Witchcraft and Discourses of Identity and Alterity in Early Modern England, c. 1680-1760

by

Charlotte McMurtry

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University of Ottawa

Abstract

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Charlotte McMurtry Dr. Richard Connors

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Witchcraft beliefs were a vital element of the social, religious, and political landscapes of England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. English society, buffeted by ongoing processes of social, economic, and religious change, was increasingly polarized along material, ideological, and intellectual lines, exacerbated by rising poverty and inequality, political factionalism, religious dissension, and the emergence of Enlightenment philosophical reasoning. The embeddedness of witchcraft and demonism in early modern English cosmologies and quotidian social relations meant that religious and existential anxieties, interpersonal disputes, and threats to local order, settled by customary self-regulatory methods at the local level or prosecuted in court, were often encompassed within the familiar language and popular discourses of witchcraft, social order, and difference. Using trial pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, and intellectual texts, this thesis examines the imbrications of these discourses and their collectively-determined meanings within the increasingly rationalized legal contexts and widening world of Augustan England, demonstrating the often deeply encoded ways in which early modern English men and women made sense of their own experiences and constituted and re-constituted their identities and affinities.

Disorderly by nature, an inversion of natural, religious, and social norms, witchcraft in the Christian intellectual tradition simultaneously threatened and preserved order. Just as light could

not exist without dark, or good without evil, there could be no fixed state of order: its existence was determined, in part, by its antithesis. Such diacritical oppositions extended beyond the metaphysical and are legible in contemporary notions of social difference, including attitudes about the common and poorer sorts of people, patriarchal gender and sexual roles, and nascent racial ideologies. These attitudes, roles, and ideologies drew sharp distinctions between normative and transgressive appearances, behaviours, and beliefs. This thesis argues that they provided a blueprint for the discursive construction of identity categories, defined in part by alterity, and that intelligible in witchcraft discourses are these fears of and reactions to disruptive and disorderly difference, otherness, and deviance—reactions which could themselves become deeply disruptive. In exploring the intersections of poverty, gender, sexuality, and race within collective understandings of witchcraft in Augustan England, this thesis aims to contribute to our understandings of the complex and dynamic ways in which English men and women perceived themselves, their communities, and the world around them.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the nineteenth century, witchcraft has been a perennial subject of historical interest. It has received continuous and sustained scholarly focus since perhaps the 1970s, with the marriage of historical and anthropological methods. Since then the study of witchcraft has become increasingly multidisciplinary. As the proliferation of approaches has shown, witchcraft can be understood at once as a social, cultural, political, religious, psychological and psychosocial, gendered, even perhaps racialized set of dynamic beliefs and processes. Not only was witchcraft a vital component of medieval and early modern cosmologies which recognized the existence of spirits, but it also played a constitutive role in the elaboration of social relations.[1] Witch-trials were products of a complex intersection of factors: "the contingent functions of institutions, officers and law codes from above, reacting with the beliefs, fears and customs of the lower orders."[2] Since the 1970s, historians of witchcraft have followed trends in the broader historiography of early modernity, incorporating the interdisciplinary methods of social, cultural, linguistic, feminist, and psychoanalytical approaches.

The continuous fascination with witchcraft is in part tied to its interpretational fluidity. The penumbral nature of early modern mental worlds, the tangled webs of discourses, the regional and temporal peculiarities reflecting the scale of variegation in early modern societies, and the often opaque or piecemeal nature of documentary evidence about witchcraft both encourages the

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[1] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 489; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 504, 510-11; Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 80; Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991), 100.
[2] Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Evidence in Early Modern England," *Past & Present* no. 198 (2008), 34.

historian's imagination and limits the applicability of their findings. These considerations often render concrete assessments problematic. In attempting to counterbalance modern sceptical perspectives of the occult by foregrounding its inarguable embeddedness in early modern cultures and cognitive frameworks, historians are able to attend more closely to the interplay of mentalities, language and discursive construction, and broader social and economic forces intelligible in extant archival and print documents about witchcraft.

The 'new' social history emerged in the 1970s as a response to the previous trends of social historical inquiry, borrowing from anthropology and proposing an alternative interpretation of social formations and patterns to the more structural and elite-driven interpretation which had previously dominated early modern British historiography.[3] Regional and micro-historical studies of witchcraft are a part of this tradition and have persuasively shown the embeddedness of witchcraft beliefs in early modern localities both rural and urban, the disorderly impacts and reverberations of witchcraft activities and prosecutions on communities, and the complexities of neighbourly and official reactions and responses.[4]

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[3] See Alan Macfarlane, Sarah Harrison, and Charles Jardine, *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Keith Thomas, "An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, Two Views," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6, no. 1 (1975), 91-109; Keith Wrightson, "The Enclosure of English Social History," *Rural History* 1, no. 1 (1990), 73-82; idem, "The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England," in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, and Steve Hindle (London: Macmillan, 1996), 10-46. For the historiography of the state in this period, see Steve Hindle, "Introduction: the State and Local Society," in *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550-1640* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1-36.

[4] See for example Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 1970); Phyllis J. Guskin, "The Context of Witchcraft: The Case of Jane Wenham (1712)," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15, no. 1 (1981), 48-71; Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft in Early Modern Kent: Stereotypes and the Background to Accusations," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe,* 257-87; Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry, and Reason of State in Early Modern Europe*, trans. J.C. Grayson and David Lederer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); James Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A Horrible and True Story of Deception, Witchcraft, Murder, and the King of England* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Robin Briggs, *The Witches of Lorraine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jonathan Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England, 1640-1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Ulinka Rublack, *The Astronomer and the Witch: Johannes Kepler's Fight for his Mother* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

The 1970s also saw the adoption of folkloric approaches, particularly regarding oral tradition and ritual, and the emergence of a historiography of popular culture. These developing streams of historical enquiry sought to elucidate the peculiar experiences and mentalities of early modern life 'from below,' to "understand the whole of an alien society in its own terms," and to "study the social functions or uses of myths, images and rituals."[5] This attention to social and cultural history has done much to help us appreciate the lives, households, and complex mentalities of the "middling sort" and commonalty of Britain to a greater extent than did earlier scholarship, which tended, among other things, to focus on political elites and structures of governance. Popular culture is a rather more schismatic, but no less vital, field, given that it has been populated by debates over the assumptions inherent in concepts of the 'popular' and of 'culture.' The latter term, for example, especially in the singular, carries the sometimes unsuitable implications of homogeneity or consensus which "might serve to distract attention from social and cultural contradictions, from the fractures and oppositions within the whole."[6]

Class and labour analysis is also intelligible in witchcraft studies, often in tandem with folkloric and anthropological approaches to popular culture. The gradual discursive estrangement between the ruling elites and the commonalty coming into shape in the later seventeenth century is revealing not only of power inequities and social polarization but also of increasing elite preoccupations with modernity, reason, and empiricism. Witchcraft came to be positioned by the better sorts as the province of the credulous, vulgar, and superstitious commoners. Common or popular cultures have received more particular attention from historians as distinct, though not

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[5] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, 3rd ed. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), *xiv*.
[6] E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1993), 6.

isolated, from elite cultures.[7] The injection of these perspectives of history from below have not only reminded us that continuities and changes in law and policy cannot be presumed to be reflective of popular mentalities, as evidenced by the reappraisals of earlier arguments for the diminution of witchcraft beliefs ascribed to Keith Thomas,[8] but also that popular mentalities and cultures as subjects of study are often impenetrable, rarely generalizable, contingent upon time and space, and not internally consistent.[9]

Other scholarly interrogations of power and social order have focused on the gendered elements of witchcraft beliefs, accusations, and prosecutions. Feminist approaches to witchcraft during and after the 1990s addressed not only the salient considerations of patriarchy and gendered oppression and control in witch trials and discourses, but also ideas of gender identity, fertility, female agency, fantasy, and emotion.[10] More recent feminist scholarship has expanded our understandings of the intersections of gender, sexuality, economic status, and so on in the lived

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[7] See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Robert Muchembled, *Popular Culture and Elite Culture in France, 1400-1750*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Robin Briggs, *Communities of Belief: Social and Cultural Tensions in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*; and the essays in *Popular Culture and Political Agency in Early Modern England and Ireland: Essays in Honour of John Walter*, ed. Michael J. Braddick and Phil Withington (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017).

[8] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Scribner, 1971). Cf. Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736-1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 79-119; James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 256-75; Willem de Blécourt, "On the Continuation of Witchcraft," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 335-52.

[9] See for example Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1981), 227-40; Burke, *Popular Culture*; Thompson, *Customs in Common*; the essays in *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1800*, ed. Tim Harris (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995); Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007); the essays in *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, ed. Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard, and John Walter (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013); the essays in *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

[10] For earlier feminist work see Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination* (London: Routledge, 1992); Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994); Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996); Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Robin Briggs, "Women as Victims? Witches, judges and the community," *French History* 5 (1991): 438-50.

experiences of and discourses surrounding those involved in witchcraft accusations, especially regarding the attention to notions of embodiment and emotion in early modern cognitive frameworks and identity categories.[11]

As Margaret Healey explains, people perceive and "interpret the world through our bodily experiences—we can only rationalize and communicate with the world through the medium of our bodies."[12] Bodies, and in particular the myriad ways in which they can be perceived, thus serve as a crucial point of entry into understanding early modern mentalities and collective knowledge. The application of concepts such as embodiment allow for an understanding of how early modern men and women inhabited space and took up room, and from which spaces they might be barred. They also allow for an interpretation of cultural norms and values as translating into "subjective attitudes and physical perceptions."[13] Ania Loomba's definition of embodiment as a "conceptual separation between an inner or invisible 'something' and its outer or visible form" is extremely useful in interpreting and understanding early modern English mental worlds, as it illuminates the particularities of "the body and the moral, intellectual, or spiritual self it was seen to house."[14] The notion that an individual's indelible self, their morality or immorality, intellect or ignorance,

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[11] See Julia M. Garrett, "Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge in Early Modern England," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 32-72; Kirilka Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), especially chs. 4-5; Kirsten C. Uszkalo, *Bewitched and Bedeviled: A Cognitive Approach to Embodiment in Early English Possession* (New York: Palgrave, 2015); the essays in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*, ed. Laura Kounine and Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 77-94; Charlotte-Rose Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Laura Kounine, *Imagining the Witch: Emotions, Gender, and Selfhood in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[12] Margaret Healey, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 3.

[13] Phyllis Mack, "Preface," in *Forging Identities: Bodies, Gender and Feminist History,* ed. Jane Long, Jan Gothard and Helen Brash (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1997), xi, qtd. in Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2.

[14] Ania Loomba, "Identities and Bodies in Early Modern Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6. See also Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 49.

spirituality or faithlessness, was translated and legible in their body, whether through physical characteristics, mode of dress, or behaviour, is central to early modern mentalities and social relations.

Cultural standards of modesty, normality, social boundaries, and socially-acceptable aesthetics and behaviour, emerged and were reinforced by the patriarchal social order, religious prescriptions conveyed in sermons, epistles, and didactic literature, and, increasingly, contact with non-Europeans and ideologies of race.[15] Norms, according to Valerie Traub, "developed out of the need to identify, classify, and compare in the face of increasing diversity, as well as to abstract and universalize."[16] This shared lexicon, beginning to ossify in the late seventeenth century in the midst of the long Reformation, was deployed by early moderns to organize and 'order' their communities, judge and compare the souls and characters of their neighbours, and determine their place in the world. Witchcraft was certainly part of these processes; witches, according to Heidi Breuer, "are by definition different from the norm; they function as others against which normative conventions can be defined."[17]

Beyond the moral and metaphysical disorder embodied by those practicing witchcraft, and even beyond the material disorder enacted by a witch upon their victim, suspicions and accusations of witchcraft within localities could precipitate simmering tensions and outbreaks of popular justice. The first chapter contextualizes these incidents by charting the evolutions in the criminalization of witchcraft, legal discourses surrounding witchcraft and evidence, and legal

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[15] Valerie Traub, "History in the Present Tense: Feminist Theories, Spatialized Epistemologies, and Early Modern Embodiment," in *Mapping Gendered Routes and Spaces in the Early Modern World*, ed. Merry Wiesner-Hanks (New York: Routledge, 2015), 38. See also Wrightson, *English Society*, 25-46.
[16] Traub, "History in the Present Tense," 47.
[17] Heidi Breuer, *Crafting the Witch: Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 7.

culture in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and the exacerbation of social polarization by elite efforts to reframe and defang witchcraft beliefs. Social polarization is taken up again in chapter two, which builds on the trope common in witchcraft pamphlets of the accused witch as a socially marginal figure, usually female, elderly, and poor. Chapter two explores how attitudes toward the poor and the gendered and embodied nature of emotions contributed to witchcraft beliefs and suspicions.

The deeply patriarchal and gendered nature of early modern English society has been well established.[18] Recent scholarship has also worked to illuminate the particular pressures of masculine gender norms and expectations under patriarchy.[19] At all levels of society gender was a conceptual lens through which social, political, and religious processes could be configured and negotiated. Gender was and remains not only a term which describes prescribed male and female social roles but also a way in which "bodily phenomena and social perceptions are structured, whereby meanings and significations—including meanings that may seem at first glance irrelevant

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[18] See for example the essays in *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, ed. Ralph Houlbrooke (New York: Routledge, 1989); Susan Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); James Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History, 1550-1760*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 1997); Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Linda Pollock, "Rethinking Patriarchy and the Family in Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of Family History* 23 (1998), 3-27; Cynthia Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the Second Earl of Castlehaven* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Alexandra Shepard, *The Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England, 1560-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Wrightson, *English Society*, especially chs. 3-4; Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson, 2012); Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families*.

[19] See for example, Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Bernard Capp, "'Jesus Wept' But Did the Englishman? Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern England," *Past & Present*, no. 224 (2014), 75-108; Alexandra Shepard, *The Meanings of Manhood*; Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity: Sexual Jealousy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For masculinity in early modern Europe more broadly, see for example Jennifer Feather and Catherine E. Thomas, *Violent Masculinities: Male Aggression in Early Modern Texts and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent, *Governing Masculinities in the Early Modern Period: Regulating Selves and Others* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011).

to the social situation of women and men—are generated."[20] Joan W. Scott, who in 1986 introduced the notion of gender as a category of analysis, insists that gender is not only a social construct, or a means of distinguishing based on sexual difference, but a "historically and culturally specific attempt to resolve the dilemma of sexual difference, to assign fixed meaning to that which ultimately cannot be fixed … not the assignment of roles to physically different bodies, but the attribution of meaning to something that always eludes definition."[21]

Scott's emphasis on the malleability of gender complicates the presumption of it being a stable and continuous category of identity, and is supported by the work of other scholars like Laura Gowing, who suggests that gender in the early modern period was "more performative and less internalized" than were the "fixed identities" emerging in the eighteenth century.[22] These ideas echo the earlier work of Judith Butler on the discursive construction of gender,[23] and of Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, according to whom gender is "first, and foremost, a *cultural* construct. As such, it is intelligible only in a cultural frame." Western conceptualizations of gender and social organization based on gender have historically relied on an invented paradigm of biological determinism encompassing binary difference and value judgements based on physical attributes and body parts. As Oyěwùmí explains, this precise "cognitive schema" does not exist in other cultures. If gender is socially constructed and not a natural imperative, then it must also be historically and culturally

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[20] Traub, "History in the Present Tense," 25.
[21] Joan W. Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 5-6. See also idem, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986), 1075.
[22] Laura Gowing, "The Manner of Submission: Gender and Demeanour in Seventeenth-Century London," *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 1 (2013), 27.
[23] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

constructed, because it is not a temporally static category, it is not articulated in the same way across all cultures, and in fact in some cultures it is not present at all.[24]

Early modern English constructions of gender conformed to the Western paradigm. The discursive categories of "men" and "women" were represented and understood to be opposites, biologically determined, and subject to close supervision and prescription of normativity. To historicize these categories, however, is to recognize that they have always been unstable and subject to alteration and transgression. This "sex-gender system"[25] of early modern England was complicated, as culture often was, by practice. Gender performance was a slippery enough concept that its normative boundaries could sometimes be transgressed without causing polite society to crumble.[26]

Amongst other things, witchcraft was a threat to traditional gender roles and social cohesion, as well as an inversion of social, communal, and religious mores. Historians have variously argued that early modern Englishmen and women saw female witches as masculinized by their deviant expressions or refusals of 'feminine' behaviour and male witches as either effeminate or tyrannical, the latter of which being the product of corrupt and chaotic masculinity.[27] As the pact between witch and Devil gained pre-eminence in English legal and intellectual

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[24] Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, "De-Confounding Gender," 1050-55. Emphasis mine. See also idem, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[25] Gayle Rubin introduced the concept of the "sex/gender system" in "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210.

[26] David Cressy, "Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 35, no. 4 (1996), 439-451; Kounine, *Imagining the Witch*, especially ch. 4.

[27] Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft, Politics, and Memory in Seventeenth-Century England," *Historical Journal* 50, no. 2 (2007), 306; E. J. Kent, "Tyrannical Beasts: Male Witchcraft in Early Modern English Culture," in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*, 84, 91; Richard W. Grinnell, "Witchcraft, Race, and the Rhetoric of Barbarism in *Othello* and *Henry IV*," *Upstart Crow* 24 (2004), 74. See also Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

discourses during the seventeenth century, it was acknowledged that the witch derived her powers from the Devil. More agentic interpretations saw the witch as malicious and vengeful and seeking out a power that she could not access without masculine assistance. Those who accused men of witchcraft "were mainly men who used [these] accusations … to police the boundaries of gender communities and the behaviour of their masculine fellows."[28] Judith Butler's assessment that in the Western tradition, identity categories such as 'man' and 'woman' are "never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary"[29] enables us to understand the inseparability of gender from witchcraft. It is not that women were disproportionately accused of and prosecuted for witchcraft because of their gender; it is rather that gender as a system of social control was enforced in part through the discouragement of those who transgressed gender norms or performed their gender incorrectly, men included.

Witchcraft also, in some cases, called the essentialism of biological sex into question in more ambiguous ways; Lyndal Roper, for example, points out two separate accounts in seventeenth-century Augsburg of a "bisexual" Devil: "[Christoph] Haizmann's had breasts as well as a large penis; Veit [Karg's] sometimes appeared in male, sometimes female form." Some European witchcraft narratives, like Karg's, also contained homoerotic subtext, as the evidence shows that Karg's interrogators may have been concerned that he was having sex with a male-presenting Devil.[30] Sexual behaviour, as Ania Loomba points out, is a key aspect in "defining the nature of a community, and therefore marks its borders; conversely, sexual transgression marks,

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[28] E. J. Kent, "Masculinity and Male Witchcraft in Old and New England, 1593-1680," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 60 (2005), 85.
[29] Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'," *Praxis International* 11 (1991), 160.
[30] Lyndal Roper, *The Witch in the Western Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 157, 172.

or is seen to be the result of, the crossing of these borders."[31] Witchcraft, it could be said, as concept and as lived experience, relied partly upon expectations of deviance from acceptable gendered behaviour and, sometimes, of trespassing upon or adopting those of the opposite gender. In a structural sense, the inversion of gender norms was an inversion of the paternalist configuration of state, community, and household.[32]

While social historians of early modern Europe have been applying class and gender-based analysis for decades, racial analysis has received comparatively less attention beyond the contributions of scholars of literary criticism and the Renaissance. Ideologies of race in early modern Europe were mostly inchoate and rather elastic, but they were increasingly central to European identities, communities, and worldviews, particularly as global empires expanded and Enlightenment empiricism shaped understandings and constructions of bodies and biology. If the process of identity formation "depends on some others or Other for completion or recognition,"[33] then the popularity of theories locating human difference in the physical body represented not only the advancement of a "common empirical epistemology" but also the germination of essentialist ideologies of race and gender.[34] The (sometimes uneven) nature of early English racial ideologies

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[31] Loomba, "Identities and Bodies," 5.
[32] See Laura Gowing, "Gender and the Language of Insult in Early Modern London," *History Workshop Journal* 35 (1993), 1-21; idem, "The Manner of Submission," 25-45; the essays in *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Michael J. Braddick and John Walter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Henry French and Richard Hoyle, *The Character of English Rural Society: Earls Colne, 1550-1750* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007). Amongst the voluminous number of regional studies, see for example: Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); idem, *The Making of an Industrial Society: Whickham, 1560-1765* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Pamela Sharpe, *Population and Society in an East Devon Parish: Reproducing Colyton 1540-1840* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).
[33] Scott, *Fantasy of Feminist History*, 14.
[34] Andrew Wells, "Confusion Embodied: Epistemologies of Sex and Race in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748-49) and the *Histoire naturelle* (1749-1804)," in *Bodies, Sex and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present,* ed. Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 50-51. See also Loomba, "Identities and Bodies," 227-46; Mark Dawson, *Bodies Complexioned: Human Variation and Racism in Early Modern English Culture, c. 1600-1750* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

is explored in relation to witchcraft narratives in chapter three, which finds religious, gendered, erotic, and racist fears of blackness in accused witches' descriptions of their encounters with the Devil.

Gender and social hierarchies were fairly well-defined by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but race and sexuality in particular were still in the ongoing processes of being delineated and conceptualized. They are therefore difficult, but by no means impossible, to use as analytical or interpretational categories.[35] Much remains unclear—or at least, impossible to assert with any certainty—about the mental worlds of early moderns, especially those whose internalities and experiences scholars have only been able to reconstruct through several degrees of separation (and perhaps more than a little bit of speculation). I refer here to the marginal sorts of people who have been denied space in the historical record in their own right—and counted or discounted by scholars until a generation ago—on account of gender, race, sexual orientation, class, or ability. The intersectional frameworks of feminist scholars of early modernity, which focus on the imbrications and meeting-points of various categories of identity or axes of oppression, help to uncover and recover the presence and experiences of historically marginalized peoples.[36]

Recovering the subjectivities and experiences of early modern people who were not white, usually propertied, men, is challenging at best. We know more about women's lived experiences and thoughts as processed by men than as recorded by women themselves. Much of what we know about the Black, Indigenous, and people of colour in Europe comes from the fictions and appraisals

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[35] Traub, "History in the Present Tense," 32.
[36] It must be noted that the term "intersectionality" was coined by critical race and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who argued in 1989 that the "single-axis framework" of legal considerations of racism and sexism (and of feminist and antiracist politics) was deficient because it elided the specific kinds of discrimination faced by Black women and other women of colour: Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1 (1989), 139-167, quotation on 139.

of white people. And so on. The filtration of these experiences and internalities through the pens of those who constructed them as the "other" requires the historian to seek out subtext and find meaning in absence.[37] The problem is often in separating the subject from the mentalities dictating the terms of their representation. In terms of race, the comparative wealth of representations of the racialized other in literary texts and artistic works have received more scholarly focus and interpretation.[38] The historian is thus often left reconstructing *perception* rather than actual experience.

