few simple people (of Lancashire), for this that I say is general throughout the country, the whole body of the common people, popishly addicted, practicing nothing else, until it please God, by the ministry of his Gospel, to convert them. Yea, the wisest men and women, devoted to Papistry, though well born and brought up for civil qualities, and of good places in the country, yet lie plunged in this ignorance, being persuaded that what they have learned by long custom and continuance in their old religion (so they style it), they should not give over. Yes, this sin is so foul and grievous, that it may not endure to be looked into.<sup>69</sup>

White's account reveals how Lancashire was perceived by contemporaries as a region where both 'religious ignorance' and 'popery' could flourish at the time. In addition, no less illuminating is what other sources indicate about the anxiety over the 'religious laxity' in Lancashire in early modern period. For example, four years after the Lancashire witch trials, the name of Edward Bromley, justice at the trials in 1612, would, this time, appear as the justice signing orders at Lancaster assizes to suppress Sunday sports and pastimes in any part of the day and on church festivals when service was in progress.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, five years after the Lancashire witch trials, in 1617, James I would declare: "We were informed, and that too truly, that

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<sup>69</sup> John White, *The Way to the True Church* (London, 1608). White's account of the 'religious state of the commons' in Lancashire in particular and in England in general were echoing Luther's account of the 'misery' he had witnessed as a visitor in Saxony almost a century ago, making it evident that in the seventeenth century Protestant reformers continued to see the same 'misery' of the common people in some areas of rural England. Luther's account reads: "Dear God help us, what misery have I seen! The common man, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about Christian doctrine; and indeed many pastors are in effect unfit and incompetent to teach. Yet they are all called Christians, are baptized, and enjoyed the holy sacraments – even though they cannot recite either the Lord's Prayer, the Creed or the Commandments. They live just like animals." As quoted in Geoffrey Parker, "Success and Failure During the First Century of Reformation," *Past and Present* 136 (1992): 43-82, p. 45.

<sup>70</sup> The related document is re-printed in *Records of Early English Drama: Lancashire*, David George, ed., 228, and it states: "1616 Orders for Sabbath Observance / Cumbers House: Kenyon MSS, No 28 single sheet (8 August)... Orders to be observed w/thin the countie of Lancaster sea downe by the lustices of peace within the said countie by the appointment of the Judges of assise./... That there be no Pippinge, dauncinge, Bowlinge, Beare, or Bull baitinge or any other prophanation vpon anie saboth daie in any pane of the daie or vpo anie festiuall daie in time of diuine service That the persons so offendinge be bound to the good behavior, and to appere as aforesaid./... (signed) Edward Bromley."

our County of Lancashire abounded more in Popish recusants than any county in England, and thus hath still continued to our great regret with little amendment...”<sup>71</sup>

Equally relevant is that Walter Scott, in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, described the Lancashire at the time of the witch trials as “full of Popish recusants, traveling priests, and so forth.”<sup>72</sup> Thomas has indicated “as late as 1604 the people of Lancashire were said to be in the habit of crossing themselves ‘in all their actions, even when they gape’.”<sup>73</sup> Hutton mentions the persistence of the belief in purgatory and superstitious notions connected with it until the early nineteenth century and states “Northern Lancashire was the most notable stronghold of popular Catholicism in post-Reformation England.”<sup>74</sup> Ingram counts Lancashire among the regions where Puritans who “waged war against religious laxity” and aimed at ‘reformation of manners’ were more likely to be found.<sup>75</sup> Haigh notes that in post-Reformation period, in many parts of Lancashire, “Catholicism remained a local norm, which could be followed from habit rather than deliberate choice”<sup>76</sup> (which, in a way, reinforces the suggestion about the connection between the ‘lifetime habits’ of the accused leading them to be charged for witchcraft and the ‘old’ religion) and points out that “in Lancashire in 1590 those attending church services still worshipped the communion bread and used Latin prayers, the sign of the cross and the knocking of the breast.”<sup>77</sup>

This general picture revealing the ‘Catholic survivalism’ in post-Reformation Lancashire, to some extent, enables us to relate the records of the Lancashire witch

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<sup>71</sup> George, *Records of Early English Drama: Lancashire*, 232.

<sup>72</sup> Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1831), 213.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 83.

<sup>74</sup> Hutton, “The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore,” 104-105.

<sup>75</sup> Martin Ingram, “From Reformation to Toleration: Popular Religious Cultures in England, 1540-1690,” in *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850*, Tim Harris, ed. (Houndmills, London: Macmillan, 1995), 104.