Laura Tabili emphasizes that historical approaches to "racial processes" should recognize their "contingent, protean and relational nature." Tabili's approach, which is derived from the class analyses developed by Antonio Gramsci and E. P. Thompson, conceptualizes race not as a "static, naturalized 'category'" but as a process that has been "subject to the same historical contexts that have continually reproduced and reconstituted class, gender, and other social formations."[39] Loomba and Sanchez also point out that reading gender, race, and sexuality into historical documents is not the hard part of feminist historical analysis; rather, the difficulty comes in establishing these discourses as constitutive of each other and as elements of wider social, economic, and political processes.[40] This is especially challenging, as it requires a sustained effort

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[37] Ania Loomba and Melissa E. Sanchez, "Introduction: Why 'Feminism'? Why Now?," in *Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies: Gender, Race, and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 2016), 3.

[38] See for example David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth-Century English Art* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987); the essays in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Matthieu Chapman (New York: Routledge, 2016); *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), especially ch. 4; Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lara Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

[39] Laura Tabili, "Race is a Relationship, and Not a Thing," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1, Special Issue (Autumn 2003), 126.

[40] Loomba and Sanchez, "Introduction," 4.

to appreciate historical difference and the co-constitutive nature of the discourses and ideologies surrounding identity categories, the epistemologies of which were still in development in the early modern period.[41] In the absence of much primary material offering insight into the lives of racialized people, this thesis attempts to expand our understandings of the beliefs and discourses that may have contributed to the unfolding of these processes.

Empirical readings of legal, theological, and philosophical texts, and didactic literature can only push our understandings of early modern mentalities so far. Social history has demonstrated that the beliefs and habits of 'ordinary' early modern people should not be conflated with those of the learned or elite; it follows that 'official' or elite moral wisdom should not be taken as representative of the common and poorer sorts' lived experiences and moral negotiations. As has been well established, the lower sorts were likely fairly pragmatic in their adoption or rejection of religious practices and prescriptions and social mores.[42] The further down the social hierarchy, the more difficult it is to recover internalities and lived experiences. It is difficult to determine or even speculate on plebeian beliefs and norms *writ large*, even without accounting for differences in region, religion, social status, or gender, but this challenge has been taken up by historians in imaginative ways.[43]

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[41] Loomba and Sanchez, "Introduction," 2-4.
[42] Keith Wrightson, *English Society*, 100; Martin Ingram, "From Reformation to Toleration: Popular Religious Cultures in England, 1540-1690," in *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850*, ed. Tim Harris (London: Macmillan, 1995), 96.
[43] See for example Naomi Tadmor, "Where was Mrs Turner? Governance and Gender in an Eighteenth-Century Village," in *Remaking English Society*, 89-112; Andy Wood, "Deference, Paternalism and Popular Memory in Early Modern England," in *Remaking English Society*, 233-54; John Walter, *Understanding Popular Violence in the English Revolution: The Colchester Plunderers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Paul Griffiths, *Lost Londons: Change, Crime, and Control in the Capital City, 1550-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Susan Amussen and David Underdown, *Gender, Culture and Politics in England, 1560-1640: Turning the World Upside Down* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

One such way to do this is to locate the collectively determined tropes and narrative conventions present in court records and pamphlets. Crucially, these documents help to illuminate patrician and plebeian attitudes of the period. The salient problem for historians is that there are limited archival materials focused upon the plebeian experience. However, the thoughts and arguments appearing in archival collections and depositions offer representations of this experience by the middling and intellectual sorts, and, though they are necessarily filtered and mediated, they may nevertheless help reconstruct the voices and experiences of the entire community.[44]

Gareth Roberts observed in 1996 that "there are many senses in which any writing about witchcraft must be a species of fiction."[45] While the anecdotes, narratives, and accounts of witchcraft found in pamphlets, journal articles, and court records may not be strictly "literary" works, historians such as Natalie Zemon Davis, Stuart Clark, Andy Wood, and Marion Gibson have effectively made the case for collapsing the binary distinction between "fiction" and "fact" in order to read certain historical documents, particularly court records and pamphlet accounts, not with the intent to extract an immutable truth but rather to tease out a common repository of tropology, archetype, and narrative convention intrinsic to the production and communication of stories as evidence.[46] Zemon Davis' work on pardon tales and letters of remission in sixteenth-

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[44] See Richard Connors, "Poor Women, the Parish and the Politics of Poverty," in *Gender in Eighteenth Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Longman, 1997), 126-47; Steve Hindle, "The Shaming of Margaret Knowsley: Gossip, Gender and the Experience of Authority in Early Modern England," *Continuity and Change* 9, no. 3 (1994), 391-419. On depositions, see Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Shannon McSheffrey, *Seeking Sanctuary: Crime, Mercy, and Politics in English Courts, 1400-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[45] Gareth Roberts, "The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fictions," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 185.

[46] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives. Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches*

century France, which incorporates methods of literary criticism, has shown that the use of narrative style and story structure and the collaborative nature of authorship in the articulation of accounts were integral elements of the legal process. The fictive or literary forms discernable in "archival fictions" offer the historian alternative truths, in the construction and cultural significance of meaning.[47] Pamphlets, other published texts, and court records, writes Marion Gibson, "need to be recognized *as* texts, representing, and not merely transmitting, information."[48]

The focus on the textuality of primary documents and the interdisciplinary methodology used to make sense of them further allows the historian to engage with the "multivocality of discourse." Dialogues, of any kind, are made up of "voices," those of the author or authors; the implicit or explicit ideas, concepts, and assumptions deployed by the author; and the audience, the nature of whose reception and frames of reference the author attempts to anticipate.[49] Naming and tracing the interplay of the elements of multivocal discourse in historical accounts allows for close reading and contextualization of discursive patterns and constructions and, perhaps, an elucidation of the sometimes contradictory ways in which early modern people positioned themselves and others in the world.[50]

The primary documents best suited to reconstructing the mental worlds of the poorer sorts or commonalty in early modern England are court documents, ideally depositions or testimonies, which come closer to conveying their unmediated thoughts and experiences than any other kind of source. It must be noted, however, that though the process of gathering evidence and delivering

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(London: Routledge, 1999), 97; see also the essays in *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Stuart Clark (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2017).
[47] Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, 4, 24.
[48] Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 7. Emphasis in original.
[49] Garthine Walker, *Crime, gender and social order in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7-8.
[50] *Ibid.*, 6-8.

and recording legal testimony had by the late sixteenth century become relatively consistent, despite the impersonal and documentary nature of court documents, their contents cannot strictly be presumed "factual" in the sense that they are conveying neutral facts: for one thing, these written documents are usually not verbatim recordings, as witness depositions, for instance, were taken down and arranged in advance of court proceedings. Though sworn under oath and intended to "faithfully represent" the witness' account, the contents of depositions could in their final iteration present a rather different picture of the facts, due either to the scribe's writing choices, the influence of lawyers or other interlocutors, or the nature of the questioning.[51]

This is a similar consideration with regards to confessions, documents which are further complicated by their potential for abuse. Torture was considered in England to be counterproductive to evidence-gathering, and the confessions people made under torture could not be presumed trustworthy, but jail conditions, in addition to other psychosocial pressures upon suspects, could certainly result in induced or dubious confessions.[52] This is not to say that all these records are not useful or do not convey some measures of truth, but as "transparent historical sources"[53] they require careful handling and contextualization. In this sense, it may be more productive to attempt to detect the broader significance of tropes and forms than to fixate on the unambiguous, unequivocal 'facts' of a case, particularly if it was sparsely documented. As David Cressy explains, "what makes a story significant, rather than merely interesting, is the landscape

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[51] Julian Martin, *Francis Bacon, the State and the Reform of Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 80-82. See also Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, 17.
[52] Martin, *Francis Bacon*, 82. See also John H. Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof: Europe and England in the Ancien Régime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).
[53] Jacqueline Pearson, Review of *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England* by Peter Elmer, *Seventeenth Century* 31, no. 3 (2016), 379.

it illuminates, the contours it reveals, and the opportunity it presents to examine opaque attitudes, conduct and speech."[54]

Pamphlet accounts, often the only extant sources of information for a given witch trial, "commit themselves to emphases, erasures, and reorganizations driven by the imperative to tell an engaging story."[55] Historians have suggested that the proliferation of pamphlet literature over the seventeenth century aimed for popular audiences indicates increasing literacy and a recognition by pamphleteers and printers of the interests and abilities of this growing market.[56] Older and ancient treatises on demonology and witchcraft, as well as grimoires, were newly abridged, translated, and reprinted, and the wide circulation of pamphlet, ballad, and newspaper documentation of witch trials supplied edification and entertainment for a less educated readership.[57] This growth in literacy among the commonalty throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was concomitant with the expansion of print culture across Europe, which "stabilized national languages and gave wide access to a common literary tradition."[58] Rising rates of literacy, contrary to what one might assume, did not invariably occasion the broad normalization of reason or scepticism of the occult; in fact, as Owen Davies has demonstrated, increasing literacy simply

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[54] David Cressy, "Gender Trouble," 446.
[55] Dolan, "Witch Wives," 454.
[56] Gaskill, "Witchcraft, Politics, and Memory," 303; Carla Suhr, "Portrayal of Attitude in Early Modern English Witchcraft Pamphlets," *Studia Neophilologica* 84, no. 1 (2012), 130.
[57] Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt, *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 6.
[58] Nicholas Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 3 (1996), 256. On literacy, see for example Wrightson, *English Society*, especially ch. 7; David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 177; Wood, *The Memory of the People*, especially ch. 5; Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

allowed more people to access information about magic, demonology, and various other subjects associated with pre-modern, pre-Enlightenment superstition.[59]

The production and circulation of pamphlets particularly in the witchcraft genre, which rendered key intellectual and theological debates about witchcraft and diabolism relatable and ingestible for the literate or semi-literate commoner, played a role in this development. Though it is impossible to speculate on the amount or nature of influence these pamphlets might broadly have had over the beliefs and attitudes of the lower sorts, the emergence of patterns of narrative forms and tropes can perhaps reveal something about the expectations or presumptions of the audience for which the pamphlets were written. James Sharpe, for example, has shown that the range of grievances against accused witches was often much wider in pamphlet accounts of witchcraft cases than in formal indictments. The local suspicions excluded from or suppressed during trials, usually encompassing property damage, spoiled wares, and loss of cattle, may help in providing a more complete picture of local and common witch beliefs.[60] The persistence of a plebeian oral culture does not contradict these ideas but rather indicates an even wider audience for the topics and ideas spread by pamphlets, as illiterate or semi-literate people were increasingly likely to know someone who could read them aloud.

Kirilka Stavreva's survey of assize records, news pamphlets, and tracts in the late Elizabethan period suggests that popular knowledge of witchcraft was informed more by the wide circulation of pamphlets than by the courts, and thus that the pamphleteers' uses of narrative form and structure and popular "discursive elements" constitute important "textual remains of historical

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[59] Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 166. See also Andrew Cambers, "Demonic Possession, Literacy and 'Superstition' in Early Modern England," *Past & Present*, no. 202 (2009), 3-35; Roy Porter, "Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment, Romantic, and Liberal Thought," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 193-99.
[60] Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 36.

witch-speak."[61] Stavreva's observation that witchcraft pamphlets, most of which were accounts of trial proceedings, appeared to outnumber indictments in contemporary assize records holds true for the late seventeenth century even with the gradual decline of witch trials in general. This might indicate that broad public interest in witchcraft persisted in spite of the increasing ambivalence and even unwillingness of justices and other legal administrators to prosecute—in fact, these pamphlets were sometimes reprinted multiple times, even decades later—and furthermore, that this interest shaped and was shaped in turn by the devices and cultural referents used by pamphlet writers. The cases discussed in the following chapters were selected for their reflections of a range of broader discourses and intersections of the themes central to this thesis. Trial and narrative pamphlets vary greatly in terms of authorial commentary and the exactness of detail, and so, where possible, are enhanced by other print media, including newspapers, periodicals, and learned texts. Due to a limited access to archival repositories, these digitized print sources make up the bulk of the primary material on which this thesis is based.

This thesis seeks to expand upon the rich historiography of witchcraft by interrogating the place of witchcraft in collective understandings of, and processes of constructing, ideologies of social cohesion and difference in post-Reformation and Augustan England. As it is with less familiar tropes that this thesis is interested in engaging, it accordingly privileges experiences of gender, race, and social status over those of religious difference, for instance, which has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the years.[62] Bearing in mind the constraints noted by specialists of social, cultural, and witchcraft history, especially regarding the contingent nature of

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[61] Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers*, 71.
[62] See for example Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 235-55; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, especially chs. 2-6 and 15; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, especially chs. 29, 33, and 35; Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 97, 291, and *passim*.

cultural beliefs and the malleability of identity categories, an approach to discourses of witchcraft present in court records, popular pamphlets, periodicals, and other print materials from the intersecting perspectives of social order, gender, sexuality, and race is an important addition to the historiography. In pursuing these intersections, the following chapters will demonstrate the complex and entangled nature of early modern English witchcraft beliefs and anxieties about disorder, difference, and change. As Peter Laslett suggested, the particular task of the historian is to understand ourselves in time.[63] Following in the footsteps of Laslett's aphorism, which continues to inspire and animate historians of early modernity, this thesis endeavours to contribute also to the recovery and historicization of the presence and processes of social and cultural constructions of those whose identities have been occluded in and by the historical record, including women and people of colour.

[63] Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: Further Explored*, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen Books 1983), 92.

CHAPTER 1

Witchcraft Beliefs, Evidence, and Justice in a Changing Legal Culture

Richard Hathaway, a blacksmith's apprentice in Southwark, Surrey, was tried in 1702 for counterfeiting bewitchment and maliciously accusing Sarah Morduck of witchcraft—formally, imposture and cheating. In the words of Lord Chief Justice Holt, the presiding judge, cheating was "a design to impose on the credulity of others, to induce them to believe a thing that is not true."[1] Witchcraft itself was not Hathaway's crime, but Holt's characterization of his actions would, twenty-four years later, come to redefine witchcraft in its criminal context. Formal witch trials in England came to an end with the passing of the 1736 Witchcraft Act, which effectively decriminalized practices of witchcraft. This seminal moment in English legal history arose from a confluence of processes social, political, and religious, a moment which did not signal the unequivocal abandonment of witchcraft beliefs by the English but rather codified the incipient recalibration of these beliefs writ large. The passing of the act was in some ways a culmination of transformations in legal thought, shaped by Enlightenment and natural philosophical ideas of reason, objectivity, and moral certainty, and the increasingly litigious nature of English society.[2] This last is reflected in the extant court records whose proceedings served as key discursive arenas

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[1] *The Tryal of Richard Hathaway, upon an Information for being a Cheat and Impostor* (London: Printed for Isaac Cleave, 1702), 9.

[2] See Christopher Brooks, *Law, Politics and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); idem, *Lawyers, Litigation and English Society Since 1450* (London: Hambledon, 1998), 27-62. For later periods, see Peter King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also the essays in *Law, Lawyers and Litigants in Early Modern England: Essays in Memory of Christopher W. Brooks*, ed. Michael Lobban, Joanne Begiato, and Adrian Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

for witchcraft debates and reveal the availability of official legal channels not only to purported victims of witchcraft but, notably, to its alleged practitioners as well.

A significant legal transformation was in the nature of evidence and the meanings of truth and fact: witness testimony and circumstantial evidence previously considered admissible gradually came to be discarded as unreliable by most judges and juries, a shift which had profound implications for the ways in which English men and women, across all social strata, identified and engaged with witchcraft and its place in their cosmologies. This chapter will demonstrate the continuities and changes of witchcraft beliefs in post-Restoration England through the prism of contemporary notions of recourse to justice and expectations of evidential cogency—the dialectics of which were negotiated, in no small part, in witch trials and related proceedings—and in doing so will explore the tensions between educated scepticism and popular superstition.

The well-documented trials of Richard Hathaway (1702), Jane Wenham (1712), and Thomas Colley (1751), charged with imposture, witchcraft, and murder respectively, help to illustrate these processes: the narratives surrounding Wenham, Hathaway, and Colley's trials demonstrate that, in spite of a progressively reluctant judiciary, fear and distrust of witches continued to have deep cultural significance and the power to disrupt local social relations into the eighteenth century. Keith Thomas has argued against a coherent cosmology animating popular magical beliefs in the sixteenth century; but what the advent and application of Enlightenment ideas to legal matters, and the disparate popular traditions scraping up against these new ways of thinking, demonstrates is the further, gradual fragmentation of the "debris of many different systems of thought."[3]

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[3] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 219.

In March of 1702, Richard Hathaway's trial at the Surrey assizes ended in a conviction. The alleged witch in this case was not Hathaway, but Sarah Morduck, a neighbour and the wife of a waterman, whom Hathaway had accused of bewitchment. He had exhibited near-constant and painful symptoms of a mysterious and incurable illness for the better part of a year before Sarah Morduck was arraigned before a magistrate and committed for witchcraft. Her subsequent trial and acquittal precipitated Hathaway's own prosecution for the wilful and malicious fraudulent accusation. Hathaway was also involved in a separate trial alongside Thomas and Elizabeth Wellyn and Elizabeth Willoughby for riot and assault against Sarah Morduck.[4]

The trial of Jane Wenham for witchcraft in 1712 at the Hertford assizes is notable for a number of reasons: it was one of the last witch trials to take place in England; it was highly controversial and widely discussed at the time of its taking place and in the decades following; and it provided an arena, at least for the rather extensive pamphlet literature surrounding it, for the battles of intellectual and theological discourses on the existence of spirits and witchcraft, the interpretation of key biblical passages thereof, and atheism, as well as for debates about the rational gathering of evidence and proof and the establishment of matters of fact. Not only were witchcraft cases seldom tried, but Wenham's trial also subverted the statistically more likely outcome of acquittal. Perhaps even more controversial was her eventual royal pardon, purportedly precipitated by Sir John Powell, the presiding judge, after the jury had returned with a guilty verdict.[5]

Witchcraft beliefs long predated their codification into law; in England it was not until the 1542 statute that witchcraft became a felony. Under Henry VIII, the act made punishable by death any and all "invovacons or conjuracons of Sprites witchecraftes enchauntementes or sorceries"

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[4] *Tryal of Richard Hathaway*, 1-30.
[5] Guskin, "The Context of Witchcraft," 48; "Home Affairs," *Weekly Journal, or British Gazetteer*, no. 240 (3 January, 1730).

either for financial gain, violent ends, or any other reason.[6] Though the act was repealed five years later by Edward VI, in 1563 the Elizabethan parliament reintroduced it and narrowed the scope of witchcraft as a capital offence, stipulating death by hanging only in cases "wherby any [person] shall happen to bee killed or destroyed."[7] A subsequent statute, passed in 1604, diverged in a number of ways from its predecessors and was not overturned until the Witchcraft Act of 1736. The new priorities introduced in 1604 were essentially summarized in the full title of the act: where the title of the 1563 act was *An Act agaynst Conjurations Inchantmentes and Witchecraftes*, its replacement was entitled *An Acte against Conjuration Witchcrafte and dealinge with evill and wicked Spirits.*[8] In 1597 King James VI of Scotland, later king of England too, had authored a philosophical text on demonism and witchcraft. The theories propounded in this text, many of which were derived from continental European demonology and focused on the contract between witch and Devil as well as methods for discovering witchcraft, inspired not only the 1604 statute but also the actions of the Essex witch hunters Matthew Hopkins and Jonathan Stearne, whose use of torture and other pressure tactics against approximately three hundred accused witches may have resulted in one hundred executions between 1644 and 1647 and constituted England's only true witch-hunt.[9]

As Brian Levack writes, both the religious nature of the criminalization of witchcraft and the frequent use of torture in continental European witch trials give historians the sense that the

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[6] 33 Hen. VIII c. 8 (1542), *Statutes of the Realm* vol. 3, 837.
[7] 5 Eliz. I c. 16. s. I (1563), *Statutes of the Realm* vol. 4 pt. 1, 446.
[8] 1 Ja. I c. 12 (1604), *Statutes of the Realm* vol. 4 pt. 2, 1028. The implications of this legislation for prosecution are addressed on pp. 80-81 of this thesis.
[9] James VI, *Daemonologie, in forme of a Dialogue, Diuided into three Bookes* (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Walde-graue, 1597); Frances E. Dolan, "Witch Wives," in *The Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature, 1500-1700*, ed. Lorna Hutson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 452; Peter Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially ch. 4; Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy* (London: John Murray Press, 2006), xiii and *passim*.

legal system and its prosecution of witchcraft was a "coercive, repressive" force.[10] Despite the divergences between European and English legal traditions, English witchcraft trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries might often bear resemblance to continental trials. Though, for example, the English did not avail themselves of judicial torture in investigating and prosecuting witchcraft, the interests and influences of justices of the peace, other local officials, and even prominent members of the community on the recorded version of events can sometimes be seen as coercive.[11] The confession of Alice Huson, who had been apprehended in 1664 for having bewitched a young girl for a span of three years, was taken down by the vicar Timothy Wellfet "suited to the Questions [he] propounded her" following three days of interrogation and full-body searches.[12] Three older women in Bideford, Devon were subjected prior to their trial in 1682 to what James Sharpe refers to as the "enthusiastic questioning of the mayor and justices," not to mention "heavy local pressure."[13]

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries witnessed the changing intellectual and juridical interpretations of witchcraft and *maleficium* from a felony to a rather minor crime of fraud and imposture. Cunning-folk, conceptually distinct from witches by dint of their trade in traditional remedies, counter-witchcraft charms, proficiency in intellectually-recognized subjects like astrology, and entrenchment in their local social milieux, were the worst affected by the 1736 statute. Perceptions of cunning-folk as cozeners meant that they were vulnerable to prosecution under this statute for fraudulently performing fortune-telling, conjuration, and other magical acts.[14]

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[10] Brian P. Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 469.
[11] Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 215-17.
[12] Matthew Hale, *A Collection of modern relations of matter of fact concerning witches & witchcraft upon the persons of people* (London: Printed for John Harris, 1693), 59.
[13] Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness,* 187, 227.
[14] Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 61. See also idem, *Popular Magic: Cunning Folk in English History* (London: Hambledon, 2007).