<sup>76</sup> Christopher Haigh, “The Continuity of Catholicism in the English Reformation,” *Past and Present* 93 (1981): 37-69, p. 45.

<sup>77</sup> Haigh, “The Continuity of Catholicism,” 68.

trials of 1612 to the expectations of the London print market for which Thomas Potts was writing. As Purkiss suggests, “his readers would have been expecting some signs of popery from the Lancashire witches.”<sup>78</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that the veracity of Potts’ report is doubtful: what he did in his report was most probably to put the emphasis especially on where he was expected to do. Considering the fact that in early modern England almost everything associated with Catholicism was also easily attributed to witchcraft,<sup>79</sup> it appears that Potts may have intended to present his readers with a text rich in ingredients referring to Catholic beliefs and values through his choice of detail from the confessions and accusations in which elements that could be denounced by reformers as signs of witchcraft or sorcery or that could be easily interpreted as evidence of the continuity of popular Catholicism. The evidence presented in Potts’ account of the 1612 trials being carefully examined, it becomes clear that the account bore implications for popular Catholicism in the region. Through his selective representation of the judicial process at the trials, Potts put the emphasis especially on the pervasiveness of image magic, the prayers (or charms), popular belief in the magical properties of communion bread, and skulls stolen from the graveyard, that is, on the peculiarities of the Pendle witches, the peculiarities that not only allowed and prompted persecution for witchcraft but also were equated with Catholicism. For the essence of the two was almost the same to the Protestant reformers: superstition in the sense of improper, misguided religion, one of the most serious religious transgressions. During the period, Catholicism, as both Thomas and Haigh have suggested, still meant Latin prayers learned by rote, protective magic, charms used for protection and cures, diabolically inspired belief in power inherent in words, signs, symbols,

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<sup>78</sup> Purkiss, *Witch in History*, 159.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, *passim*; see also Scribner, “The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the ‘Disenchantment of the World’.”

inanimate things,<sup>80</sup> all of which might be found in the evidence presented against the Pendle witches.

At any rate, the depositions, confessions, and accusations in the records of the Lancashire witch trials of 1612 and the idea of inversion discussed above show that, at least as far as this region is concerned, “in public life, and possibly in people’s minds, witchcraft was at least as prominent as religious error as it was as anti-social murder or destruction,”<sup>81</sup> even to the supposed witch herself, no matter whether the understanding of ‘religious error’ be mainly shaped by the teachings of Catholicism in its popular form or not. For, “their world was a Christian world.”<sup>82</sup> However, it is evident that it mattered a great deal to Protestant reformers if the evidence presented against the witches from a region of ‘ill-reputation’ implied the continuance of the beliefs and practices based on the ‘old religion’. Consequently, Potts’s careful selection of detail from the trials both opened windows to the mental world of the inhabitants of the Pendle Forrest along with the nature and role of their beliefs in magic and witchcraft, and, at the same time, seems to have been crafted to confirm the contemporary anxieties about Lancashire.

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, *passim*; Haigh, “The Continuity of Catholicism,” 68; see also Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Deamons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ch. 32.

<sup>81</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 42.

<sup>82</sup> See footnote 68.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

The arguments presented in this thesis would indicate that it is central to an understanding of the early modern witchcraft phenomenon in England to take into account the complementary nature of the popular beliefs and the learned culture and the problem of the relationship between the two during the period. Based on the available historical evidence – the statutes of witchcraft, pamphlets generated by the witch trials, and the tracts of the learned – it can be readily concluded that popular witch beliefs were unquestionably referred to in relation to, or rather in opposition to, a strong Protestant moralism which was apparently a motivational force for those who vigorously attempted not merely to keep control over but to transform popular belief and action at the same time. In their treatment of the subject, the learned and the pamphleteers alike paid as much attention to the vindication of Protestant ideals as to the ‘discovery’ of witches and witchcraft. After all, the concept of sin in general and witchcraft in particular (as its most extreme manifestation) were closely associated by Protestant reformers with an ‘unregenerate’ state of mind and lack of ‘conscience’ which could not perceive the right and the wrong or the notion of the individual’s moral obligation.