Neither the *malefic* act, nor the diabolical compact, were prosecutable offences: it was the pretension to witchcraft, not the witchcraft itself, which was criminal. After its passage the Act rarely saw use, but it was invoked intermittently until the twentieth century.[15] Witchcraft also continued to appear in civil court in defamation suits, as a threat to reputation rather than a moral danger.[16]

The belief in witchcraft as an element of Christian faith persisted, and not only among the lower sorts, long after the decriminalization of witchcraft in 1736. However, popular beliefs and legal definitions and procedures concerning witchcraft, which for a long time had been virtually indistinguishable, had begun to disentangle themselves long before it, and the legal, criminal contexts of witchcraft were gradually distorted, particularly as the final trials faded from living memory. As noted, the 1736 Act newly stipulated that the *pretence* of witchcraft was a criminal offence, punishable by a maximum of one year's imprisonment. However, Owen Davies argues that the assumption that witchcraft was thus transformed from a capital offence to "an offence against the country's new enlightened state" is too simplistic.[17] This enlightenment—and the realignment of the official narrative about witchcraft from one of demonology and faith both collective and individual, to one of superstition and plebeian ignorance—came not from the wholesale abandonment of supernatural beliefs and deeply embedded processes of meaning- and knowledge-production, but rather from increasing social polarization and scepticism amongst the

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[15] Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 1, 61.
[16] Witchcraft had already been appearing, much earlier, in ecclesiastical courts for the same reason. See for example Peter Rushton, "Women, Witchcraft and Slander in Early Modern England: Cases from the Church Courts of Durham, 1560-1675," *Northern History* 18, no. 1 (1982), 126-31. See also C. L'Estrange Ewen, "Appendix III: Slander," in *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials: The Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of the 1373 Assizes Held from the Home Court 1559-1736 AD* (London: Kegan Paul, 1929).
[17] Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 1.

learned elite of the kinds of evidence and methods of proof used both in court proceedings and other contexts.[18]

The beliefs of the governing elites were far from uniform; certainly, many parliamentarians, legal commentators, theologians, and others must have cleaved to their belief in witchcraft, but as Gaskill points out, the more pragmatic amongst them took pains to conceal this, lest they be accused of popery or religious enthusiasm.[19] Similarly, to express one's scepticism too doggedly might attract accusations of atheism. These debates were not only carried out in print, or upon purely theoretical theological terms; but as Gaskill, Bostridge, Elmer, and others argue, witchcraft was swept up in rising political tensions and factionalism engendered by the rage of party. The diminution of witchcraft beliefs among the educated and elite may, therefore, have arisen from political and ideological, as well as intellectual, perspectives.[20]

Another consideration is that of the social hierarchy. The divide between popular and elite beliefs was not an even cleavage, and may have only been represented as such by the latter so as to further distance themselves from the monolithically credulous—a "façade of cultural exclusivity."[21] It must also be noted that while witchcraft and the superstitious common sorts were frequently mocked and attacked in print, and likely also in public gathering-places, it is far less certain that they received such widespread ridicule in private.[22] The outward scorn, however, exemplifies the "dissociation" that Wrightson identifies within the language of sorts as it was operationalized and weaponized by the ruling classes: the linguistic distinctions between the

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[18] Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Evidence," 67; idem, *Crime and Mentalities*, 88.
[19] While such accusations could be politically damaging, anti-Catholicism became gradually muted in witchcraft discourses during the eighteenth century, especially as religious anxieties came to focus more on the potential threats posed by non-Anglican Protestant confessions to the established Church: Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 291.
[20] Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 112; Ian Bostridge, "Witchcraft Repealed," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 311; Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics*, especially ch. 7.
[21] Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 88. See also Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 76.
[22] Bostridge, "Witchcraft Repealed," 311.

learned and wealthy and the ignorant common sorts gradually came to be used to "[stigmatize] those whom [the elite] excluded" and likely "furthered and consolidated the social realignments of the age."[23]

The political and learned elite, and increasingly the middling sorts of people, understood themselves in many ways diacritically to the common and poorer sorts; though ambivalence and equivocation of belief and opinion is expected across any social group, elite scepticism of witchcraft might thus have been, at least in part, an attempt to create distance between the elite and the superstitious and ignorant masses.[24] But witchcraft could not disappear forever: it provided at once a definition of, and justification for, the existence and supremacy of church and state. However, this symbiosis had the adverse effect of keeping witchcraft discourse in the mainstream; the existing social and religious order depended, in part, on the continuation of witchcraft even as it was ideologically bound to eradicate it.[25] Extreme scepticism of witchcraft was thus interpreted by some as atheism, as it could be taken as wholesale denial of the existence of spirits, a notion which was anathema to most godly people.[26] A 1712 sceptical pamphlet described this fear that "any Attempts made against the [existence of witchcraft], is endeavouring to rob Religion of one considerable Guard which should secure it against the Attempts of prophane and licentious Men." However, the pamphleteer countered that "Religion stands upon a far more Solid and Lasting Foundation"[27] than proponents of this fear seemed able to comprehend.

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[23] Keith Wrightson, "'Sorts of People' in Tudor and Stuart England," in *The Middling Sort of People. Culture, Society, and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 38, 40.
[24] Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 82. See also Wrightson, "'Sorts of People'," 28-51.
[25] Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers*, 72; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, especially chs. 3-5.
[26] See Kenneth Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England 1580-1720: The Atheist Answered and his Error Confuted* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015).
[27] *The Case of the Hertfordshire Witchcraft Consider'd* (London: Printed for John Pemberton, 1712), iv-v.

A quality pejoratively attributed to the lower sorts was superstition, a term which itself underwent an evolution in meaning during the period. While it retained its earlier denotation of "unfounded, credulous or heretical beliefs," its association with Reformation-era religious tensions was gradually supplanted by Enlightenment implications of ignorance, irrationality, and anti-modernity.[28] The intellectual scepticism and restrained, rational religious observance of the educated, measured against the ignorant superstitions and religious enthusiasm of the lower orders, were thus "heavily reinforced by social prejudice."[29]

Transformations in legal thought and evidence

Law enforcement in early modern England was highly contingent upon contemporary social ideals and perceptions of rank and hierarchy within the social order. While "law" in the institutional or jurisprudential sense retained its basic function of imposing and protecting order and property, because in practice it required a high degree of local cooperation across social strata, changing values and the social and cultural impacts of economic, religious, and political changes informed the trajectory of its enforcement. This local cooperation was facilitated by the conventional understanding that all people, as inherent sinners, had the capacity for criminality, an understanding which positioned law enforcement as a social and moral undertaking and justified the discrepancy between harsh or extreme prescription and merciful practice. Anyone might at some juncture commit a crime, but that did not automatically make them criminals.[30]

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[28] Davies and de Blécourt, *Beyond the Witch Trials*, 3-4.
[29] Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 255.
[30] Cynthia B. Herrup, "Law and Morality in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past & Present*, no. 106 (1985), 108-12.

A prevailing belief in English legal culture arising in the mid to late seventeenth century was that matters of fact—the actions or events perpetrated by human beings at issue in a given court proceeding—could ultimately be established beyond a reasonable doubt, and that common people had the mental capacity to make impartial and rational decisions. The men sitting on grand juries, called to determine indictments prior to trial proceedings, were of higher status than those on trial juries, as it was expected that learned men of the better sorts were capable of more intellectual and procedural nuance than their social inferiors.[31] In English common law, matters of fact were the purview of lay jurors from the sixteenth century onward; thus, common people—either jurors or observers at trial proceedings—became familiar with the concept, language, and conditions of "facts."[32] This, in turn, facilitated the application of the concept of facts and their determination to contexts far removed from the courts: namely, natural philosophical and theological discourses.[33]

It was believed that a judge and jury could plausibly reconstruct a sequence of events despite not having been party to them; for this reason, eyewitness accounts, though somewhat rare, were naturally the most highly sought-after form of evidence in court proceedings. In the absence of firsthand experience, any witness brought before the court should be expected to provide "believable and trustworthy" testimony.[34] The reliance of the early modern English court system

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[31] Barbara Shapiro, *'Beyond Reasonable Doubt' and 'Probable Cause': Historical Perspectives on the Anglo-American Law of Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 52. See also the essays in *Twelve Good Men and True: The Criminal Trial Jury in England, 1200-1800*, ed. J.S. Cockburn and Thomas A. Green (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Christopher Brooks, "Professions, Ideology and the Middling Sort in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Middling Sort of People*, 113-40.

[32] Martin, *Francis Bacon*, 77. Note that women were prohibited from jury service in England until the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in 1919, and women remained a minority in jury panels until 1974: Anne Logan, "'Building a New and Better Order'? Women and Jury Service in England and Wales, *c*. 1920-70," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 5 (2013), 702.

[33] Martin, *Francis Bacon*, 72-73; Barbara Shapiro, "Religion and the Law: Evidence, Proof and 'Matter of Fact', 1660-1700," in *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660-1830*, ed. Norma Landau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 186.

[34] Shapiro, "Religion and the Law," 188.

on witness testimony necessitated the development of an epistemology and strict procedures for the evaluation of testimonial credibility, a task which was to be shouldered by jurors. Markers of social status, such as gender, age, education, financial autonomy, and occupation, either enhanced or diminished a witness' credibility.

Reputation was also a significant consideration; individuals who were known to be liars or to possess "low moral character," while not barred from providing testimony, were perceived as less reliable and valuable to a case.[35] The impact of these qualities on the veracity of testimony was left to the jury's discretion, and jurors were expected to give only so much weight to testimony as their consciences could allow.[36] Precluded from providing witness testimony were those with reputations for criminality—particularly those who had committed treasonous or felonious offences—or mental incapacity. The quality of witnesses was thus central to the determination of facts, but quantity was also a factor: the more witnesses possible, the more rounded the established facts.[37] This was especially true for witch trials, as material evidence of *maleficium* was rare.

The Romano-canon system of the European continent, which typically required a minimum of two reliable witnesses or a confession, nevertheless allowed the inclusion of *indicia*, or circumstantial evidence, on the basis that witchcraft was a *crimen exceptum*: exceptional and thus subject to different standards of proof.[38] But witchcraft was never officially a *crimen exceptum* in English law, and though *indicia* constituted a major element of English witchcraft discourse, it was never formalized in statute law, and neither was the witness requirement. There was little

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[35] Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, 99. For a more sustained discussion on reputation, as well as its gender dimensions, see chapter two of this thesis.
[36] Shapiro, "Religion and the Law," 190. See also Martin, *Francis Bacon*, 78.
[37] *Ibid*., 192.
[38] Garthine Walker, "The Strangeness of the Familiar: Witchcraft and the Law in Early Modern England," in *The Extraordinary and the Everyday in Early Modern England: Essays in Celebration of the Work of Bernard Capp*, ed. Angela McShane and Garthine Walker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 105.

consensus amongst legal commentators, jurists, and others of the learned elite as to the appropriateness of the inclusion of presumption and *indicia* into witch trials, but in practice, especially as the seventeenth century drew to a close, more often than not these "lower species" of proof seemed acceptable for indictment but insufficient for conviction.[39] As Cynthia Herrup explains, the distribution of power in the criminal legal system and the necessity of mobilizing local participation in legal proceedings ensured that every step of the process, including conviction, comprised a "series of discrete decisions assessing degrees of culpability."[40] So it was that in 1712, Lord Chief Justice Powell sought and was granted a royal pardon for Jane Wenham, even after the jury returned a unanimous verdict of guilty.

The development and gradual ossification of the legal concept of matters of fact and its attendant criteria for experience and credibility, as well as the problem of legal proof, played a crucial role in the trajectory of English witchcraft beliefs into the eighteenth century. Matters of fact and argumentation based on fact had by the latter half of the seventeenth century been incorporated into public discourses both esoteric and popular.[41] As philosophical principles of reason and moral certainty entered mainstream discourse and dominated legal and theological debates around the turn of the eighteenth century, expectations of probability, certainty, and provability changed. Traditional knowledge could now be augmented by reason and methodical and tangible observation. The processes and criteria for the production of rational knowledge closely resembled those for the elaboration of the increasingly rational legal culture: proofs and

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[39] Walker, "The Strangeness of the Familiar," 109; Shapiro, *'Beyond Reasonable Doubt'*, 209-12, quotation on 212.
[40] Herrup, "Law and Morality," 107.
[41] Steve Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), *passim*.

certainties depended on credible and disinterested testimony; on the impartial relation of human sensory experience; and ideally, on mathematical proof.[42]

Unnatural and supernatural matters complicated this principle. "It is one Thing to consider of these Matters *calmly* and *at a distance*," wrote the anonymous author of a 1712 pamphlet, "and another to have them *before our eyes.*"[43] The primacy of eyewitness experience was unsettled by the rationalization of law and intellect, which clashed with the subjectivity, affect, and potential for inaccuracy inherent in information related by those with close personal stakes in a case, especially when witchcraft was involved. Because the performance of *maleficium* was almost always implicit and attributed retroactively—that is, witchcraft acts tended to be dialogic in nature, for people normally did not see a witch invoke the Devil to cast a spell or curse, and so displays of anger and injurious or violent speech were usually only recognized as foreshadowing the material consequence of witchcraft *post factum*[44]—prosecutors would come up against ever greater obstacles in attempting to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, both that witchcraft had been performed and that the accused was indeed the malefactor. In a system designed to mitigate biases and the imperfections of human memory, moral certainty was an increasingly challenging achievement.

For some theologians and clerics, and for natural philosophers as well, matters of fact and moral certainty could be a means by which to prove the literal reality of biblical stories or to demonstrate God's presence in nature. One's relationship to God and the wider world could be thus enriched and conceptualized.[45] Natural or supernatural phenomena did not have to be fully

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[42] Shapiro, "Religion and the Law," 192, 202-04; Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Evidence," 67.
[43] *Hertfordshire Witchcraft Consider'd*, 86. Emphasis in original.
[44] Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers*, 75. See also Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33.
[45] Shapiro, "Religion and the Law," 195.

understood in order to be true; there was evidence enough in human senses and memories, and in tangible and observable facts—though this evidence ought to be appropriately substantiated, ideally through empiricism or "sense-experience."[46] John Locke's claim that "the comprehension of our understandings comes exceeding short of the vast extent of things" in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* illustrates this tension between the drive to catalogue and comprehend and the essential unknowability of the universe. Locke further wrote, "if we will disbelieve every things, because we certainly cannot know all things; we shall do muchwhat as wisely as he, who would not use his legs, but sit still and perish, because he had no wings to fly."[47] Spirits, demons, and monsters in the Christian intellectual tradition were component parts of a divinely ordered world, as were wonders and miracles.[48] Legal and philosophical scepticism, not just of witchcraft but of miracles and other awe-inspiring phenomena, was rooted not in total disbelief but in the expectation of sufficient evidence and authority.[49] This rapprochement renders the early modern relationship between empiricism, natural science and Christian faith more complex and yet more intelligible; as Stuart Clark observes, "cosmology was at the same time epistemology."[50]

Alexandra Walsham's exploration of folkloric traditions across the British Isles reveals a wide variety of beliefs about the Satanic presence in nature, particularly in geographically and climatically hostile regions, contributing to a "tissue of topographical legend to explain the appearance of the physical landscape."[51] The presence of unique topographical features—for

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[46] Shapin, *Social History of Truth*, 201.
[47] John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes*, 12th ed. (London: Rivington, 1824), vol. 1, ch. 1, s. 5.
[48] Theological and natural philosophical doctrines, the latter of which operated "within a highly Christianized framework," have been reassessed in recent historiography as much more compatible than earlier scholarship would suggest: Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 55. For recent scholarship, see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, especially chs. 3 and 4.
[49] Shapin, *Social History of Truth*, 200-01 and *passim*.
[50] Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 54.
[51] Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape*, 40.

instance, certain bodies of water, unusual formations in cliffs or boulders, prehistoric remnants, or medieval monuments—had become assimilated into the customary beliefs of nearby communities over the course of generations, and though many were seen as sacred sites, some were attributed to or connected with demonic influence and thus also imbued with supernatural qualities.[52] The iconoclasm of the Reformation posed a threat to these beliefs, usually because of their pagan or Catholic roots, but it did not entirely preclude the absorption of certain elements of these beliefs, namely the Devil's influence over the landscape, into Protestantism. Protestant doctrine emphasized the Devil's capacity to interfere with natural and human affairs, and so diabolical explanations for the "ugly and unproductive features of the natural environment" could be generally accepted.[53]

In a response to published criticisms of his first pamphlet covering the 1712 witch trial of Jane Wenham, Hertford clergyman Francis Bragge refuted the objection that Anne Thorn, a key witness, could not possibly have conversed with an evil spirit in the shape of a cat by invoking the highest form of divine revelation. "Is it more ridiculous and incredible," he asked, "than that the Devil should speak to Eve in the Shape of a Serpent?" After establishing this authoritative precedent, Bragge closed his argument by noting that the veracity of this fact was amply confirmed by the continued tormenting of Anne Thorn by the spirit in its feline form.[54] In theological constructs, just as in the legal conceptualization, in order to be established beyond a reasonable doubt, the nature and proof of matters of fact ought to be conveyed rationally by witnesses whose social status and reputations indicated their authority and indifference. Beyond its illustration of

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[52] *Ibid.*, 378, 477-78, 504-08, and *passim*.
[53] Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape*, 504. On the Reformation's conceptualization of the Devil, see also Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 560-63.
[54] Francis Bragge, *Witchcraft farther display'd* (London: Printed for E. Curll, 1712), 38-39.

the religious adoption of matters of fact, Bragge's argument above, in particular the reasoning he used to determine a fact, is broadly representative of the kind of legal thought reliant on witness testimony that was already becoming obsolete.

Indeed, the Devil's workings may have been observable in nature, but popular beliefs and memory could not but fall short of judicial expectations of proof. These increasingly rigorous standards were not, as has been shown, a reflection of broad disenchantment or disbelief—though the volume of polemical pamphlets and texts denying the existence of witchcraft is an attestation of the presence, if not omnipresence, of total disbelief—but rather the product of a changing legal culture and the incorporation of scientific methods of discovery. Natural philosophers followed the Aristotelian principle that some knowledge, certain occurrences or phenomena, could not reasonably be expected to be proven by the same method as others. Sense-experience and mathematical proof had sometimes to be complemented by or even substituted with "*probable* knowledge of, for example, physical cause or historical fact."[55] However, in the courtroom and in legal discourse, the degree of evidence presented in witchcraft cases—eyewitness accounts were only nominally so, as the precise moment in which *maleficium* was enacted was experienced only by the witch—simply did not provide enough legal certainty. Scepticism had existed in a variety of forms in English society long before the advent of the Enlightenment, and though its articulations in both legal and cultural contexts evolved and multiplied during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, witchcraft, as religious belief, as folklore, and as source of social disharmony, continued to take up space in early modern mental worlds.

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[55] Shapin, *Social History of Truth*, 207. Emphasis in original. See also Locke, *Human Understanding*, ch. 1, p. 4, s. 5.

In the decades after the Restoration, the prospect of innocents facing witchcraft convictions and, consequently, executions, was considered a dismal but justifiable inevitability. But jurors were burdened with the nearly impossible task of seeing through deeply contextual webs of suspicion, prejudice, and rumour, all of which had "solidified into legal truth." Prosecutions of witchcraft, as Gaskill authoritatively states, tended to be "concatenations of circumstance [rather] than calculated initiatives."[56] When accusations of witchcraft were so often made not as the result of reason but of emotions, particularly of corrosive ones like anger or fear, how could these accusations be vindicated by an increasingly rational court system?

Historians have noted that the diabolical contract between Devil and witch gained pre-eminence in witchcraft discourse over the course of the seventeenth century, which further complicated the legal concept of witchcraft as it was increasingly impossible to substantiate.[57] Indictments for witchcraft involving damage to property or stock, cattle for example, accounted for a not-insignificant 36.8 per cent of all witchcraft cases brought to the assizes during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, but by the time of the Restoration they accounted only for 2.9 per cent. The legal precepts for witchcraft were in flux throughout the seventeenth century, as the witch's diabolical activities and the somatic manifestations of *maleficium*—the mysterious illnesses, possessions, and occasionally deaths—gained pre-eminence over more material issues of property.[58]

The significance of the diabolical contract in particular, a crucial element of the 1604 witchcraft statute, was probably imported from continental European demonology. Its addition to

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[56] Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness in Early Modern England," in *Remaking English Society*, 220-21, 223.
[57] Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Evidence," 68.
[58] Clive Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," *Past & Present*, no. 140 (August, 1993), 48-49.

the statute law, which made it illegal to "consult covenant with entertaine employ feede or rewarde any evill and wicked Spirit to or for any intent or purpose,"[59] was intended as a reinforcement of existing standards of proof, as judges sought "sworn evidence that the witch kept a familiar or bore the devil's mark on her person; most decisive of all, they hoped for her free confession that she had entered into a pact with Satan."[60] This hope seemed to have been realized in the 1640s with the abnormally high volume of confessions arising from the witch-hunting efforts of Matthew Hopkins and Jonathan Stearne in Essex; the Devil had never before figured so prominently in depositions. However, they deployed coercive tactics and inquisitorial methods atypical of English witchcraft investigations which rendered their results unreliable.[61] Thus, even sworn evidence could be questionable. Contemporaries also grew increasingly concerned with the mental instability of accused witches. Forced confessions and other judicial distortions were seen as within the realm of possibility. As Ralph Cadworth wrote in 1706, many "silly melancholy people" had been condemned by "the Ignorance of some Judges and Jurys," due either to their confessions or to "other slender and insufficient Proofs."[62]

Some, though not all, accused witches confessed to having literally signed a document surrendering their eternal soul to the Devil, but, never being able to produce such documents, simply had to be taken at their word; and while judges and jurors were certainly at their liberty to do so, the witch's or devil's mark was a much more effective proof, as it could be observed and confirmed by another party.[63] According to Michael Dalton's popular judicial guide *The Countrey*

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[59] 1 Jac. I c.12 s. II, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1028.
[60] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 575.
[61] Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," 58-59.
[62] Ralph Cadworth, *A confutation of the reason and philosophy of atheism* (London: Printed by J.D., 1706), 466.
[63] For a lengthier discussion of the witch's mark and the procedure for its identification, see chapter three of this thesis.

Justice, which was published in 1635, the witch's mark, as well as the familiar, were "maine points to discover and convict these Witches," as they evinced the witch's "league with the Devill."[64] The presence of an unusual marking conforming to the characteristics of the witch's mark was not, however, enough to convince a jury on its own.[65]

The odds of demonstrating an accused witch's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt became increasingly improbable as witness accounts and circumstantial evidence were gradually becoming less persuasive. Clergyman and writer Nathaniel Wanley bluntly questioned the legitimacy of witnesses who testified, upon oath, to having observed clearly improbable, unexplainable phenomena—a witch in flight, for example. "Why," Wanley asked, "may we not rather believe a Man is distemper'd in his Mind, or fond of his own Invention, that tells this Story, than have our Faith imposed upon" by such impossibilities? Though Wanley mocked those credulous enough to believe a witch might fly with the assistance of a broom or an oyster-shell, he made the sobering point that "'tis better to lean towards Doubt than Assurance, where things are hard to prove and dangerous to believe" when, as in a witch trial, the outcome was a matter of life and death.[66]

The extreme example that Wanley employed to illustrate his point is rather misrepresentative of the most frequent popular allegations against suspected witches—for instance, damaging property, injuring or killing livestock, bewitching, and less often, transforming into animals—and further trivializes popular fears of the witch by defanging it, severing it from its association with malicious action, and suggesting that the credulous witness might be mentally unsound. Wanley's intended audience was evident: learned, intellectual sceptics like himself. But

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[64] Michael Dalton, *The Countrey Justice, Containing the Practice of the Justices of the Peace out of their Sessions* (London, 1635), 277.
[65] See also Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter*, 71.
[66] Nathaniel Wanley, *The history of man; or, the wonders of humane nature, in relation to the virtues, vices and defects of both sexes* (London: Printed for R. Basset, 1704), 554.

it would be a syllogistic fallacy to assume that all learned or intellectual men were sceptics or vice versa, especially when, as previously established, status and reputation were so central to witness credibility. In fact, as the latter half of the seventeenth century progressed, the sustained participation of local notables and other prominent people was crucial in pushing some witchcraft cases to trial. Jonathan Barry's reconstruction of the local contexts surrounding the trial of the Bideford Witches at the 1682 Exeter Assizes reveals the extent to which prominent families, intimately impacted by the malfeasance of the accused—here, the family of gentleman Thomas Eastchurch—were able to exert pressure on the local elite and ensure prosecution which might not otherwise have ensued.[67]

Witch trials in the early eighteenth century were few, but perhaps the best-known and most documented trial, that of Jane Wenham at the 1712 Hertford assizes, also exemplifies the prominent role that the better sorts of people might take on in order to propel witchcraft cases forward in the face of judicial reluctance. In the Wenham case, the interests of the prosecutors, some local clergymen, were rather loftier than those of the Eastchurch family in the Bideford case: finding an opportunity to combat impiety and popery, as well as scepticism of witchcraft. Phyllis J. Guskin comments that the high social standing of these clergymen was probably the "key element" in the jury's decision of guilt.[68]

Both cases, however, are revealing not only of the presence of superstition in every stratum of society, or of local power relations, but also of the ways in which popular and traditional beliefs and suspicions were manipulated by elites, clergymen and legal authorities alike. Witnesses testifying against the Bideford witches registered existing mistrust of the three women, one of

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[67] Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 58-102. See also Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," 54.
[68] Guskin, "The Context of Witchcraft," 61.

whom confessed to practicing witchcraft for over twenty years, and to have caused several injuries and deaths;[69] Jane Wenham had been suspected of witchcraft for decades, and multiple deponents attributed livestock losses and property damage to her and seemed immediately to suspect her in the event of mysterious occurrences.[70] When previously a preponderance of evidence of this nature would have held more legal weight, and even accounted for a major or sole charge in an indictment, the juridical emphasis on the diabolical contract, serious illness, or death rendered more traditional allegations almost legally void. It is important to note that the subordination of traditional beliefs had always been a feature of witch trials to a degree; local suspicions had to conform to legal standards, as well as the "political and theological concerns of the elite which informed and shaped the juridical forms," meaning that many elements of accusations, specifically those pertaining to suspicions of evil activities too intangible to fall under the purview of the legal system—flying, affecting the weather, causing ships to sink—would ultimately be carved out upon initiation of legal proceedings.[71]

In the preface to his narrative account of the examination and trial of Jane Wenham in 1712, in which he himself was a witness, Francis Bragge urged the reader to suspend their disbelief at the "extraordinary" nature of the evidence presented despite its mostly being circumstantial, reasoning that "positive Witnesses to a Contract with the Devil"—at the time the most persuasive, and least attainable, proof of witchcraft—was an unreasonable expectation. Bragge then

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[69] *A True and Impartial Relation of the Informations Against Three Witches* (London: Printed by Freeman Collins, 1682), 19-32; *The Tryal, Condemnation, and Execution of Three Witches* (London: Printed for J. Deacon, 1682), 2.
[70] 515.I.6.(28.), British Library, "An account of the tryal … and condemnation of J. W. on an indictment of Witchcraft, etc.," 1712; Francis Bragge, *A full and impartial account of the discovery of sorcery and witchcraft, practis'd by Jane Wenham of Walkerne in Hertfordshire* (London, Printed for E. Curll: 1712), 1, 14, 23-4. Similarly, in Scotland, most women accused as witches had had longstanding prior reputations for witchcraft: Julian Goodare, "Women and the Witch-hunt in Scotland," *Social History* 23, no. 3 (1998), 291.
[71] James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 36; Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," 51.

emphasized the sheer number and credibility of the witnesses, most of whom ostensibly had no clear connection to Wenham or anything to gain from her conviction and whose testimony was largely consistent, as well as the "Unaccountableness" of the facts, which could only be explained by witchcraft.[72] A number of other pamphlets about the trial, some published in response to Bragge's, undermined these claims to the witnesses' indifference and argued in favour of 'natural' explanations for the established facts of the case.[73]

In his care to convince his readership of the legitimacy of his account, Bragge demonstrated his awareness of the current of scepticism surrounding witch trials and used the familiar, legal language of matters of fact to appeal to the reader's sense of rationality and conscience, making note of those observers who "did … acknowledge themselves surprizingly convinced, their Prejudices giving Way to the Testimony of their Reason and Senses," and of those for whom nothing short of Wenham transforming herself into various animals in front of them would be proof enough.[74] Like many pamphleteers trying to reach a wide readership, Bragge also understood the importance of positioning himself as a trustworthy authority on the subject without appearing to cleave to biases or preconceptions, though, given the ensuing spate of responses and rebuttals, his success in this is debatable. Though fantastical and sensationalist language of the sort that Bragge employed would attract interest and sales, not to mention criticism, it would serve primarily to reinforce or reproduce existing beliefs rather than convince a sceptic.

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[72] Bragge, *A full and impartial account*, Preface.
[73] See, for example, *A full confutation of witchcraft: more particularly of the depositions against Jane Wenham, lately condemned for a witch* (London: Printed for J. Baker, 1712); *The impossibility of witchcraft, plainly proving, from Scripture and reason, that there never was a witch* (London: Printed for J. Baker, 1712); Author of 'The impossibility of witchcraft, &c.', *The impossibility of witchcraft further demonstrated* (London: Printed for J. Baker, 1712).
[74] Bragge, *A full and impartial account*, Preface.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, certainty seemed increasingly impossible to achieve in the minds of jurists and legal commentators. The development and entrenchment of the legal norms and processes for proving matters of fact led to a high degree of empirical scrutiny of the evidence presented in courts. When that evidence was fantastical, hard to corroborate, hearsay, or circumstantial—which was often the case in witch trials—jurors and judges could not reasonably achieve moral certainty as to the guilt of the accused witch. Even when, in rare cases, material evidence was presented, it could be rather easily discredited. For instance, it was revealed in the trial of Richard Hathaway that he had gone to great lengths, over the course of his specious illness, to counterfeit the symptoms of bewitchment, one of which being the painful voiding of pins. The deposition of William Bateman, a gentleman summoned by the parish minister Dr. Martin to assist in his attempts to uncover Hathaway's fraud, related his discovery of the ways in which Hathaway had hidden pins, some oddly bent or rusted, on his person—perhaps even swallowing some—for easy access when vomiting. When Hathaway's arms were restrained, his vomit was clear of pins.[75]

Justices of the peace and judges, for their part, were increasingly conscious of the urgency of impartiality, especially as the conditions for witchcraft prosecutions became more and more exclusive. Cases which did not involve either serious injury or death struggled to proceed to trial as early as the 1660s, many ended in acquittal, and in the first decades of the eighteenth century even a grand jury was reluctant to indict regardless of the "sheer strength of community opinion," despite the frequency with which grand juries sent cases to trial during the latter half of the seventeenth century.[76] While jurors may have sent a proportion of these cases to trial in order to

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[75] *Tryal of Richard Hathaway*, 10. On the expelling of pins by the bewitched victim, see also Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter*, 181, 184, and *passim*.
[76] Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 93-94; Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials*, 262, cited in idem. See also Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," 49.

mollify accusers and their supporters, knowing that they had a slim chance of conviction, Gaskill posits that in actuality, jurors—both of pretrial hearings and trials themselves—probably also believed that witchcraft existed, but inconclusive or deficient evidence inhibited attaining moral certainty.[77]

Perspectives such as these were part of mainstream discourses as well. An anonymous pamphlet published as a response to Bragge's sought to dissect the latter's assumptions and arguments with "all that Fairness and Impartiality, that may be thought reasonable in one, who desires only to be well inform'd."[78] This pamphleteer contended that Bragge may have misrepresented the truth of a number of facts, especially those revealed in the testimonies of the individuals most closely affected by Wenham's alleged acts of malefic witchcraft. Bragge's principal mistake, said the author, was in attributing greater importance to these testimonies regardless of whether or not they were corroborated by "indifferent and credible Witnesses," the probability of their being exaggerated or embellished, and the difficulty of rationally interpreting and relating events or sensory experiences when one was in the midst of a fit or a trance.[79]

While they conceded that many of the events described during the proceedings certainly strained credulity, the pamphleteer further challenged Bragge's assertion that witchcraft could be the only logical explanation. The improbable physical feats apparently performed by Matthew Gilston and Anne Thorne, two servants claiming to have been bewitched by Wenham, were either insufficiently proven by themselves or other witnesses, or too ambiguously related by Bragge to figure as reliable facts of witchcraft. For example, Anne Thorn claimed to have run half a mile within about seven minutes on an injured leg in pursuit of a bundle of sticks, a fact which either

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[77] Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 4.
[78] *Hertfordshire Witchcraft Consider'd*, 2.
[79] *Ibid.*, 3.

was not quantified by herself or any other witness, or was, but not to Bragge's satisfaction; either way, he did not articulate how the distance and speed at which Anne Thorn travelled were calculated. This inexactitude undermined Bragge's certainty. Furthermore, even if Anne Thorn had done exactly as she had testified, there were other, perhaps more reasonable, natural explanations, one of which being the "*Muscular* Force" so often brought on by "*Nervous Disorders*," namely, the fits she claimed to have suffered.[80]

The pamphleteer's rationalization of apparent somatic impossibilities is enhanced by their normalization of such actions and behaviours, as they may well have been common enough for most ordinary people to have observed them in the course of daily life. It would be difficult to determine how ordinary people might have interpreted or pathologized these episodes, especially considering how many such episodes likely went unrecorded, for whatever reason; what proportion were linked explicitly to witchcraft; the highly gendered perception of hysteria and distemper; and geographical disparities in mentality and medicine, most importantly between urban and rural geographies. Jonathan Barry remarks that the sometimes seizure-like conditions and symptoms of bewitchment and possession may have been commonly attributed to witchcraft because they were so often instances "in which families lost control of what they should have been able to control (their nerves, bodies, environment)."[81] This is consistent with Lyndal Roper's observation that early modern people "expressed their mental turmoil in the idiom of the demonic."[82] The caveat was that as the seventeenth century drew to a close, the currency of this idiom was gradually diminishing.

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[80] *Ibid.*, 7. Emphasis in original.
[81] Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 273.
[82] Roper, *The Witch in the Western Imagination*, 175.

Demonic possession and bewitchment were familiar enough by the turn of the seventeenth century that people could easily recognize cases or even convincingly fake it. Possession and bewitchment were thus also subject to scepticism: while most people agreed that some cases were genuine, it was also apparent that others were simply misdiagnosed melancholy or imposture, or more rarely, falsifications.[83] However, between two essentially unprovable alternatives, witchcraft may have been the preferred option when physicians were unable to discern the cause of such an ailment or to properly cure it, or if their medical diagnosis was rejected by the victim or their community. Witchcraft was well understood and could be dealt with, whereas the causes of many illnesses were and could not.[84] Regardless of these considerations, the pamphleteer's rational criticism of Bragge's arguments and appeal to the reader's own observable reality echoes the thrust of contemporary natural philosophical inquiry. Philosophies of medicine throughout the eighteenth century increasingly pathologized witchcraft, bewitchment, and possession as delusion, melancholy, hypochondria, and so on; and physicians increasingly approached these disorders and their treatments in physiological rather than spiritual terms.[85]

Popular justice

The customs and expectations of mutuality and obligation which animated local social relations also informed the actions of the early modern English crowd.[86] The element of disorder

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[83] Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter*, 141.
[84] Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness,* 216.
[85] Michael Hunter, *The Decline of Magic: Britain in the Enlightenment* (London: Yale University Press, 2020), 127-30.
[86] John Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), especially chs. 2 and 6.

endemic to local social relations was also present in the early modern crowd; and though, as historians have shown, early modern people found increasingly frequent recourse to injustices or ills through legal channels, customary and entrenched methods of "self-help" did not accordingly disappear. Memory and respect for the past, according to Andy Wood, were deeply meaningful features of early modern culture. For common people, as opposed to the gentry, this veneration of the past consisted less of the continuation of reputation and legacy than it did of the preservation of the bedrock of common ways of life, "as the medium through which folkloric traditions were communicated," and "as a way of making sense of the world."[87] Gaskill's argument that experiences of witchcraft "*stimulated* and *reaffirmed* collective values amid turbulent transitions"[88] takes on additional significance in light of Wood's emphasis on memory: not only does it affirm the self-regulatory importance of conflict and dispute to local social relations, but it firmly places witchcraft and witchcraft beliefs in cultural memory and reinforces their longevity. It posits that superstition or credulity cannot be reduced to ignorance, irreligion, or anti-modernity, but it can be interpreted as cultural preservation in a time of overwhelming uncertainty. However, the continuation during the eighteenth century of outbreaks of popular justice with witch beliefs and fears at their epicenter (perhaps exacerbated by plummeting prosecution rates and then the ceasing of prosecution altogether), though an indication of this longevity, were more explosive reactions of these witchcraft beliefs and could have more disordering effects on communities.

Traditional or customary methods of demonstrating guilt, such as scratching the accused witch in order to draw blood (also the "most common form of counter-magic in the early modern period"),[89] searching the accused's body for the devil's mark, 'swimming' or 'ducking' the

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[87] Andy Wood, "Deference, Paternalism and Popular Memory," 246.
[88] Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 230. Emphasis in original.
[89] Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 129-30.

accused, or weighing them against a bible, were gradually discarded by English courts over the course of the seventeenth century as either insufficient evidence or unlawful measures.[90] Ducking or swimming, also known as the ordeal by water, was one of a handful of methods of determining whether someone was a witch, a popular ritual throughout Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and in England specifically from the first quarter of the seventeenth century.[91] General practice was that the hands and feet of the accused person would be tied together, their body wrapped in a sheet and dipped into the water. The innocence of an accused witch who sank was thought to be vindicated; floating, however, was an indication of witchcraft. According to the *Daemonologie*, King James VI's tract on demonology and witchcraft first published in 1597, the accused witch floated because, by covenanting with the Devil, they had renounced their baptism: "the water shall refuse to receive them in her bosom, that have shaken off them the sacred water of Baptisme, and willfullie refused the benefit thereof."[92]

Ducking, which in first-hand accounts reads often like mob violence—and arguably, especially in the years following the 1736 Witchcraft Act, constituted collective attempts at retribution more so than pure evidence-seeking or discovery of the diabolical—gradually came to be condemned by authorities, including local religious figures, and members of the public, though not all in unison. Ducking was officially denounced during a Parliamentary Commission of Oyer and Terminer, held in 1645 in the midst of the highly controversial witch-hunts of Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne in Essex, though a number of learned texts from earlier in the

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[90] Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Evidence," 52-60. In the interest of consistency, the ordeal by water will hereafter be referred to as "ducking."
[91] Owen Davies locates the first recorded instance of ducking or swimming in England in 1612, with the swimming of Mary Sutton in Bedfordshire: Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 86.
[92] James VI, *Daemonologie*, 80.

seventeenth century had already established a degree of resistance to the validity of the practice.[93] The Commission's unequivocal condemnation of ducking, which was echoed by judges and justices of the peace, was not universally observed by local authorities, many of whom continued to allow the results of ducking to be used as evidence in witch trials.

Traditional beliefs and methods of proof and truth-seeking, while not entirely abandoned, gradually became obsolete as developments in English law, natural theological thought, and popular conceptions of witchcraft required a higher standard of rigour and precision than these methods could provide. Jane Wenham, upon being apprehended for witchcraft, begged Justice Henry Chauncy to allow her to be swum, so that she might demonstrate her innocence, but Chauncy demurred, on the grounds that such tests were "Illegal, and Unjustifiable."[94] It should be noted, however, that Chauncy's condemnation of one method did not extend to all others: he agreed to have Jane Wenham's body searched for evidence of a devil's mark. While not always taken as definitive proof of guilt, the presence of abnormal or uncommon marks or blemishes on already suspicious bodies could be persuasive. As Julia M. Garrett writes, the act of searching for markings in an accused witch's private parts legitimized public policing, scrutiny, and sexualization of women's bodies.[95] In the English context, the accused witch was disrobed and her body thoroughly examined by a group of women, usually neighbours and sometimes even kin of the accuser. This invasive inquest into a woman's sexual experiences was rendered legitimate by its "affiliations with legal authority."[96]

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[93] Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 89.
[94] Bragge, *A full and impartial account*, 12.
[95] Garrett, "Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge," 32.
[96] Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 191; Garrett, "Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge," 37. For an explanation of the searching procedure in contemporary Germany, in which the executioner was tasked with washing and intimately searching the accused witch's body, see Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 54.

Though it could easily be a humiliating experience for the accused witch, searching was for one thing not a health hazard as ducking could so easily be. As has been shown, the devil's mark had legal precedent—though contemporaries and earlier writers were certainly sceptical of this proof as well. Sir Robert Filmer's guidebook *An advertisement to the jury-men of England touching Witches*, first printed in 1653, discards the devil's mark as an adequate proof because the "having of an incurable, and insensible marke, or sore, shall be a presumption, or certaine signe of a witch."[97] It could be that in Jane Wenham's case, Chauncy believed in the devil's mark, but it is also possible that he approved the search because he simply had no other objection.

Ducking earned further judicial censure in 1712, when Lord Chief Justice Parker announced at the Essex summer assizes that thereafter, the ducking of a suspected witch resulting in their death would be treated as murder with intent.[98] Despite Parker's warning, ducking persisted as a ritualized activity throughout the eighteenth century and was rarely prosecuted except when resulting in the death of the accused witch. Remarking on the irony of elite disapproval of a practice that a century before had been endorsed by their predecessors, Owen Davies emphasizes the intensification of elite anxieties about law and order in the period. Indeed, instances of ducking and other instances of collective reactions to witchcraft were increasingly painted as riotous.[99]

A column appearing in the January 1731 issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine* related the swimming and consequent death of an elderly woman in Somersetshire, purportedly witnessed by "200 spectators huzzaing and abetting the riot."[100] The author, citing the coroner's subsequent

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[97] Robert Filmer, *An advertisement to the jury-men of England touching Witches* (London: Printed by I.G. for Richard Royston, 1653), 11.
[98] Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 89-90.
[99] *Ibid.*, 91.
[100] "Melancholy Effects of Credulity in Witchcraft," *The Gentleman's Magazine: or, Monthly Intelligencer*, no. 1 (January 1731), 29-30.

investigation of the incident, estimated that forty people were directly involved in the woman's assault; but most everyone examined refused to name the principal assailants, and ultimately, only three were charged with manslaughter.[101] The anonymous author of a 1737 letter to the editor of the *Whitehall Evening Post*, having witnessed the recent ducking of a sixty-year-old woman near Bedford, wrote of his attempt to defend the woman and convince the perpetrators of the "uncertainty of the Experiment." His arguments, he wrote, were in vain, as he himself "was very near being mob'd."[102]

Around thirty years later, another column in the same journal gave a sparse account of the swimming of a poor woman by a farmer in Cambridgeshire. The victim appears to have survived, but the perpetrator was to present himself at the next quarter sessions—on what charges it is unclear—thanks to the "humanity" of a local reverend who intervened.[103] Accounts such as these might perhaps demonstrate the dissatisfaction of common folk with the traditional legal channels for justice, the persistence of superstition amongst the common folk, the sublimation of social, economic, political, or religious tensions, or simply a collective preference for what was perceived as more tangible proof of guilt and a more expedient form of justice. Given the dynamism and peculiarity of local social relations, it would be impossible to generalize as to which of the above alternatives would have dominated, and it is likely that many of these tensions coexisted in the same locality.

These undercurrents of anxiety are also legible in surviving records of mob violence against alleged witches *without* the pretext of evidence-seeking; for example, Joan Best of Barnstaple in North Devon was charged in 1728 with assaulting Deborah Peard, a single woman whom Best

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[101] "Melancholy Effects," 30.
[102] "Extract of a Letter about the Tryal of a Witch," *Whitehall Evening Post* no. 3186 (July 1737).
[103] "Historical Chronicle," in *The Gentleman's Magazine: or, Monthly Intelligencer*, vol. 39 (August 1769), 411.

believed to have bewitched her husband John's milk. In her information presented to the mayor and a justice of the peace, Peard testified that Best attacked her in the street, "tore of her head Clothes & fetched the blood of [Peard] in Severall scars of her face," and that this attack summoned a "Great Mobb" of over one hundred people, which "wounded and bruised her in Severall parts of her body by means whereof she was in great Danger of her life." John Best, one of the few people Peard was able to positively identify, allegedly threatened to beat her "within an Inch of her life." Peard eventually reached and locked herself inside her home, but soon the mob returned, breaking down the door and dragging her into the street. Peard ultimately found shelter in a sympathetic neighbour's house, but said that if she had not, she "should have been murthered."[104]

Another example of this is relayed in the depositions given at the 1702 trial of Richard Hathaway of Southwark in Surrey, who was brought up on a charges of being a cheat and imposter for feigning bewitchment by and attempting to cause the death of Sarah Morduck.[105] Despite the efforts of Dr. Martin and a surgeon named Mr. Kensey, whom among others sought to expose Hathaway's trickery, the overwhelming public opinion of Southwark was firmly against Sarah Morduck. Hathaway, a blacksmith's apprentice, had a few years previously been pressured into taking a drink from Morduck, and soon after fallen dangerously ill such that he could neither eat nor drink and lost his sight. Though he was kept for several months at Saint Thomas' Hospital in Southwark and attended by numerous physicians, his bewildering condition was eventually deemed incurable; "at length, he became a meer Shadow."[106] The only way he seemed able to find

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[104] B1/0/2260, North Devonshire Record Office, "Information Deborah Peard of Barnstaple, singlewoman Assault by Joan wife of John Best of Barnstaple, butcher, occasioned by belief that Peard was a witch," 1728.
[105] The four pamphlet accounts of the Hathaway case are discussed and analyzed in terms of textuality in great depth in Lara Apps, "Motive Hunting in the Case of Richard Hathaway," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 1, no. 1 (2012), 72-99.
[106] *A Full and True Account of the Apprehending and Taking of Mrs. Sarah Moordike, who is accused for a witch* (London: Printed for John Alkin, 1701).

relief was by scratching Sarah Morduck's arm hard enough to draw blood, which allowed him to briefly regain his senses and appetite—though it also caused him to vomit and excrete pins—before inevitably deteriorating again.

The general hostility toward Sarah Morduck reached boiling point a few times over the course of Hathaway's alleged bewitchment: for example, Dr. Martin recalled a "great hurly-burly" at the parish church in early February 1701, where the service had been interrupted because Sarah Morduck was in attendance. The Sexton removed her to the vestry, where soon after a crowd began to coalesce. Sarah Morduck began to cry and insisted she had done nothing to cause the disturbance. Dr. Martin dispersed the crowd, locking her in the vestry, but when he returned after the sermon to find her gone, the Sexton explained that she had asked him to let her go; if she stayed until the service ended, she said, she "should be torn to pieces."[107] Dr. Martin later received thanks from Morduck's brother, James Hearne, for "preserving his Sister from the Mob."[108] Sarah Morduck was thereafter intermittently threatened and harassed by various townsfolk, including Hathaway's employer Mr. Welling.