When looking closely into the essence of the evidence both offered by the supposed victims or witnesses and elicited from the alleged witches themselves at the trials, and into the way pamphlets transmitted the court records of witch trials to their audience, and on evaluating these together with the information provided by other sources used in this study, it is possible to discern, among much that refers to the normal themes of English witchcraft, that is, the popular concern over *maleficium* (doing harm by magical means), the witch stereotype of an unruly woman (in her speech, behaviour, and mind), and the familiar spirit, and among much that is the product of human imagination, a great deal of what is unquestionably an implicit Protestant response to the way popular mind worked and perceived the world, to the 'misery' and 'mental weakness' of the common people, to the 'religious ignorance and superstition' in which they lived and which led them to sin. Furthermore, as implied in the fourth chapter, in early modern England, the learned perception of the threat posed by witchcraft could be, in some cases, closely related to the post-Reformation Protestant anxieties regarding the adherents to or the traces of the 'Old Religion', 'corrupt traditions', and the pervasiveness and popularity of 'non-religious' practices in a particular region, despite the continuing attack on them by the Protestant authorities.

Accusations of witchcraft, as mentioned in the second chapter, taking root in a social environment characterized by interpersonal violence, local suspicions and fears, found their expressions in courtrooms by means of a legal system based on an accusatorial procedure in which lay members of the community played an important role in bringing formal charges against witches. When the witch accusations and confessions are examined more closely, they reveal that there was a certain interaction between the accuser, the supposed witch and the reformer. Under the

influence of such kind of interaction, especially the accusations about the suspect's conduct in community, her morally and socially reprehensible behaviour, her quarrelsome temperament and scolding tongue, her religious ignorance, and moral deviations such as illegitimacy and sexual irregularity, some of which were also relevant in identification of any other type of criminal (e.g. the village scold), seem to have conveyed stronger implications in accordance with the aim of the 'transformation of manners and morals'. Thus, what started as an interaction, further reinforced by the efforts of the justices in courtrooms, preachers at the pulpit, and the pamphleteers equally, was reflected in the narratives of the villagers who sometimes formed their accusations of witchcraft on the basis of an 'unsophisticated' interpretation of Reformation ideals. Furthermore, even the confessions of some of the supposed witches themselves functioned the same way, or rather were manipulated in such a way as to operate in a moral context and on a more subtle and complex level in order to justify these ideals.

The image of the witch, as we have seen, was made up of different elements and the popular belief in animal familiars discussed in the third chapter was just one of them. It would not be wrong to say that the frequent use of the lore surrounding witches' familiars could be seen as the way witchcraft accusations and confessions reused familiar materials and old beliefs by which the figure of witch was revealed. In this sense, their use showed similarity to the reuse of Catholic beliefs, as mentioned in the fourth chapter, in charms and spells or the reuse of what survived of Catholicism after the Reformation as pretext for witch-stories. It is clear, therefore, that witchcraft stories about the animal familiars and the efficacy of traditional charms or spell-like prayers alike had something to do with the use of previously acquired knowledge, with the repetition of memories under certain



circumstances, the very thing which educated Protestant people either found repugnant and attacked or did not take seriously.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from the discussions in the previous chapters concerns the nature of popular and learned mentalities. It was typical of the ordinary people, perhaps because they were relatively independent of an organized and systematic doctrine, to see no inconsistency in combining a number of different elements in explaining their beliefs, anxieties, suspicions etc. and in giving meaning to their experiences in inventive ways. Thus, as the second chapter reveals, they could easily apply the features of other local offences and offenders to those of witchcraft and suspected witches; thus, as the third chapter indicates, they, in their narratives of witchcraft related to witches' familiars, felt no need to draw an unambiguous line between the world of human beings and that of animals or a clear-cut contrast between natural and supernatural; and thus, as described in the fourth chapter, they did not discriminate between their 'beliefs and half-beliefs', between their religious knowledge and popular magical practices. On the other hand, it was characteristic of the learned or the reformed mind, to draw a sharp line between the things said, done, or experienced just out of, or according to, custom, habit and necessity and those said, done, or experienced through mental power, conscience and moral judgment designed to give direction to human actions but disturbed by the soul-destroying and unholy affections of the 'unregenerate', between the 'old religion' and the 'new culture', and between the world of human beings and that of non-human beings. Lastly, it was again characteristic of the reformed mind to construct an idea of the superstitious as unrefined, unlearned, illiterate, misguided, irrational and mechanical.

Thinking about witchcraft and witch beliefs, it appears, provides one with insights into various aspects of early modern society, culture, and thought. It is not possible, of course, to comprehend the full nature of these beliefs. In an attempt to reconstruct the background or the less obvious side of the issue, however, it becomes possible not only to analyze certain aspects of the witchcraft phenomenon in early modern England with reference to popular and learned traditions of the period, but also to gain an understanding of the two traditions by studying witchcraft.

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