Dr. Martin and Mr. Kensey, at whose home Hathaway convalesced for a time, unconvinced by Hathaway's symptoms, conducted their own independent tests of Hathaway's purported condition and concluded that it was fraudulent. On one of the occasions when Sarah Morduck was brought to be scratched by Hathaway, Dr. Martin at the last minute exchanged her arm for that of Mrs. Johnson, a neighbour who had acquiesced to assisting in Dr. Martin's experiment. Hathaway, believing Mrs. Johnson's arm to be that of Sarah Morduck's, scratched it, drew blood, then opened his eyes and began to speak as though he had been cured. It was only then that he realized his

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[107] *Tryal of Richard Hathaway,* 5.
[108] *Ibid.,* 11.

mistake. The room was full of silent observers of whose presence Hathaway had not been informed. Hathaway began feigning ill again, and that night, "half a Dozen lusty Fellows" assaulted Morduck in her home. Though Hearne endeavoured to have some of his sister's assailants charged, the justice of the peace to whom he applied determined that there was not sufficient evidence.[109]

The account of the assault trial provides more description of the brutal beating of Sarah Morduck on this occasion, as well as a number of others. After breaking in to her house, a large group of people took Sarah Morduck to the home of Thomas Wellyn, Hathaway's employer and one of the defendants. There, Hathaway scratched Morduck's arm and the other defendants, Elizabeth Wellyn and Elizabeth Willoughby, "in a very barbarous manner beat her, pulled out her Teeth, tore her Face, Hair and Cloaths, threw her on the ground, stampt upon her Belly, and threw her into the street, where she lay as murdered until taken into a Neighbours House."[110]

Later that year, after Sarah Morduck had fled to London to escape her neighbours' abuse, a young boy called out "there goes the Old Witch" upon seeing Morduck at the Newgate market, and the "fury of the Rabble" convinced Morduck that she would have been killed were it not for a group of women who helped her take cover in the ale-house in which she was lodging. She continued to be harassed by Hathaway and his friends until finally they caught her "in a riotous manner," and she was arrested and examined by Sir Thomas Lane, a magistrate, for having bewitched Hathaway. After being searched for a witch's mark and giving a demonstration of the curative powers of scratching, she was sent to jail to await trial.[111]

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[109] *Tryal of Richard Hathaway,* 11-12.
[110] *Ibid.*, 28.
[111] *Ibid.*, 25, 29-30; *The apprehending and taking of Mrs. Sarah Moordike*, 2.

The only remaining official record of Morduck's trial at the Guildford Assizes is the indictment, and it appears only to have been reported on briefly in the *London Post*, but we know from Hathaway's own trial that Morduck was acquitted and Hathaway committed as a cheat and impostor. Despite the acquittal, and though it "appeared plainly" that there was no evidence against her, Morduck continued to be persecuted by the community and had reason to fear for her own life.[112] Even Dr. Martin had drawn considerable ire from parishioners, including the Wellings, whose association with Hathaway had brought them ruin, and been accused of taking bribes for giving information that helped exonerate Sarah Morduck at her trial. When the threat to Morduck's life did not abate, Hathaway's trial was moved up and he was removed to the care of Mr. Kensey in November 1701.[113] The initiation of legal proceedings against Hathaway seemed not to turn his neighbours against him but, rather, to further inspire them to his cause. A collection was even set up at the parish church to provide him support during the trial.[114]

These accounts of violence also demonstrate the willingness of important leaders and officials, including religious figures and justices of the peace, to condemn acts of extralegal justice even when it came to witchcraft. These instances of what might charitably be called folk justice, though "diffused throughout the communal and legal structures of early modern England,"[115] were no longer so broadly sanctioned. However, the impression of many accounts of these incidents is perhaps that punishment frequently did not reach some or many of the participants; as Owen Davies notes, there appear to be only two extant cases of prosecution for the ducking of accused

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[112] *The apprehending and taking of Mrs. Sarah Moordike*, 2.
[113] *Tryal of Richard Hathaway*, 26.
[114] *Ibid.*, 2.
[115] Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers*, 73.

witches post-1736.[116] It would hardly be reasonable to assume that ducking and other rituals had suddenly lost currency when the tenacity of popular belief in witchcraft is so well-documented.

The trial of Thomas Colley, a chimney sweep, at the Hertford Assizes in July 1751, was the first of these cases. Thomas Colley and two other men, William Humbles and Charles Young, were indicted for the assault and murder of Ruth Osborne, a sixty-nine-year-old poor woman suspected of witchcraft in the parish of Tring. The most substantial coverage of the trial is provided by a pamphlet published by the Little Old Bailey, anonymously authored by a spectator. The pamphlet transcribes the witness depositions, defence, and the jury's decision in Colley's case, and is appended by the account of John Osborne, Ruth's widower, which had not been brought up in court. The trial further received some brief attention from periodicals, mostly published in London, and was sporadically revived in print over the following two decades.[117]

The Osbornes had long been ostracized by their neighbours, whom, according to John, were unusually credulous and quick to suspect them in cases of sudden illness, unexpected losses of cattle, or other mysterious occurrences. Here he may have been referring to an incident reported by *The Scots Magazine* in which Ruth, begging a dairy farmer for buttermilk in Gubblecot, some two miles away from Tring, angrily told the farmer upon being denied that "the pretender would have him and his hogs too," a statement which suggests that the Osbornes may also have been distrusted for their religious or political predilections. When shortly after this the farmer's calves, and the farmer himself, became "distempered" and suffered from fits, he consulted a cunning woman on the advice of some neighbours who were convinced that Ruth Osborne had bewitched

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[116] Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 95.

[117] A report of the ducking of two elderly women in Leicester published in the *Read's Weekly Journal* in June 1760 compares the incident to the events in Tring nearly a decade prior, though it erroneously states that both John and Ruth were seventy years old and that John was also killed: "News," *Read's Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* 5097 (28 June 1760).

him. The cunning woman prescribed a constant guard around the farmer's property and the use of counter-bewitchment charms, a regimen which apparently "produced no considerable effects."[118] Though John Osborne was a hale man of fifty-six, popular distrust of him and his wife rendered them perpetually unable to contract stable employment and they were forced to rely on parish support, and John to labour in the parish workhouse, to cope.[119]

The assault for which Colley, Humbles, and Young were bound for the assizes took place on 22 April 1751 and consisted of the violent ducking of the Osbornes. By the accounts of six deponents at Colley's trial, all of whom had been in the crowd on 22 April, the ducking of Ruth and John Osborne was more an example of ritualized violence rather than witch-finding. The Osbornes' ordeal did not seem to have been incited by any particular offence, but nor was it spontaneous: William Dell, the town crier of Hamel Hempstead in Hertfordshire, deposed that on Thursday 18 April a man named Nichols paid him to announce on Hamel Hempstead's market day that the Osbornes were to be "publickly duck'd" the following Monday "for their wicked Crimes."[120] The announcement was also made at Winslow and Leighton-Buzzard.[121] The assault was abetted, depending on the source, by between five and ten thousand people. According to the trial pamphlet, several witnesses, including the overseer of the poor and the master of the workhouse, testified to "a large mob of 5000 people and more," but notices in periodicals including the *General Advertiser* reporting on the outcome of Colley's trial suggest that "upwards of 10,000

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[118] "History," *The Scots Magazine* 13 (1 June 1751), 305. For a discussion of the "unbewitching practices" of cunning-folk, see Davies, *Popular Magic*, especially ch. 4.
[119] *The Tryal of Thomas Colley, at the Assizes at Hertford* (London: Printed for T. Brown, in the *Little Old Bailey*, 1751), 6-7. For a discussion of the development of parish workhouses and their conditions in England during the eighteenth century, see Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 184-91.
[120] *Tryal of Thomas Colley*, 2.
[121] "History," 305.

People had assembled together."[122] The spirit of these accounts is more significant than the exact size of the mob; whether or not there truly were five or even ten thousand people clamouring for the Osbornes' punishment on that day in April, that the crowd was large and boisterous can probably be taken as fact.

Matthew Barton, the parish's overseer of the poor, heard the announcement of the Osbornes' impending ordeal. Believing them to be good, honest people, Barton endeavoured to assist them by providing them shelter in the workhouse. On the night of Sunday 21 April, Jonathan Tomkins, the master of the workhouse, further attempted to protect the Osbornes by clandestinely removing them to the vestry room of the church, "thinking that the Sanctity of the Place would have some awe upon the Mob." The next morning, the agitation of the assembled townsfolk was so great that they invaded the workhouse, searched it from top to bottom, and even checked the ceiling. Finding no sign of the Osbornes, "some cried out and swore, that if [the Osbornes] … were not delivered to them, they would not only burn the Workhouse down, but the whole town of Tring to Ashes." Making good on their promises of vandalism, they managed to tear down a wall and pull out all the windows before Tomkins eventually surrendered the Osbornes, who were taken away "in great Triumph."[123]

The events of the ducking at Marlston-Meere were related in the depositions of six witnesses, all of whom singled out Thomas Colley as a principal actor and instigator, and in the appended interview with John Osborne. The Osbornes were first brought to Gubblecot, and then transported to Marlston-Meere when the Gubblecut pond was deemed insufficient. They were then brought to an empty house, stripped of their clothes, bundled separately into sheets, tied with rope,

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[122] *Tryal of Thomas Colley*, 3; "News," *General Advertiser* 5236 (1 August 1751).
[123] *Tryal of Thomas Colley*, 3.

and alternately dragged through the pond thrice each. When Rose failed to sink in the water, Thomas Colley waded into the pond with a large stick to turn Ruth "up and down several times." Joseph Garnet observed that the assembled people were "infatuated" in their belief that this proved Rose's guilt, apparently not realizing that the water in the pond was less than three feet deep.[124]

The third time Ruth was dragged into the pond, Colley pulled her back and forth until the sheet came untied and he "pushed her on the Breast with his Stick, which she endeavoured … to catch hold of, but he pull'd it away." John Humphries, a wheeler, deposed that "that was the last Time he perceived any Life in her." He also saw Colley later collect money from the crowd "as a Reward for the great Pains he had taken in shewing them Sport in ducking the old Witch."[125] After Ruth Osborne was discovered to be dead, the ducking ceased. Ruth's corpse and John, who was so badly hurt "as not to have any Sense of the World for some Time," were brought to a house, where they were laid in a bed together for an indeterminate time.[126]

Colley, who had no council and no supporting witnesses for his trial, gave a brief statement in his own defence that he had been a neutral spectator and had only stepped in once he'd decided the mob's treatment of the Osbornes, for whom he bore "good Will," had gone too far. The money he'd collected, he said, had been in exchange for his assistance to the Osbornes. With little deliberation, the jury determined Colley to be guilty of assault and murder and he was sentenced to death by hanging.[127] Though he had apparently received no support during his trial, the verdict was met with a great deal of popular discontent. The *General Advertiser*, *General Evening Post*, *London Evening Post*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, and *London Morning Petty Post* all reported that

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[124] *Ibid.*, 4-5.
[125] *Tryal of Thomas Colley*, 4.
[126] *Ibid.*, 6.
[127] *Ibid.*

the date of Colley's execution, originally 17 August, had been postponed by a week due to a general outcry against the judgement, with enough people "declaring they would attempt to rescue [Colley] from the Power of the Law" that a guard consisting of 108 soldiers and seven officers was ordered to escort the procession.[128]

Colley's execution was ultimately carried out the morning of Saturday 24 August 1751, at Tring, just outside Marlston-Meere, the residents of which having petitioned that Colley "might not hang so near their Houses." Several thousand people reportedly gathered to watch the convoy, and observers noted that were it not for the soldiers the spectators "no doubt would have obstructed the Execution had they not been in [*sic*] intimidated."[129] Colley requested a statement be read in which he recanted his views on witchcraft, expressed regret over Ruth Osborne's death, and begged for mercy. The statement was widely reprinted in London periodicals. After his execution, Thomas Colley's body was left there in chains.[130]

The events revealed at Colley's trial, and in the other accounts of popular violence above, demonstrate not only the concurrence of intellectual and judicial scepticism and the persistence of witchcraft fears in popular culture, or the conviction of these fears as the impetus for mob justice, whether spontaneous or orchestrated; they also demonstrate the very material threat to social order that witchcraft embodied. Beyond the implications of sin, corruption, and alterity that constituted

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[128] "News," *General Advertiser* 5251 (19 August 1751); "Country-News," *General Evening Post* 2763 (17-20 August 1751); "News," *London Evening Post* 3721 (24-27 August 1751); "Historical Chronicle, August 1751," *The Gentleman's Magazine: or, Monthly Intelligencer* 21 (August 1751), 378; "Extract of a Letter from Tring in Hertfordshire dated August 25," *London Morning Penny Post* (26-30 August 1751).
[129] "News," *London Morning Petty Post*.
[130] "News," *General Evening Post*; "Historical Chronicle," 378. On capital punishment, see J. M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), especially ch. 9; Peter King and Richard Ward, "Rethinking the Bloody Code in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Capital Punishment at the Centre and on the Periphery," *Past & Present*, no. 228 (August 2015), 159-205; Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially ch. 2; idem, "The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons," in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England*, ed. Douglas Hay et al (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 65-118.

witchcraft discourse, beyond the *maleficium* itself, the provocation of English men and women to extra-legal violence, sometimes to fatal effect, could deeply disrupt communities and leave lasting consequences.[131]

Published accounts illustrate other shifts in tone and perspective in discussions of witchcraft. Columnists and pamphleteers might deploy rational and theological argumentation to illustrate their convictions, depending on the extent of their scepticism—even in the first half of the eighteenth century, some vocal individuals would go so far as to cast the entirety of witchcraft into doubt, while many others might simply discredit the popular methods of proof—but they all shared a tendency to cast aspersions on the credulity of common folk, highlighting the apparent irrationality of popular rituals intended to "prove" a suspected witch's guilt. Religious and legal authorities would, similarly, complicate what had once been a ubiquitous narrative, delivering sermons against witch hunting, prosecuting those who had engaged in attacks against suspected witches. In condemning instances both of folk and official justice, the pulpit and the bench, writers, clergymen, magistrates, and other elites sometimes framed suspected witches as victims or objects of pity and in doing so, both afforded them the benefit of the doubt and reframed witchcraft discourse to alternatively scapegoat and advocate for relief for poor populations. In fact, witchcraft increasingly came to be associated with poverty and vagrancy over the course of the later seventeenth century, a period throughout which massive population growth and broad political and

[131] See Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter*, especially ch. 2; Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 225-32. For these considerations in early modern Europe more broadly, see Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London and New York: HarperCollins and Viking, 1996).

religious turbulence pressurized local social relations and anxieties about hostility and suspicion raised doubts about the longevity of neighbourliness.[132]

[132] See Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Keith Wrightson, "Mutualities and Obligations: Changing Social Relationships in Early Modern England," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 139 (2006), 157-94; and the essays in *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric*, ed. Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000).

CHAPTER 2

Ideologies of Poverty, Gender, and Witchcraft

The early modern English witch can be defined in shades of alterity: most witches, either accused or confessed, were already marginal members of society, and the ways in which they inhabited space and enacted agency unsettled an already instable *status quo*. If female, she was usually poor, unmarried or widowed, deformed, elderly; she might have engaged, consensually or not, in sexual congress with the Devil or his agents; she might perform her gender in unsanctioned ways or exhibit masculine characteristics.[1] A 1779 calendar of prisoners noted that "we never hear of a young witch"[2]; an anonymous contributor to a 1736 issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, questioning the disproportionate number of women accused to be witches, posited that elderly women were typical candidates for witchcraft accusations because they were already the most "detested and unpity'd Creature[s] under the Sun."[3]

The awareness and delimitation of differences in status and power were tightly woven into this social fabric, though they were also dynamic and fluid. Historical perceptions of the seventeenth century as a period of sustained social, economic, religious, and political instability and uncertainty provide a lens through which to view and interpret the continuities and changes in the ways in which early modern English men and women constituted themselves and their places in the world in relation to their immediate and imagined communities.[4] Articulations of social

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[1] Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 172; Dolan, "Witch Wives," 450. For the image of the female witch in its European contexts, see Roper, *Witch Craze*, especially ch. 7; Rublack, *The Astronomer and the Witch*, 127-28.
[2] *The malefactor's register; Or, the Newgate and Tyburn calendar* (London: Printed for Alexander Hogg, 1779), 370.
[3] "Artifices of Witchmongers," *The Gentleman's Magazine: or, Monthly Intelligencer*, vol. 6 (March 1736), 137.
[4] See Wrightson, *English Society*, especially chs. 2 and 6. Benedict Anderson introduced the concept of the imagined community in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

difference both customary and nascent, though to a degree contingent upon the complex particularities of space, time, and social structure, are acutely legible in the discourses and quotidian experiences of and with poverty, charity, and witchcraft.

The urgency of economic and social instability was difficult to ignore in the early modern parish, as disparities between the socioeconomic sorts widened, England's vagrant population swelled, ideals of charity and neighbourliness were under constant negotiation, and relations of power and authority between sorts of people and people and institutions were in constant adaptation. In early modern English society, order was "the subject of ongoing, fitful, and contested negotiations."[5] Malcolm Gaskill has argued that the "enmity and breaches of charity" that led to witchcraft accusations within communities should be understood by historians as reflective of the basic nature of local social relations, rather than simply an indication of the erosion of neighbourliness, a phenomenon perceived and lamented by contemporaries. According to Peter Elmer and Robin Briggs, though the focalization of common interest around witchcraft accusations or prosecutions could lead to "acute polarization," it could just as often have a positive influence on social cohesion.[6] Both of these arguments are consistent with the findings of social historians like Keith Wrightson, who emphasizes the centrality and inevitability of hostility and dispute in local society: the "constant dynamism" of communities was, in fact, often the result of instances and aftermaths of conflict, an "essential feature of the constant process of readjustment of social relationships at the local level." Order and balance in society thus depended to some degree upon

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[5] Richard Connors, "Measure for Measure: Social and Legal Thought in Early Modern England," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2018), 429; See also Wrightson, *English Society*, especially ch. 2; Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
[6] Gaskill, "Witchcraft in Early Modern Kent," 287; Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics*, 7; Robin Briggs, "'Many Reasons Why': Witchcraft and the Problem of Multiple Explanation," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 56.

the interplay of "tension and co-operation, of differentiation and identification," as well as collective commitments to shared values.[7]

Among these values were neighbourliness, mutuality, and charity, which remained aspirational but were, in practice, threatened throughout the pressures and upheavals of the seventeenth century.[8] They may have retained their cultural currency precisely because of the realities of recurrent community discord, aggravated by changing economic conditions, material inequalities, and perceptions of poverty, which were becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. These new pressures on social order were accordingly reflected in the articulations of cultural differentiation and identification that Wrightson has collectively termed the language of "sorts." This language, an informal alternative to the traditional language of social hierarchy, had by the early seventeenth century become "conventionalised" and "stereotyped" such that it prevailed into the eighteenth century as the dominant means for people, in increasingly exclusive and oppositional ways, to distinguish between social strata. Operating primarily through juxtaposition, the language of sorts consisted of clear distinctions between the common or lower sorts and the richer or better sorts. It similarly separated the ignorant and vulgar from the wise and learned. As operationalized by the better sorts, it simultaneously delimited power inequalities and pigeon-holed the lower sorts as homogeneous, uncivil, and ignorant.[9]

The historiography of witchcraft has, over the last three decades or so, broadly indicated that occult beliefs and credulity of witchcraft in post-Restoration England were not incompatible

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[7] Wrightson, *English Society*, 69-70.
[8] Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 215; John Walter, "Public Transcripts, Popular Agency and the Politics of Subsistence in Early Modern England," in *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society*, 123-48.
[9] Wrightson, *English Society*, 25-46; idem, "'Sorts of People'," 31-40; idem, "The Social Order of Early Modern England: Three Approaches," in *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure*, ed. Lloyd Bonefield, R.M. Smith, and Keith Wrightson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 177-202; idem, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 289-303 and *passim*.

with the use of witchcraft accusations as outlets for hostility and tension.[10] The two could quite comfortably coexist, even into the eighteenth century, which saw a dramatic diminution of witchcraft trials, the prevalence of elite distaste for common superstition, and in 1736, the repeal of the witchcraft statute which had been in force for over a century. Discourses and accounts of witchcraft continued to appear in eighteenth-century newspapers, court records, and learned texts, though slightly less frequently and with increasing distortion in the decades following the 1736 legislation as witch trials slipped from living memory. This chapter, in line with the general consensus among historians that local social contexts were important in driving witchcraft accusations, will explore the role of increasing antipathy toward the poor in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which was accompanied by practical and discursive reworkings of the norms of obligations and mutuality, and which intersected with gender norms and gendered understandings of emotion, in the fomentation of witchcraft accusations and trials.

Gender, social order, and attitudes towards poverty

While Protestantism may have broadly offered improved prospects for married women compared with Catholicism, women, and women's work, remained subordinate within social and household structures.[11] Marriage, in Protestant terms, was an institution both secular and holy; the

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[10] See for example Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 429-48; idem, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 118-19; Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 107-11; Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 223; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 638-80.

[11] Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families*, 186; Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 301-44; Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500-1800* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 137-76; Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1993), 383-414.

positions of women remained inferior to those of their husbands and fathers.[12] While Protestant women and men were held to be equal in the eyes of God, it was the will of both God and secular authorities that women were subordinate to husbands and fathers within the household. Mutuality between husband and wife insofar as marital obligations were concerned did not constitute equality, as the household, like the state, was configured "within a context of ultimate male authority."[13] This patriarchal organization of the household "enabled actions and attitudes that may today be understood as violence."[14]

Female subordination in the household and society was not simply a precept of religious doctrine or patriarchal social organization: it extended also to crime and punishment. Women were disproportionately prosecuted for scolding, infanticide, and witchcraft, the most distinctly "feminine" crimes.[15] These, as well as those crimes for which women received different, and usually harsher, punishments than did men, were transgressions of the social order and established norms of female behaviour.[16] This is visible in some ways even in the historiography of early modern criminality; Garthine Walker points out that historians have tended to reproduce modern assumptions and stereotypes about gender by drawing implicit distinctions between "feminine" and "masculine" crimes, without interrogating the deeply gendered and masculinized conceptions of criminality at play. This, according to Walker, reinforces the idea that female criminality is "an

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[12] The traditional consignment of duties such as childbearing, rearing, and running the household to women was supported by religious doctrine, though Patricia Crawford notes that these roles and the religious prescriptions and advisements about them "created conflicts" for women; for instance, while women were expected and encouraged to love their husbands and children, too much love was inappropriate and would "imperil their salvation." Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families*, 186.
[13] Wrightson, *English Society*, 108; Satu Lidman, "Violence or justice? Gender-specific structures and strategies in early modern Europe," *The History of the Family* 18, no. 3 (2013), 242.
[14] Lidman, "Violence or justice?," 242.
[15] On infanticide see Laura Gowing, "Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past & Present*, no. 156 (1997), 87-115.
[16] Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, 23, 34; Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker, "Introduction," in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London: University College London Press, 1994), 5.

aberration of the norms of feminine behaviour."[17] The "scold," for instance—the term used to denote a woman who engaged in antisocial and abusive speech—was a troublemaker and a menace to her community. "[The] feminization of deviant speech,"[18] scolding was not exclusively a feminine offence, but the gender double standard baked into the social and legal structures of early modern England made it a more permanent and damning brand for the female scold.[19]

Punishments for crimes not explicitly associated with women also tended to be more serious, most especially when the crimes defied social or moral norms. Spousal murder, for example, was prosecuted as petty treason and punishable by burning when committed by women, as it constituted the deliberate defiance of religious and social order: "killing one's husband directly assaulted godly hierarchies; murdering one's wife did not."[20] Similarly, domestic violence when carried out by a woman subverted the natural ordering of the household and, by extension, of society, while male domestic violence was an expression of their "natural authority" and usually justifiable in the pursuit of order.[21]

Witchcraft was similarly disruptive and disordering; an inversion of God's authority, religious morality, and social bonds; and an expression of aberrance or deviance which was frequently reflected in the material circumstances and somatic features of the stereotypical female witch. The general impression from extant trial records, pamphlets, newspapers and periodicals, and learned texts is that most accused witches were older women experiencing a degree of poverty.

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[17] Walker, *Crime, gender, and social order*, 4; see also Kermode and Walker, "Introduction," 5-6.
[18] Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 141.
[19] Walker, *Crime, gender, and social order*, especially ch. 3; David Cressy, *Dangerous Talk: Scandalous, Seditious and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19 and *passim*; Martin Ingram, "'Scolding Women Cucked or Washed': A Crisis in Gender Relations in Early Modern England?," in *Women, Crime and the Courts*, 47-80.
[20] Walker, *Crime, gender, and social order*, 138-48, quotation on 138; see also Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, 23. Note that spousal murder when committed by men was simply prosecuted as murder.
[21] Walker, *Crime, gender, and social order*, 140.

Women accused as witches were also often unmarried, either single or widowed—a dismal circumstance in itself, as contemporary understandings of female nature held that close male influence, either from father or husband, would impart temperance and help restrain the passions which could prove disruptive and unproductive if left unchecked.

The rigidly patriarchal social hierarchy championed by early modern writers prescribed the behaviours and values necessary for harmony and order both private and public. "Reality," writes Susan Amussen, "fell short of the ideal": in actuality, these behaviours and values, aspirational and respected though they were, sometimes diverged from the ways in which early moderns made decisions, interacted with others, and generally carried out their lives.[22] Order—and disorder—in the English village or neighbourhood was derived in part from the comportment of the family, the "little commonwealth," the origin to which many social disruptions were traced. The structure of the early modern household reinforced, and was reinforced by, all levels of secular and religious authority.[23] Accordingly, social ills and offences were not only dishonourable for the offender, but they also reflected poorly on the whole household, the patriarch especially.

The primacy of honour and reputation to early modern English life transcended social configurations and obligations, playing a significant role in legal procedures and decision-making. Mary Johnson of Coventry, Warwickshire, tried for witchcraft and murder in 1706, was convicted and sentenced to death by burning on the strength of the evidence against her, which chiefly amounted to unverifiable *post hoc* connections between Mary Johnson's public displays of anger

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[22] Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, 95-96.
[23] *Ibid*, 97; Walker, *Crime, gender, and social order*, 9. On the little commonwealth, see Phil Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10-11; Linda Pollock, "Little Commonwealths I: The Household and Family Relationships," in *A Social History of England, 1500-1700*, ed. Keith Wrightson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 60-83; Malcolm Gaskill, "Little Commonwealths II: Communities," in *Ibid*., 84-104.

and bitterness and "hellish Pranks … up and down the Country," including the deaths of her husband and two children, three neighbours, and untold cattle.[24] Witchcraft, a crime which by its nature was unprovable, had to be validated in the legal context by an abundance of credible witness testimony, and the basis of such testimony was almost always reputational.[25] Like other crimes which offended both the law and religious morality, witchcraft was situated within and profoundly contingent on its precise social and communal contexts. Though Mary Johnson was a wife and mother, two accomplishments which would normally undergird her good character, her ostensible emotional instability—and likely poverty, given that the inciting incidents for almost every death attributed to her were refusals to grant charity—probably contributed to suspicions against her and facilitated the discrediting of her character by more respectable neighbours.

As has been established, social and economic instability could exacerbate existing tensions and hostility within communities, especially between parishioners and comparatively disempowered or marginal people, and galvanize witch-crazes. This last is true less in the English example than in that of continental Europe, but episodes of sustained crisis or upheaval engendered unique opportunities for fear and suspicion to take hold, as in the exceptional East Anglia witch-hunts of 1645.[26] The long Reformation in England, conceptualized as a continuous process of religious, political, and social change, resistance, and negotiation, introduced and amplified religious concerns about providence, diabolism, superstition, and godliness. These concerns often manifested as burdensome expectations imposed on parishioners from above, or increased tension

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[24] *A Full and True Account of the Tryal, Examination, and Condemnation of Mary Johnson, a Witch* (London: Printed by T. Bland, 1706). Though Gaskill posits that Mary Johnson's case is apocryphal, it is arguably still pertinent to this discussion: whether the case is entirely fictitious, or the pamphlet a reprint of one from decades earlier, the fact of its publication in 1706 is likely indicative of its relevance to contemporary discourses. For Gaskill's comment, see *Crime and Mentalities*, 79.
[25] Shapiro, "Religion and the Law," 204.
[26] Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Evidence," 52.

in the community, for whom distrust, scapegoating, and recourse to justice could be a pressure-valve.[27] Though the question of *maleficium* and the unnatural designs of the Devil were in no way secondary concerns—indeed, periods of insecurity tended to intensify these kinds of anxieties—witchcraft could become a convenient, though no less urgent *per se*, discursive and actionable tool for the arbitration and processing of what was often perceived as the erosion of established ways of life.

The economic changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most notably here the escalation of economic disparities, conditions of poverty, and social polarization, tore at the fabric of English society and fueled collective anxieties about the erosion of neighbourliness and social order.[28] They also resulted in the gradual codification of poor relief, which, though it had traditionally been voluntary prior to the Elizabethan poor laws, had nonetheless been an important component of English social organization.[29] Perceptions of the poor had undergone a drastic change over the sixteenth century, as the existing classification of the poor as either deserving (such as the elderly, children, and the ill) or undeserving (the able-bodied but idle) grew to accommodate a third option: that of the labouring poor, people who, despite the inclination and ability to work, were unable to find employment or received such dismal pay that they could not support themselves or their families.[30]

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[27] Gary K. Waite, "Sixteenth-Century Religious Reform and the Witch-Hunts," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft In Early Modern England and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 489-90. See also the essays in *England's Long Reformation, 1500-1800*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (London: Routledge, 2011); Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 668-70.
[28] See C. G. A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500-1700*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); A. L. Beier, *Social Thought in England, 1480-1730: From Body Social to Worldly Wealth* (London: Routledge, 2017).
[29] Wrightson, *English Society*, 157-58, 162; Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 227.
[30] Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London and New York: Longman, 1988), 73-79.

The "moral orthodoxy" of the traditional perception of poverty and its causes grew increasingly complex in the decades preceding the turn of the seventeenth century, as many found their financial circumstances deteriorating and violent crime and agrarian disturbances grew in frequency; not only was the magnitude of poverty increasingly impossible to elide, but this new precarity also threw popular conceptions of stability and harmony into doubt.[31] More public preoccupation with vagrancy at the same time also had the tendency to conflate poverty with criminality, and the itinerant poor were increasingly excluded from customary law, a marginalization which implicitly positioned them as anti-social and unneighbourly.[32] "Little wonder," Keith Wrightson comments, "that to some of them it appeared that the very bonds of society were endangered."[33] It was under these strained conditions that the Elizabethan framework of poor relief policy, encapsulated in the poor laws of 1598 and 1601, which would essentially remain in place until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, emerged.[34]

The system through which relief was to be disbursed was oriented around the parish, requiring the assessment of need and the collection and redistribution of rates, or taxes, from eligible households to the deserving, or "involuntary," poor.[35] Accordingly, the ranks of parish officers widened to accommodate the appointment of overseers of the poor, responsible for the collection and redistribution of relief. This bureaucratization of poor relief created an artificial distance between the poor and their social betters, when before the exigencies of charitable obligation would have dictated more frequent and personal contact. In this sense, the poor laws

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[31] Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 2-3.
[32] Herrup, "Law and Morality," 105; Wood, *The Memory of the People*, 179-80.
[33] Wrightson, *English Society*, 157.
[34] Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 4-5; Wrightson, *English Society*, 162. For a lengthy and detailed analysis of the development and evolution of poor relief policy and the key political and intellectual considerations of the process, see Slack, *Poverty and Policy*; Paul A. Fideler, *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England: The Old Poor Law Tradition* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2005).
[35] 39 Elizabeth I, c. 3, s. I, cited in Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 227.

were an "expression of communal responsibility yet a potent reminder of social distance."[36] It should be noted that here, as with the regulation of social behaviour, for example, there is a recognizable tension between prescription and practice.[37] Because the Tudor government "possessed only limited coercive power,"[38] the implementation and efficacy of the poor laws, necessarily contingent on the enforcement of local authorities as well as the peculiarities of and variations between the social organization of communities, was uneven and unequal throughout the countryside. In fact, the "complex and intensely participatory nature" of governance in this period afforded local authorities great flexibility in interpreting and implementing policy. The provision of poor relief could thus be tailored to the precise social, economic, and political contexts of a given locality.[39]

Beyond the administrative concerns of parish relief, the dependence of many on the goodwill and generosity of their neighbours was met with ambivalence: those of fewer or no means might be pitiable, in need of compassion, or they might be idle parasites exploiting their community's Christian benevolence. As poverty continued to swell over the seventeenth century, official and unofficial action was taken within the parish to control it and ease the financial pressures of the poor laws. Because often those in need outnumbered those receiving formal relief, established customary "networks of informal support" helped to mitigate high rates and abjection.[40] Especially in rural areas, poor relief more often than not resembled a mélange of formal and informal support; charity, gifts, debt forgiveness, doles, funds, and various other casual

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[36] Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 228; Wrightson, "The Social Order," 201.
[37] Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 6.
[38] Wrightson, *English Society*, 158.
[39] Jonathan Healey, "The Development of Poor Relief in Lancashire, c. 1598-1680," *Historical Journal* 53, no. 3 (2010), 571.
[40] Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 3.

forms of neighbourly assistance coexisting with official, state-mandated measures; what Joanna Innes terms a "mixed economy of welfare."[41] These expectations of obligation, mutual assistance, and charity, key components of the structure and hierarchization of English social relations, exist alongside the increasingly stark social polarization between the commoners and their betters. Rising need across England tested the bounds of neighbourly compassion and charity, as did rising poor rates, which, in seventeenth-century Lancashire for instance, limited the extent to which "ordinary" households felt able to give to their poor neighbours—which in turn likely resulted in greater dependence on formal poor relief.[42]

State authority and the "dispensation of justice" continued to consolidate and ossify throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as local and central authorities relied increasingly on "regimes of surveillance and correction."[43] Paul Griffiths, documenting the nascent practice of local surveillance and information collection across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, notes that beyond the utility of cataloguing all manner of demographic data and building sustainable ways of keeping and sharing records for the development of both local and central government, the rise of these "information cultures" across England contributed to the reconfiguration of social relations, illuminating and even intensifying social divisions, particularly between the socioeconomic sorts. This was most obvious in the "deliberate and ideologically driven" collection and organization of certain information, especially that which contributed to local decision-making and the regulation of behaviour.[44]

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[41] Joanna Innes, "The 'Mixed Economy of Welfare' in Early Modern England: Assessments of the Options from Hale to Malthus (c. 1683-1803)," in *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past,* ed. Martin Daunton (London: University College London Press, 1995), 139-80.
[42] Jonathan Healey, "'By the charitie of good people': Poverty and Neighbourly Support in Seventeenth Century Lancashire," *Family and Community History* 19, no. 2 (2016), 92.
[43] Connors, "Measure for Measure," 428, 432.
[44] Paul Griffiths, "Local Arithmetic: Information Cultures in Early Modern England," in *Remaking English Society*, 134.

Certain offences such as bastardy and vagrancy were more heavily monitored and prosecuted; parish officers, in "defending" their communities from additional charges on poor rates, not only drew further attention to the omnipresence and the movements of the poor, but also contributed to homogenizing and dehumanizing perceptions of the poor "as a potential threat, less as individuals and more as 'the poor'." While not universal, these perceptions were pervasive.[45] The poor, especially those whose poverty intersected with other marginal identities (age, gender, marital status, ability and health), were increasingly monitored and criminalized throughout the seventeenth century. Poor households, single people, and single women especially were closely surveilled by the seventeenth-century "parish state" in order to anticipate and minimize dependence on the community.[46] The itinerant poor, especially strangers, were typically treated with hostility and even abuse, especially from the middling sorts as "conflicting feelings of resentment and guilt were projected unconsciously."[47] This resentment and guilt may have derived from annoyance or concerns with climbing poor rates, the salience of widespread poverty and need, strained relations, and perhaps unwillingness or inability to give aid due to personal circumstances.

As economic inequalities deepened throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the tenor of relations between people of different sorts was gradually rearranged, the emerging middling sorts of people—increasingly prosperous and prominent members of the common sorts, chiefly craftsmen, tradesmen, and yeomen in rural localities—experienced ambivalence in their

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[45] Wrightson, *English Society*, 174-75.
[46] Tadmor, "Where was Mrs Turner?," 99; Diane Willen, "Women in the Public Sphere in Early Modern England: The Case of the Urban Working Poor," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 4 (1988), 575. On the concept of the "parish state," see Peter King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 333; idem, "Edward Thompson's Contribution to Eighteenth-Century Studies: The Patrician-Plebeian Model Re-Examined," *Social History* 21 (1996): 215-28; Hindle, *The State and Social Change*, 209.
[47] Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 217.

dealings with the poor.[48] The middling sorts of people, comfortably well-off but not affluent, likely identified and associated more closely with the better sorts than with the commonalty, thus understanding their position within the ecosystem of the parish as purveyors of official and unofficial support. This position was complicated, however, by the nascent "commercial ethic" of the middling sorts, which competed with traditional values of charity, as well as changing perceptions about the poor.

The poor were also increasingly associated with witchcraft. One of the major contributions of Alan Macfarlane's classic case study of witchcraft in Essex, first published in 1970, was the advancement of the "charity refused" model of witchcraft accusations, creditable in equal measure to the work of Keith Thomas.[49] Macfarlane's systematic study of court archives in Essex revealed that most accusations were brought by wealthier people against their poorer neighbours. According to this model, a typical accusation of witchcraft might be made after an older, poor, usually female neighbour was denied succor and reacted in anger, perhaps even uttering a threat. This exchange would be followed by a sudden and unusual consequence to the refuser, who might fall ill or witness the mysterious illness of a family member or the unexpected death of livestock. The poor neighbour seeking relief would thus be suspected of enacting vengeance through witchcraft.[50]

Accusations of witchcraft may have been acts of identity-construction for the middling sorts of people: "self-redefinition through the exercise of common interest and deliberate social distinction."[51] While this distinction, amongst the better sorts, tended to manifest in a sort of distant

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[48] See for example Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 35; Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotion*, especially ch. 3. See also Wrightson, "'Sorts of People'," 41-51; Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 118-19 and *passim*.
[49] Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 660-63, 665-67.
[50] Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 152-53.
[51] Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 217.

sympathy for the innocent, sometimes noble, elderly poor, it was simultaneously operationalized against the ignorant, superstitious, and riotous lower sorts. They may also have been the product of guilt for having turned away an ailing neighbour.[52] While the charity-refused model of witchcraft accusations is compelling and intelligible not only in the case of Essex, it and other attempts to 'explain' accusations must be deployed carefully; while local or broader changes could certainly impact the nature of social relations and upset balance, creating opportunities for increased hostility or suspicion or the conditions for persecution, they ought not to be seen as causing accusations. Witchcraft beliefs cannot be fully rationalized in this way, as it must be remembered that these beliefs constituted a substantial part of early modern cosmologies.[53]

The learned discourse on the intersection of poverty and diabolism tended to follow sceptical lines, as widely-circulated pamphlets, journals, and other tracts arguing against the reliability of witness and circumstantial evidence in witchcraft cases were often accompanied by reflections on the unfortunate scapegoating of the poor and elderly.[54] More ideologically moderate authors might not contest charges of witchcraft, but argue instead that indigence, old age, and social ostracism pushed desperate people into the Devil's service. For example, according to Francis Bragge, the author of a controversial series of pamphlets concerning the 1712 trial of Jane Wenham, "silly old women" were usually accused of and tried for witchcraft because their "Ignorance and Poverty" made them more susceptible to the Devil's persuasions.[55] More sceptical

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[52] Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 217.
[53] Gaskill, "The Pursuit of Reality," 1069-88; Goodare, "Women and the Witch-hunt," 291.
[54] See, for example, "Artifices of Witchmongers," *The Gentleman's Magazine*; *Hertfordshire Witchcraft Consider'd*, iii.
[55] Bragge, *Witchcraft farther display'd*, 34.

authors, especially by the turn of the eighteenth century, might go so far, as Malcolm Gaskill has suggested, to defend the innocence of accused witches and find fault with their communities.[56]

Alice Huson, a widow of Burton Agnes in Yorkshire and tried for witchcraft at the 1664 York assizes, was poor enough that she "had most part of her Relief" at the home of the Corbets, a household which was financially comfortable enough to provide Alice with "small matters, as keeping of young Turkies, &c.," to pay her in "Mony, Corn, or otherwise to her Satisfaction," and to serve her "with Meat and Drink such as she desired."[57] The Corbets were also able to send for multiple physicians and to borrow a gentleman's carriage in their efforts to cure their daughter Faith of her mysterious illness, suggesting that they had means as well as good relations with local notables.[58] Alice, however, appeared not to have good relations with her fellow parishioners beyond the Corbets: "there went a general evil Report of her in the Town, and many not only accounted her so, but called her Witch." Mrs. Corbet, who admonished her children for fearing Alice and calling her an "Old Witch," is portrayed as trusting and benevolent, but her charity did not inspire good behaviour in Alice, who stole Faith's gloves and bewitched her. Even throughout Faith's illness, her parents were convinced that she suffered from distemper; only Faith herself accused Alice, whom she already distrusted, of bewitching her. Faith's illness lasted for at least a period of two years, and only came to an end when her father, the vicar, and the local justice of the peace brought Alice to Faith's bedside and apprehended the former.[59]

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[56] For a brief survey see Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 227-28.
[57] Hale, *A Collection of modern relations*, 52-53.
[58] *Ibid.*, 53-56, quotations on 53.
[59] Hale, *A Collection of modern relations*, 53-57.

From Alice's confession, which was recorded by the vicar Mr. Timothy Wellfet, her principal motivation was financial.[60] When the Devil appeared offering money in exchange for her servitude and renunciation of God, she agreed seemingly without hesitation. The Devil paid Alice between five and ten shillings perhaps eight or nine times, and on at least two occasions, Alice gave or lent some of this money to her neighbours: twenty shillings to a Thomas Ratle, and eight to Lancelot Harrison. When Doll Bilby, another witch, suggested they kill Faith Corbet, Alice demurred "for we had done her overmuch hurt already," though she did confess to killing Dick Warren, which she would not have done had she not "employ'd this wicked Spirit."[61] What we can see of Alice Huson's circumstances, it is clear not only that the parishioners of Burton Agnes engaged in informal networks of charity, but also that that charity was sometimes provided by those needing occasional or regular relief themselves. Of course, Alice Huson confessed to giving money to her neighbours because she had done wrong to implicate them in her alleged wrongdoings, as that money had been given her by the Devil; but despite this fact, her case provides a glimpse at the complexity of relationships built on mutual aid.

Furthermore, it is interesting that the only perspectives we have of Alice Huson are those of Faith Corbet and her parents. There is a suggestion that Alice is disliked and suspected throughout the parish, but Mrs. Corbet's support of her and her character provides an interesting juxtaposition to the popular opinion which is parroted by Faith Corbet. Without trial records it is impossible to speculate further about the grievances that may have been brought forward for the

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[60] Several iterations of Alice Huson's confession have appeared in print. Its first appearance was in Hale's text cited above, published in 1693. A condensed version, which notably excluded Alice's account of her sexual encounters with the Devil, was printed in the *Arminian Magazine consisting of extracts and original treatises on universal redemption* in 1787. Another version was published in John Ashton's 1896 text *The Devil in Britain and America*.
[61] Hale, *A collection of modern relations*, 58, 59.

legal proceedings, but it is clear that Faith's sustained accusations against Alice were influenced by her impression from others in the community.

By mid-century, it was not uncommon for the perpetrators of assault, mob violence, and in some cases murder of suspected witches to be brought to trial.[62] A commentary on the 1751 trial and execution of Thomas Colley, who had been found guilty for the murder of Ruth Osborne, mocked the "madness of credulity" that led people to suspect and mete out arbitrary justice on a woman who "has been poor and old enough to obtain the pity and compassion of every one; when nothing has remained to her but her innocence, her piety, and her tabby cat."[63] Though evocative, it is impossible to say whether this generic description is an accurate portrayal of Ruth Osborne, who, along with her husband John, was ducked thrice in a pond on suspicions of witchcraft. John, who survived the ordeal, reported that he and his wife had long been suspected of witchcraft by their neighbours, such that he was refused employment and they were forced to rely on parish support.[64] Two parish officers, Matthew Barton and Jonathan Tomkins, both of whom attempted to protect the Osbornes from a gathering mob by hiding them first in the workhouse and then in the church, appear to have been the only witnesses at Colley's trial to have actively aided the Osbornes. Barton in particular cites in his deposition the goodness and honesty of the couple. However, it is rather unlikely that most people, not to mention the local and central authorities with the power and inclination to criminalize and prosecute, would agree that more extensive social relief rather than punishment ought to be administered.[65]

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[62] A more substantial analysis of official scepticism of witchcraft and popular justice can be found in chapter one of this thesis.
[63] *The malefactor's register*, 370. This quotation provides an interesting example of what Malcolm Gaskill has described as the iconography of witchcraft. After the decriminalization of witchcraft in 1736 and as popular memory of witch trials faded, witchcraft and the image of the witch became gradually abstracted, trivialized, and attached to certain stereotypes, including old age, poverty, and the animal familiar: Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 111.
[64] *Tryal of Thomas Colley*, 7.
[65] Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 227-28; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 652-80.

Temperance Lloyd, Mary Trembles, and Susanna Edwards—colloquially, the Bideford witches—were tried for witchcraft at the Exeter Assizes on 28 March 1682. The last known English witch trial to have definitively ended in conviction and execution, the trial of the Bideford witches is a prime illustration of public antipathy toward the poor and disorderly, as well as a revealing and forceful illustration of local power dynamics.[66] Temperance Lloyd and Susanna Edwards, both widows, and Mary Trembles, a single woman, were tried, convicted, and ultimately executed for witchcraft. The depositions and the women's own confessions as preserved in three trial pamphlets reveal them to have been old, poor, and disliked by their neighbours. Two of these pamphlets reveal more perhaps about the popularity of certain stereotypes and tropes around the time of publication than about the details of the trial.

Of the three, Temperance Lloyd, an elderly "poor Woman labouring under an almost Insupportable Burden," had been in the Devil's service the longest—thirty years according to one pamphlet.[67] The same pamphlet drew an explicit connection between Temperance's poverty and vulnerability to diabolism: "tis a *Maxaim* in the Devils politicks allwaies to *Fish in troubled waters* which course he commonly takes to erect his *Trophies* upon the Destruction of such Miserable Creatures."[68] The acknowledgment of Temperance's situation and its part in the Devil's pursuit of her—which she resisted for a time before ultimately capitulating—does not read as an implicit criticism of her neighbours' abdication of their charitable obligations but rather as a rebuke of Temperance's weak will.

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[66] Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 184.
[67] *The Life and Conversation of Temperance Floyd, Mary Lloyd and Susanna Edwards Three Notorious Witches* (London: Printed by J. W., 1687), 7.
[68] *The Life and Conversation*, 2. Emphasis in original.

This suggestion that there was a nobility, and even respectability, in being poor and resistant to the irrevocable abandonment of Christian values and morality effectuated by the diabolical pact, is taken up much more vigorously in another pamphlet concerning the Bideford trial, also published in 1682. The anonymous author of this pamphlet was less concerned with the details of the trial proceedings than with the religious implications of witchcraft: specifically, its destruction of one's immortal soul, which according to this pamphleteer was not worth any corrupted thing the Devil could offer. Earthly sufferings and privations were ephemeral in comparison with the "Eternal Happiness, the injoyment of which, is beyond Expression" of Heaven.[69] One of the charges laid against the Bideford witches was for the malicious bewitchment of the cattle belonging to Mr. Hann, a local minister and a man "of good Repute and honest Conversation, who sought his souls eternal happiness." Mr. Hann's godly righteousness is starkly contrasted with the witches, who "design'd their everlasting Ruine."[70]

Susanna Edwards, the second of the alleged Bideford witches, recalled that the Devil had resembled a gentleman during her first encounter with him. She had hoped to "have a pice of Money of him," and upon telling him that she was poor, he promised that she would "neither want for Meat, Drink, nor Clothes" if she agreed to assist him.[71] Susanna Edwards implicated the third accused witch, Mary Trembles, who recounted going into town to "[beg] for some meat," although she "could get none." Soon after this disappointment she crossed paths with Susanna Edwards, who promised, as the Devil had promised her, that Mary would want for nothing if she did as she was instructed, probably a tempting offer for a single woman reduced to begging.[72] This clear

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[69] *Execution of Three Witches*, 6.
[70] *Ibid.*, 3.
[71] *A True and Impartial Relation*, 35.
[72] *Ibid.,* 34.

indication of her economic status made Mary Trembles an easy target, both for the Devil and for the suspicions of her neighbours. Mary agreed, and soon afterwards the Devil made his first appearance to her. Mary also testified that she and Susanna Edwards visited the home of John and Grace Barnes to ask for some bread or meat, were turned away, returned later to ask for some tobacco, and were again refused, at which point Susanna grew angry and remarked that "it should be better for … Grace if that she had let [Mary] to have had some Tobacco."[73]

Returning briefly to Loomba's articulation of embodiment, it is apparent that early modern English standards of virtue and normativity were deeply embodied, as a witch's internal character—their fundamental immorality, deviant desires either sexual or vengeful, disorderly emotions—was reflected externally, in their non-normative body, mode of dress, inappropriate behaviour, or other salient characteristics. The pertinence of emotion and affective acts to witchcraft beliefs and accusations in the early modern period have not gone unexplored.[74] As with humours, strong emotions, or "passions," were understood by early moderns to have "bodily agency,"[75] in that expressions thereof were often recorded as visceral, all-consuming, full-bodied outbursts. In this sense, language, as a means of expressing such emotions, was embodied, and could have material and deleterious consequences.

Gender, emotion, and embodiment

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[73] *A True and Impartial Relation*, 35.
[74] See for example Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, especially ch. 3; David Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England," in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 116-36; the essays in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*; Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*.
[75] Kristine Steenbergh, "Emotions and Gender: The Case of Anger in Early Modern Revenge Tragedies," in *A History of Emotions 1200-1800*, ed. Jonas Liliequist (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 127.

Curses, insults, lies, and oaths, or "sins of the tongue," had the power to ruin reputations and unsettle communities, and, though it was generally understood that all people, as sinful beings, had the capacity to brandish an "ill Tongue," that the lower and ignorant sorts were most prone to gossip, envy, nastiness, and impiety was axiomatic.[76] Thus, these sins of the tongue were frequently accompanied by pejorative implications both of social difference and diabolism. In terms of the semiotics of witchcraft, a common stereotype or shorthand in early modern visual and textual representations of witches was the expression of negative and subject-oriented emotions like anger or envy. Violent or malicious speech was often blamed for occasioning injury or worse; the witch's "ill Tongue" appears in many witchcraft cases to be the literal embodiment of their anger and temper.[77]

The true origin of this power, whether it be the individual speaking the words or the words themselves, is unclear; Kirilka Stavreva argues that the supernatural nature of this kind of violent speech renders it unintelligible, as its physical consequences were rarely immediate and usually connected to the violent speech retroactively.[78] What Stavreva terms witch-speak, the invectives, curses, and blasphemous tirades that through their association with witches could invoke physical consequences, was imbued with "emotive *force* … to bring forth the acts it enunciated."[79] Insults and violent speech were further embodied by their gendered connotations; as Stavreva notes, legal action in Wales for scolding and witchcraft "often overlapped."[80]

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[76] Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, 6, 19. See also Wrightson, "'Sorts of People'," 35-38; Gowing, "Gender and the Language of Insult," 1-21.
[77] Malcolm Gaskill, "Afterword: Passions in Perspective," in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*, 269; Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, 99; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, 6; Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers,* 3-4, 75.
[78] Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers*, 75.
[79] *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.
[80] *Ibid*., 4.

Susanna Edwards' angry retort to Grace Barnes' rejection can thus be contextualized: both as an example of the refusal of charity, but also as an example of the material consequences of her anger. The latter is even better exemplified in the testimony of Joane Jones, who recounted that Susanna Edwards grew "displeased" when Jones' husband confronted her with suspicions that she was practicing witchcraft and that Edwards announced her intention to do him harm. According to Jones, her husband soon after "fell a shaking, quivering, and foaming, and lay … like a dying or dead man," and when he had recovered, named Edwards as his tormentor.[81]

Susanna Edwards' case is one of many that exemplifies the material repercussions of women's tempers and the deeply gendered conceptualization of emotions inherent to early modern English society. This gendered understanding related both to the affective state or experience of certain emotions and to their external or somatic reflections, which were sometimes interpreted and recorded as transgressive. Masculine-coded emotions were by nature not-feminine, and thus more socially acceptable. Early modern English women, lacking the rationality, strong constitutions, intellect, and inherent rectitude of men, were also deemed incapable of checking their emotions. The early modern configuration of femininity emphasized heightened or even hyperbolic emotionality, and consequently, the absence of emotional control and propensity toward solecism or indecorous emotional displays. Furthermore, noble or aristocratic women were generally thought to be more even-tempered in direct comparison to women of lower social status.[82]

Women were also understood to succumb more easily and frequently to fits of anger than were men. Feminine anger, the most alarming and disorderly female emotion—unlike masculine

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[81] *A True and Impartial Relation*, 32.
[82] Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, 90.

anger, which being uncalculated and spontaneous was socially acceptable and justified—was simmering, unprovoked, often vindictive, a "serious character flaw," an "affront to male authority and a threat to social harmony," seen by contemporaries as "a disease of a weake mind which cannot moderate it selfe but is easily inflamed."[83] Condemnatory or moralizing articulations of female anger saturate extant early modern writing, particularly in the witchcraft genre.[84]

As has been established, the refusal of charity was a common element of the revenge narrative, which characterized witches as "malicious" and motivated primarily by revenge or hatred. This trope was not meant to be deployed as an entreaty for greater compassion, but rather as something of a warning to those desperate people for whom the only outlet for their feelings of anger or betrayal was the diabolical pact. The revenge narrative was frequently paired with what Marion Gibson terms the "motiveless malignancy narrative," in which pamphleteers portrayed a witch's anger and retaliation as unjustified and unfounded and the victims of their cruelty as "gentle or noble … not constructed … as blameworthy but as totally innocent victims."[85]

Thomas Whiteing, who was well-known among the parishioners of St. Warburgh in Kent for having an "ill Tongue" and being a "Wizard," verbally threatened a servant named William Hunt for having accidentally stricken his son. According to the depositions of three witnesses present at the 1694 Kent quarter sessions, William Hunt, who became delirious and fitful and died a week later, "did cry out sev'all times that the said Thomas Whiteing would be the death of him."[86] Whiteing's case is slightly unusual, as the bulk of the narratives containing this trope of the "ill

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[83] Gwynne Kennedy, *Just Anger: Representing Women's Anger in Early Modern England* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 3-4; Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia* (London: Printed by William Jaggard, 1615), 276, quoted in Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, 90.
[84] See Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, especially ch. 3.
[85] Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (London: Routledge, 1999), 104-05.
[86] Q/SB/25/38-39, Kent History and Library Centre, "Series of depositions against Thomas Whiteing for bewitching and other offences," 1694.

Tongue" are about female witches, usually antagonizing their neighbours in retribution for charity denied.

An unnamed deponent in the trial of Joan Buts at the 1682 Surrey Assizes testified that Joan, brought up on charges of witchcraft for allegedly having bewitched Mary Farmer, had said "That if she had not bewitched her, if all the Devils in Hell could help her, she would bewitch her." In court, Joan beseeched the judge, explaining that "I am a passionate woman, and they having urged me, I spake those words in passion, my Lord, but I intended no such thing."[87] Joan Buts was fortunate to have been found not guilty, unlike some other women.

At the trial of Rose Cullender and Amy Duny, held at the Suffolk assizes in 1664, Dorothy Durent informed the court that she had left her infant son in the care of Amy Duny, an old woman with a reputation as a witch, while she went on an errand, and that she had requested that Amy Duny not breastfeed him. Though she acknowledged that Amy Duny was too old to be able to produce breast milk, Dorothy was afraid that any attempt would harm her son. When she discovered upon her return home that Amy had breastfed the child, Dorothy's angry response prompted an outburst from Amy, who allegedly uttered "many high Expressions and Threatening Speeches … telling [Dorothy], That she had as good to have done otherwise than to have found fault with her."[88]

That night, and over the following weeks, Dorothy's child fell into "strange fits of swounding" which worried her so much that she sought the advice of a reputable doctor a county over. The doctor's remedy, to hang her child in his blanket from the chimney and cast any creature

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[87] *An account of the tryal and examination of Joan Buts, for being a common witch and inchantress, before the Right Honourable Sir Francis Pemberton* (London: Printed for S. Gardener, 1682), 2.
[88] *A Tryal of Witches, at the Assizes Held at Bury St. Edmonds for the County of Suffolk* (London: Printed for William Shrewsbery, 1682), 4-5.

she found within into the fire—as this creature would be the witch's familiar—was cause for further enmity between the two women. After Dorothy discovered a frog in the blanket and threw it into the fire, she learned that Amy had been badly burned. Amy, holding Dorothy responsible, promised that she "should live to see some of her Children dead, and she upon Crutches." Though Dorothy's son recovered and survived, her ten-year-old daughter Elizabeth, who had also begun to suffer from a similar distemper, died not long after.[89] Dorothy further developed a "Lameness" in her legs and relied on crutches to walk, and the affliction did not abate until Amy Duny was found guilty of bewitchment and sentenced to death.

The author of the pamphlet relating this information is unknown, though a brief preface by the publisher claims that it was recorded by a spectator at the trial and subsequently handed over to an unnamed gentleman, who kept it during the intervening years between the trial in 1664 and the pamphlet's publication in 1682. Without the court records it is impossible to determine the accuracy of this account and its documentation of the deponents' exact words, but at face value it is notable for its precision of Amy Duny's threats against Dorothy Durent. In many similar accounts, it is not unusual for the content of the witch's angry or violent speech to be remarked on but not substantiated; for example, in Francis Bragge's pamphlet about the trial of Jane Wenham, labourer Matthew Giltson testified that after he had denied her a bundle of straw, Wenham "went away muttering." Giltson further testified that directly after this incident he found himself inexplicably traveling over three miles out of the parish to fetch some straw.[90] This testimony was corroborated by a number of neighbours, who added that they had seen him, apparently in a trance, wade unhesitatingly through a river. Giltson's testimony, and Bragge's account and

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[89] *A Tryal of Witches*, 8-9.
[90] Bragge, *A full and impartial account*, 2.

contextualization of it, make it clear that Wenham's cross "muttering" was the cause of Giltson's odd episode.

Matthew Giltson's employer John Chapman, already suspicious of Wenham, in his anger "called her a *Witch* and *Bitch*"[91] but was ultimately only required to pay Wenham a shilling when she had initially requested a warrant against him on charges of slander; Wenham's already poor reputation in the parish had probably convinced the Justice Henry Chauncy, to whom she had applied, not to grant the warrant. Wenham, observably angry at this turn of events, allegedly said "if she could not have Justice here she would have it elsewhere, or Words to that Purpose."[92] Wenham's muttering and ambiguous warnings, in addition to her old age, poverty, and poor reputation, were enough for various neighbours to connect her to a number of strange occurrences. Even more telling is Bragge's interpretation of this episode: of Wenham's motivations, which remained unspecified by Wenham herself, Bragge editorialized that she obviously hoped to capitalize on her encounter with Chapman while evading suspicion; and of her disposition, he asserted that women like Wenham, possessed of a "Wicked Mind," were naturally predisposed to anger and revenge.[93]

Richard Hathaway's unsuccessful prosecution of Sarah Morduck for bewitchment may also have been based partly on Morduck's comportment. Hathaway, who was prosecuted for maliciously feigning bewitchment, did not confess as to his motivation for accusing and assaulting Morduck, though prosecutors of his case speculated that he may have been anticipating material gain (from performing his bewitchment to crowds) or hoping for Morduck's execution. These motivations are both reflected in Hathaway's actions, though one is not necessarily more

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[91] Bragge, *A full and impartial account*, 2. Emphasis in original.
[92] *Ibid.,* 3.
[93] *Ibid.*.

compelling than the other. However, there are several recorded instances of Sarah Morduck apparently uttering threats, which might either be true, thus constituting part of Hathaway's enmity for Morduck, or be a clever falsification to destabilize Morduck's character and make it seem as though she possessed the witch's ill tongue. Morduck had reportedly been known to have "ill words" with neighbours, and on one of the occasions when Hathaway had scratched her in order to restore his health, Morduck allegedly said "That her Blood shoulq [*sic*] do him no good, but rather worse."[94]

Rather than arousing pity or compassion, the discomfort and disorder embodied in a poor, emotionally volatile woman, especially one apparently in the habit of making personalized threats against those who denied her, were likelier to prompt censure and hostility. Recall Mary Johnson: when a Mr. Wilson refused to lend Mary ten shillings, she allegedly "went away in a great Passion, Swearing she would be Reveng'd on him before to morrow Morning," and that evening Mr. Wilson suffered a fit, vomited blood, and died.[95] Though it might seem reasonable to posit that the fact that all of Mary Johnson's supposed victims died suddenly and grotesquely probably elevated her status from a mere scold to a witch, numerous deponents justified their uncharitableness and derision by citing her reputation. It is unclear whether, prior to the deaths for which Mary Johnson was held responsible at her trial in 1706, she had been suspected of causing other deaths, but she had undoubtedly been perceived as a witch prior to the incidents in question.

John Massy, a shoemaker, deposed that his wife, upon meeting Mary Johnson in the street one night, refused to speak with her because she "desired not to Converse with such as Convers'd with the Devil." Mary Johnson replied that Mrs. Massy ought to go home, "for she should go

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[94] *Tryal of Richard Hathaway*, 17; *A Full and True Account*.
[95] *Mary Johnson*.

abroad no more." Mrs. Massy arrived home shivering but feeling as though her body was burning, and was later "siezed with such an excessive Looseness, avoiding nothing but Blood, that in three Days time it Kill'd her."[96] When William Grosthead, a mercer, turned Johnson away because of her reputation, she began "uttering several bitter Imprecations, and saying the Child in his Arms should not be well long." Within an hour of this meeting, the child, a boy of three years old, "was took with strange Convulsions bleeding strangely at the Nose, Mouth, and Ears til next Morning, and then Died."[97] Worst of all was the circumstance in which Mary Johnson's family mysteriously died. According to William Halsey, a victualler, who along with some neighbours had gone to the Johnsons' home out of concern for the husband and two children, all three of whom had not been seen since the previous week. They were discovered "all in one Bed together, lying in a most languishing and terrible Condition." Pins and needles were coming out of Mr. Johnson's nose and ears, and the youngest child, a five-year-old girl, was bleeding from her mouth, nose, ears, and "fundament." Halsey testified that the three had lain in such a state for a fortnight before passing away.[98]

Common in all these stories is not only the predominance of reputation, although Mary Johnson, Alice Huson, Temperance Floyd, Susanna Edwards, Thomas Whiteing, Joan Buts, Amy Duny, Jane Wenham, and Alice Morduck were all noted by their accusers or by witnesses as having prior reputations for witchcraft. For Thomas Whiteing, it would appear as though his well-known "ill Tongue," which had garnered him the suspicions of his neighbours, was the result of hyper-masculine aggression rather than emasculation; for the women, their anger and imprecations were at once validations of gender stereotypes and deeply unsettling portents for those at the receiving

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[96] *Mary Johnson.*
[97] *Ibid*.
[98] *Ibid*.

end of their tempers—tempers which were understood to be all the more explosive because of the witches' social standing. These cases are thus also united by their indications of the entangled nature of attitudes about poverty and gender. Witchcraft was, in these cases, detectable not only in the evidence of poverty in the witch's body, but also in the physical manifestation of the witch's emotions. The volume of cases following these patterns is certainly suggestive of a common preoccupation with quotidian confrontations with poverty and hardship, especially when that poverty and hardship converged with other transgressions of normativity and respectability.

CHAPTER 3

Race, Gender, and Inversion in Witchcraft Discourses

Discourses of identity, alterity, and inversion are inseparable from accounts of witchcraft. Can witchcraft stories and incidences help explain or demonstrate how people were actively negotiating and renegotiating their realities and perceiving their widening worlds? One exciting heuristic device is the possibility of reading the language of witchcraft as being part of a wider attempt by early moderns to process and define the "racial and cultural other,"[1] increasing contact with whom was being facilitated and accelerated by movement and empire. In other words, the vocabulary used to discuss and interpret the supernatural and diabolical—and more abstractly, the non-normative, irreverent, and offensive—may have been instrumentalized, if unconsciously, in order to discuss and interpret reactions to and conceptions of encounters with the presence, practices, and embodiments of racial and cultural difference. The boundaries of traditional European forms of knowledge and perceptions of the world were toppled by early modern exploration and discovery. The more space, both physical and intellectual, was being inhabited by the unfamiliar and unknown, the more preoccupied early moderns became with subtending their realities, with folding the strange and novel into their worldviews. To what degree did nascent ideologies of racial and cultural differences inform early modern English mental worlds? And furthermore, how did these ideologies interact with the discourses and lived experiences of witchcraft?

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[1] Grinnell, "Witchcraft, Race, and the Rhetoric of Barbarism," 74.

Witchcraft might be an ideal meeting-place for the theories and methodologies of feminist and cultural histories, most notably regarding embodiment, opposition and the configuration of the social order, and the interest of both fields in ideas and constructed meanings. Stuart Clark refers to the "linguistic turn" in cultural histories of witchcraft, or the integration by some historians of a principle tenet of linguistic philosophy that language is culturally contingent—"made, not discovered"—and subsequent adoption of more relativist approaches to early modern witchcraft beliefs and discourses, focusing on the construction, reproduction, and relation of meanings rather than on questions of objective truth and reality.[2] Social relations, on a local or global scale, were conducted and negotiated in a language built partly on deeply gendered notions of difference and power. As many historians have demonstrated, increasing contact with non-European, non-Christian societies fundamentally altered the ways in which early modern English men and women located themselves in the world, and discourses of gender, sexuality, and religion, among others, gradually evolved and took on additional meanings to accommodate these new ideas and experiences.[3]

Early modern English culture and cognition, writes Stuart Clark, were built on a "system of dual classification that represents cosmological and social order as the maintenance of hierarchical oppositions between superior and inferior things."[4] This Aristotelian framework was characteristic of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European cognition as a whole; the persistence of earlier intellectual traditions, as well as early modern linguistic and religious developments, made such a system a cosmological imperative. As Clark emphasizes, these oppositions were

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[2] Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, 9-10.
[3] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 2; Loomba, "Identities and Bodies," 4; Sabrina Strings, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), Ebook edition, especially ch. 2.
[4] Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 70.

neither orderly nor entirely sensical, but they ought to be viewed as "cultural artefacts" rather than a logical system—or in other words, as a collection of moral and intellectual ideals rather than concrete practice. Christian doctrine held that contrariety, the dependence of something on its fundamental opposite for existence, could be found everywhere: it was God's design and necessary for the preservation of natural and spiritual balance. Thus, for the concept of good to exist, so too must evil, as good could be neither known nor achieved without the threat or temptation of evil.

Opposition and contrariety, not restricted only to theology, so characterized the early modern worldview that they were present and legible in natural philosophical inquiry, medicine, and other fields organized by these principles.[5] They were even, as Keith Wrightson demonstrates, endemic to the informal language of "sorts," the dynamic, culturally significant linguistic alternative to conventional expressions of the social hierarchy and social difference. Juxtapositions of "poorer," "meaner," or "ignorant" sorts of people with "better," "learned," or "richer" sorts of people were by the seventeenth century familiar and recognizable frames of reference, a shared lexicon grounded in contemporary "conventional logical methods" of distinction and opposition.[6]

Witchcraft, one of the most prominent contemporary examples of this binary, co-constitutive mentality, came to represent at an institutional level "the inversion of godly order, an abstract idea through which normative messages about doctrinal and moral conformity could be articulated, most prominently by the clergy." More broadly, the rhetoric of witchcraft positioned it as the natural opponent of "patriarchal, Christian, and estate order," and thus the disordering of

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[5] Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 35-46.
[6] Wrightson, "'Sorts of People'," 29-30, 33-37. See also idem, "Social Order," 177-202; idem, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 289-303 and *passim*.

dominant social and religious values and norms.[7] Of course, as Laura Kounine observes, norms could only be inverted if they were "clearly defined and understood,"[8] a condition which, as suggested in this chapter, cannot always be presumed. Clark's reminder that early modern cognitive frameworks were not rigid or fully logical is especially key in discussions of imagination, language, and culture, all of which are subject to evolutions in meaning. With this in mind, the language of witchcraft drew on the inversions and subversions of normative configurations of identities and power roles: whiteness and blackness, masculinity and femininity, faith and faithlessness. There are cogent parallels between the languages of witchcraft and race—from a more superficial standpoint, they are both of them examples of contrariety and oppositions, challenges and threats to social and religious order—but more than simply being comparable, the linguistics of race and witchcraft might be understood as having constituted each other, if implicitly, or at least shared in the same oppositional tropes of light and dark, good and evil, morality and sin.[9]

Discourses of blackness

Historians of language and meaning are often preoccupied with "the question of how language authorizes any kind of belief at all."[10] Did the established vocabulary and familiar tropes of witchcraft have a tangible impact on emerging racial consciousness or discourse? Did colonial

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[7] Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 289; Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers*, 72. See also Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 69-79; and Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 134.
[8] Laura Kounine, *Imagining the Witch: Emotions, Gender, and Selfhood in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 188.
[9] See Grinnell, "Witchcraft, Race, and the Rhetoric of Barbarism," 72-80.
[10] Clark, *Thinking with Demons,* 3.

expansion and experiences of ethnic and cultural difference enter into or alter existing supernatural beliefs? These questions, given the dearth of primary documents about Black people and lack of a cogent vocabulary of race, are likely unanswerable. But the historiographical reconstructions of these languages, when considered together, may reaffirm the increasing centrality of racialized categorization, identity-building, and meaning-making to the ever-widening early modern English worldview. And, as Kim Hall argues, "the absence of a term for race … and of a distinct and coherent racial ideology does not make early modern English culture … race-neutral."[11] Historians and anthropologists have placed the etymological turning point for race in the eighteenth century, during which time categories of difference, informed by Western cultural and spiritual values, were increasingly associated with physiognomic and somatic features.[12] The increasing currency of these ideas was, according to Nancy Stepan, the result of processes of "ontologising via embodiment."[13] These associations and understandings cannot be presumed to have been ubiquitous, but their articulations in the historical record can help to reveal patterns or evolutions in mentalities and collective knowledge. The key is to "[understand] racial formation as an historical process rather than a static, naturalized 'category'."[14]

It is often difficult to decisively place Black people in historical records. The history of Black people in early modern Europe can be understood similarly to histories of other marginalized identities such as sexuality, in that the subject is "generally mediated and ancillary."[15] The Black presence in England was deliberately obscured during the Elizabethan era, and in a more general

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[11] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 261.
[12] Timothy McInerny, "The Better Sort: Nobility and Human Variety in Eighteenth-Century Great Britain," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 1 (2015), 47-48; see also Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race'," 248. See also Justin E.H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).
[13] Nancy Stepan, "Race, Gender, Science, and Citizenship," *Gender and History* 10, no. 1 (1998), 29.
[14] Tabili, "Race is a Relationship," 126.
[15] Garrett, "Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge," 33.

sense the highly figurative style of early modern writing sometimes renders precise meaning or intention ambiguous. This last is intensified by the number of terms commonly and indiscriminately used to refer to Black people, and sometimes other people of colour: including, but not limited to, variations on Negro, Blackmoor, African, Ethiope, Barbar, Indian, and infidel. However, references such as those in parish records, usually the most unambiguous, were implicitly more interested in the white man to whom the Black person in question was proximate, rather than the latter as an individual with agency. Burial records, for example, tended to provide more information about slave owners, masters, or employers than about the deceased; sometimes they were not even named.[16] These considerations are problematic, but the work of Kim Hall and others, particularly in the literary tradition, on the embedded language and "troping of race" enables the historian to locate or uncover race in early modern texts that are not strictly "about" blackness.[17]

The popular assumption that early modern England was white—that there were no Black people, or if there were, they were too few to be remarkable—has been challenged by the findings of Hall, Fryer, Shyllon, Habib, Olusoga, Strings, Gerzina, Kaufmann, and others, which have greatly extended the scope of our understandings of the Black presence, both physical and figurative.[18] Archival evidence demonstrates that Black people, enslaved or free, lived and died in England in a variety of social positions. Especially prior to England's official involvement in the

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[16] Imtiaz H. Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 199.
[17] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 14.
[18] See Hall, *Things of Darkness*; Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain 1555-1833* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977); Habib, *Black Lives*; David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2016), Ebook edition; Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (London: John Murray, 1995) and "Ignatius Sancho: A Renaissance Black Man in Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 21 (1998): 106-07; Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015); Strings, *Fearing the Black Body*.

slave trade, Black people in urban and rural milieus, most of whom were engaged in domestic service, were servants, seamstresses, cooks, prostitutes, diplomats, courtiers; most lived independently; some were enslaved; in short, their lived experiences were many and varied.[19] The Black presence in England, as well as expanding travel, trade, and colonial ventures to Africa, the Americas, the West Indies, and India, contributed to increasingly widespread confrontation with and ideas, assumptions, and judgements about non-European bodies and cultures. For many, this contact was limited to letters, pamphlets, journals, plays, and literary texts recording journeys abroad and offering stories featuring exotic peoples and locales; English traders in Africa and colonists in the West Indies arrived on foreign soil already armed with prior 'knowledge' and assumptions about native peoples.[20] Ongoing conceptualizations and reconceptualizations of identity in the early modern period were driven in part by increasing contact with a non-European world. Lacking frames of reference with which to reconcile new information about the wider world and its peoples, Europeans sought to incorporate it into existing frameworks.[21]

As England grew as a naval power, the English "character" and national image gradually transformed to accommodate global travel and cultural exchange. Not only did travel and trade broaden the geographical and cultural borders of the early modern English worldview, but they also led to "the most striking transformations in economic history" between the 1550s and 1630s.[22] Africa, which occupied a position of strategic importance for Atlantic travel and trade, played a

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[19] See Habib, *Black Lives*; Olusoga, *Black and British*, especially ch. 2; Gerzina, *Black London*.
[20] Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 55.
[21] Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 10-14; Anthony Grafton, April Shelford, and Nancy G. Sirasi, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 97-158.
[22] Theodore K. Rabb, *Enterprise and Empire: Merchant and Gentry Investment in the Expansion of England, 1575-1630* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

key role in English economic expansion. From the beginning of the English venture into African trade, colonial and domestic labour were paramount.

Recent scholarship indicates that there were Black people in England as early as 1500, although official records may have intentionally obscured some of this information.[23] Black people came to Tudor England usually through trade with Africa or privateering against Spanish ships, or as merchants or migrants from Iberia.[24] England's participation in the slave trade, though clandestine, grew a great deal and became gradually regulated over the course of the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. The first chartered companies to trade in Africa were licensed in 1618 and 1626, and the first company explicitly dedicated to the African slave trade was established in 1633. Colonial and imperial expansion into Africa and the New World continued to escalate, and by the end of the seventeenth century, England had carved out a place at the forefront of the slave trade. Furthermore, the scale of monarchical, parliamentarian, and aristocratic investment in the trade affirmed its economic and cultural significance.[25]

Beyond the mechanics and politics of the slave trade, Black people are present in parish archives and private records from the Elizabethan era onward, principally in urban centres such as London and other major port towns where merchants, traders, and privateers would organize and set off, such as Liverpool and Bristol.[26] These documents indicate ownership of enslaved Africans, generally a sign of "upward social mobility," although the "hostility" and "negativity" in parish

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[23] Though privateering was illegal in the sixteenth century, the Crown privately allowed English merchants to interfere in the Portuguese and Dutch monopolies in African trade, particularly in the regions of Barbary and Guinea. Habib, *Black Lives*, 1; Tamara E. Lewis, "'Like Devils Out of Hell': Reassessing the African Presence in Early Modern England," *Black Theology* 14, no. 2 (2016), 108-09; Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 17, 20-21.
[24] Olusoga, *Black and British*, 155.
[25] Lewis, "'Like Devils Out of Hell'," 110-11; Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 21.
[26] Habib, *Black Lives*, 196; Olivette Otele, "Liverpool dans la traite transatlantique: impératifs et pratiques des pères de la cité," in *Villes portuaires du commerce triangulaire à l'abolition de l'esclavage. Cahiers de l'histoire et des mémoires de la traite négrière, de l'esclavage et de leurs abolitions en Normandie*, no. 1, ed. Eric Saunier (Cléon: Routes du philanthrope, 2009), 57-70.

records demonstrate the "downward social spiral" of Africans in England, concurrent to England's increasing involvement in transatlantic slavery.[27] Other records include baptisms, many of which according to parish records took place of the individual's own volition. However, in England as in most other European countries regardless of confession, even willing converts to Christianity could be regarded with suspicion and distrust. Some writers expressed horror at the ways in which Africans practised Christianity:

> They judge of God like themselves, loving what they love, pleased with what they please: As the Ethiopians, though Christians, yet worshipping the Virgin Mary, paint her like a Blackmore, because they are black: Now what a fearfull pollution is this, to deceive ourselves about God, about sin, about godliness, our own souls? So that when we can have a pretence, or a colour to justifie our selves, then we rejoyce.[28]

True Christians were Christian from birth, and the inherent "nature" of Africans, or often in the religious context, "infidels," precluded them in the minds of many from achieving full recognition and status as Christians. This issue of nature and humanity further enabled the justification of slavery.[29] Another barrier to Christianity was less metaphysical: that of complexion.

Early accounts of encounters with Black Africans were preoccupied with the provenance of black skin, a mystery which fascinated and engaged the minds of travelers, writers, and philosophers.[30] A popular theory during the sixteenth century attributed black skin to climate and persistent sun exposure, though it was eventually discarded as it became evident that black skin

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[27] Lewis, "'Like Devils Out of Hell'," 112; Habib, *Black Lives*, 153.
[28] Anthony Burgess, *A treatise of original sin … proving that it is, by pregnant texts of Scripture vindicated from false glosses* (London, 1658), 216.
[29] Edward Long, *The history of Jamaica* vol. 2 (London: Printed for T. Lowndes, 1774), 428; Lewis, "'Like Devils Out of Hell'," 113.
[30] See for example Kim F. Hall's discussion of the Hakluyt papers in *Things of Darkness*, 44-61; David Olusoga's discussion of sixteenth-century sailor George Best's and other theories in *Black and British*, 146-152; Jennifer Morgan's discussion of Richard Ligon's travel writing in "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 167-92. See also Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), especially ch. 3.

would not fade to pale upon removal from arid or tropical climates, and that the Indigenous peoples of the Americas did not seem to resemble Black Africans despite climatic similarities.[31] The notion that blackness was not the effect of sunburn but an inherited feature raised further questions, such as: would it prevail over whiteness in children born of an interracial union? And more crucially, what did blackness *mean*? What did it reflect, or reveal, about the essence of the African?[32]

This essence, or inherent nature, of the African was both internally and externally determined: internally in the configuration of their souls; and externally in the colour of their skin, which rendered them in the European view a distinctive race—or more accurately, "nation," which over the eighteenth century gradually came to be superseded by "race"[33]—and which also was understood to be the personification of their inner selves. Of course, this embodiment extended beyond the colour binary of black and white: some missionaries hoped that the brown skin of Indigenous American peoples and Jews, for the latter of whom a "pathological sign of their nomadic community," might return to an original whiteness upon baptism.[34]

The soul, in the Christian tradition, was thus understood to be reflected in the body. It followed that, if other aspects of an individual's interiority could be read in their body, so too could their faith or lack thereof. According to Protestant reformers, the body was the "locus of sin" and "a vehicle for spiritual evil since it was fully permeable by the Devil."[35] There is little consensus

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[31] Olusoga, *Black and British*, 148.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] The term "nation" as articulated by Buffon, Hume, and others, came to signify the governance, customs, and beliefs which characterized organized groups of people, while "race" was increasingly used to classify people based on "the whole 'ensemble' of traits," including physiognomy, skin colour, stature, hair type, intelligence, and so on. Buffon's "species-race-nation" conceptualization allowed race to be a broad signifier and to encompass national variations, though it should be noted that European writers were generally disinclined to register variations between racialized ethnic groups. Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race'," 252-57, quotation on 254; Buffon, "Premier Discours," *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Jean Piveteau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), 13, cited in idem.
[34] Dawson, *Bodies Complexioned*, 228.
[35] Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, 336.

in early modern writing on the analogizing of skin colour and faith, but Loomba identifies two popular themes: the "exterior blackness" of certain religious figures—Jesus, for instance—which, as it was "brought upon by tribulation, … signals that the interiority is white"; and the association of blackness with sin, which originates within the soul, is "rooted in faithlessness, and then manifested in bodily terms."[36] Accordingly, the sin of unbelieving—committed, for example, by those following Islamic rather than Christian doctrine—was articulated in terms of blackness, though sin and corruption more broadly were also explicitly linked to blackness and Black people. Anthony Burgess, in *A treatise of original sin*, argued that the sinfulness endemic to human nature "makes thy soul all over like a Blackmoor! Thou mayest behold thy self in the glass of Gods word, and not see one fair spot; it is a leprosie upon the whole soul, so that it leaveth nothing good in thee. It's true, the substance and faculties of thy soul are left still, yet they are so corrupted and vitiated, that in a moral consideration there is nothing whole or sound in them." Burgess, for whom the "essence … of all sinne" was the imposition of one's own will above God's in the pursuit of "lusts" and "wickedness," was not only drawing a direct connection between sinfulness and Black *people*, rather than a disembodied blackness, but was also rhetorically associating black skin with disease and moral decrepitude.[37]

Dawson identifies another common perception that dark skin obfuscated attempts to 'read' the African's internality. While the fair complexions of the English provided a "window onto their souls," Black complexions were shuttered, rendering an immediate assessment of their "capacity for sanguine, Christian fervour" impossible. Dawson locates this for example in contemporary misgivings about Africans' capacity for modesty, based on the fact that their skin was too dark for

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[36] Loomba, "Identities and Bodies," 9. See also Lewis, "'Like Devils Out of Hell'," 108.
[37] Burgess, *A treatise of original sin*, 71, 249.

visible blushing.[38] Dawson also raises an important caveat which must not be overlooked: that the association between skin colour and behaviour in the early modern period was "polyvalent and tenuous."[39] Though the association was certainly made, and with enough frequency that numerous theories could arise about its conditions and causations, there was no ubiquitous understanding of it, and furthermore, some contemporaries firmly rejected the notion that external difference was a suggestion of internal difference. "'Tis such a vulgar Error," wrote Charles Gildon in 1694, "so criminal a fondness of our Selves, to allow nothing of Humanity to any but our own Acquaintance of the fairer hew." Gildon even professed that Christian Africans "move by a nobler Principle, more open, free and generous, and not such slaves to sordid Interest."[40]

Early modern works of exegesis, chiefly concerning the biblical stories of the sons of Noah and the mark or curse of Cain, were also incorporated into early modern racial discourses. The book of Genesis dictates that the three races of people on earth are descended from the sons of Noah: Japhet, Sem, and Cham (or Ham). The descendants of Ham were understood to populate the continent of Africa, which, following the expansions in European geographical knowledge and cartography from the fifteenth century on, was seen as progressively distinct and separate from Europe and Asia. Furthermore, as Braude points out, the precise genealogical link between Ham and Africa, and indeed between his brothers and their respective peoples, originated not in Scripture but rather with medieval exegetical works, and it only appeared consistently after the advent of sustained European contact with West Africa in the mid-fifteenth century.[41] John

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[38] Dawson, *Bodies Complexioned*, 225.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] Charles Gildon, *Miscellaneous letters and essays on several subjects philosophical, moral, historical, critical, amorous, &c. in prose and verse* (London: Printed for Benjamin Bragg, 1694), 98-99.
[41] Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997), 110-11, 127.

Stevens' translation of Spanish histories, *A brief history of Spain*, compiled and published in 1701, stated that Ham was allotted the territories of "Babylon, Arabia, Egypt, and all Affrick."[42] The association of Ham with the peoples of Africa was increasingly used to explain the Africans' black skin and, similarly to the stances on religious conversion noted above, to justify the slave trade.[43] According to Genesis, Noah punished Ham for having reacted shamefully to his nakedness by cursing Ham's son Canaan, and all of his descendants, to be a "servant of servants … to his brothers."[44]

Ham's error was not necessarily limited to his humiliation of Noah: he was sometimes described as less pious or virtuous than his brothers and father, and even Canaan could be construed as "a loose young profligate Fellow … and consequently a fit Tool for the Devil to go to work with."[45] In such an interpretation of the story, wickedness and moral lassitude are something of a pre-existing condition in Ham's line, almost an open invitation for diabolical interference and explanation for the necessity of a punitive response. If the peoples of Africa were the offspring of Ham or Canaan, then subordination would be in their nature—though this connection was neither popularly nor universally made in the initial period of English participation in slavery.[46]

The curse of Cain, or "mark upon Cain" in the King James version, meanwhile, was the consequence of fratricide. God's punishment for Cain's murder of Abel was two-pronged: because the earth had been poisoned by the spilling of Abel's blood, any land Cain tried to farm would be

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[42] John Stevens, *A brief history of Spain. Containing the race of its kings, from the first Peopling of that Country…* (London: Printed for J. Nutt near Stationers-Hall, 1701), 2.
[43] Olusoga, *Black and British*, 149-52; Braude, "The Sons of Noah," 129.
[44] Gen. 9:25 (ESV).
[45] Daniel Defoe, *The political history of the Devil* (London: Printed for Joseph Fisher, 1739), 117.
[46] Olusoga, *Black and British*, 154.

barren; and he would be forced to live the life of a "fugitive and wanderer."[47] Cain's motive for killing Abel has been the subject of eternal debate, though an interpretation supported by Defoe and others suggests that Cain was driven by jealousy, and that this jealousy opened a door through which "the Devil immediately entred."[48] The nature of the mark, with which God branded Cain so that he would remain undiscovered and his suffering be extended, was not made explicit in Scripture, and so interpretations of it as a physical blemish or marking exist alongside more spiritual interpretations of it as an incorporeal omen or sign.[49] Cain's curse was also widely understood to be passed down to his descendants, characterized by their relation to Cain as wicked, degenerate, and cursed.[50] Some early modern interpretations visualized the mark as dark skin.[51] The connection between this dark skin, the direct result of an immoral act and chronologically, the original murder, is rather telling when one considers the endurance of the theory that Cain was actually born of a union between Eve and Satan.[52]

Ham and Cain were frequently conflated in medieval texts, so frequently that the scholarly consensus is that Ham and Cain were rhetorically connected by contemporaries for their similarities.[53] Wheeler's incisive remark that the various early modern theories for the provenance of black skin assume "an original whiteness from which all populations degenerated" applies here just as it does to climatic explanations.[54] Neither Ham nor Cain began life as black men, either in

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[47] Gen. 4:12, quoted in John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 97.
[48] Defoe, *The political history of the Devil*, 99. See also David Jenner, *Cain's mark and murder, K. Charls the I his martyrdom delivered in a sermon* (London: Printed for J.R. by John Williams, 1681), 2-3; Richard Baxter, *A paraphrase on the New Testament, with notes, doctrinal and practical*, 3rd ed. (Printed for T. Parkhurst, 1701), ch. 11; Robert Barclay, *An apology for the true Christian divinity* (London: Printed and sold by T. Sowle, 1701), 153.
[49] For a review of pertinent examples, see Jenner, *Cain's mark*, 3-12.
[50] Defoe, *Political history of the Devil*, 108.
[51] See for example *The Athenian Oracle* 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London: Andrew Bell, 1704), 1:29-30.
[52] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 15-19.
[53] Braude, "The Sons of Noah," 128.
[54] Wheeler, *Complexion of Race*, 100.

Scripture or in common interpretation: their informed blackness, or rather, loss of their whiteness, was the result of sin and personal moral failure.

The construction of Blackness itself also acted as a short-hand to indicate other kinds of sin, particularly "non-normative sexual practices."[55] The symbiotic connection between ideologies of race and sexuality in the early modern period, a connection which is legible, either explicitly or implicitly, in extant witchcraft pamphlets, will be explored here in more detail. The "germinating anti-black sentiment" in seventeenth-century England shaped the ways in which Black people were portrayed; a widespread and enduring stereotype was that of hypersexuality. The image of the African as "libidinous" and animalistically uninhibited dominated early modern writing about Africans even in the sixteenth century.[56]

England's increasing military and mercantile efforts and concomitant economic expansion in the early modern period facilitated interaction with the non-European world, resulting in a more thorough entrenching of pre-existing tropes of blackness, or "proto formulations of categorical racism."[57] Language in Christian doctrine juxtaposing "light" and "dark" came to describe and categorize "physical differences … making it impossible to separate 'racial' signifiers of blackness from traditional iconography."[58] Representations of Blackness in European art and literature certainly predated the early modern period, but this pre-existing imagery was revived by early modern expansions in trade and the movement and dislocation of people. The early modern visual and linguistic imagery of Blackness was "juxtaposed with notions of degradation and subordination."[59]

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[55] Loomba, "Identities and Bodies," 9. See also Traub, "History in the Present Tense," 15-54.
[56] Strings, *Fearing the Black Body*, 82.
[57] Lewis, "'Like Devils Out of Hell'," 108.
[58] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 4.
[59] Lewis, "'Like Devils Out of Hell'," 114.

According to Kim Hall, descriptions of light and dark transcended contemporary "beauty standards or markers of moral categories" by becoming "the conduit through which the English began to formulate the notions of 'self' and 'other' so well known in Anglo-American racial discourses."[60] Polarities such as light/dark, white/black, and good/evil are not inherently racialized; however, the persistent association of these binary oppositions with African peoples and cultural practices enabled early modern English writers to construct a language of difference predicated on a hierarchy of race. In these oppositions, blackness was usually symbolic of "death, mourning, baseness, evil, sin and danger," while whiteness was often shorthand for "purity, virginity, innocence, good magic … and perfect human beauty."[61] The sustained application of blackness, defined by skin colour and physiognomy, as a cultural standard against which one might measure beauty or worth, "pushes this language into the realm of racial discourse." As Hall eloquently remarks, "aesthetic concerns easily become a semiotics of race."[62] This fusion of aesthetic and moral significations empowered ideologies of difference around skin colour.[63]

This fact is even more pronounced in its intersections with additional categories of identity, gender in particular. Not only did diacritical conceptualizations of race and skin colour construct, elevate, and materialize ideals of femininity, but they also worked to propel this vision of femininity beyond imagination into an embodiment of the values and supremacy of whiteness.[64] The deliberate juxtaposition of the purity, innocence, and beauty of white femininity with black masculinity and its attendant threat to white social order defined whiteness in part by constructing it against that which it opposed, metaphorizing and reifying the patriarchal imperative of female

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[60] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 2.
[61] Fryer, *Staying Power*, 135.
[62] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 5-6. See also Strings, *Fearing the Black Body*.
[63] Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 2.
[64] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 241, 253.

virtue. Whiteness, then, symbolized both social and "general superiority."[65] This went beyond art as well: the representation of African women and men as hypersexual and barbaric "marked the boundary of English civility,"[66] thus visually and discursively using Blackness to prop up whiteness. Racialized distinctions between Africans and Europeans emerged as explicitly embodied in the mid-seventeenth century as artists and philosophers increasingly meditated on the primacy of skin colour to beauty.

As previously established, the sheer variety and frequent opacity of terms used to describe blackness—and Blackness—in early modern English can complicate attempts to distinguish between purely figurative or metaphorical language and references to race. This is particularly troublesome in witchcraft pamphlets, as diabolism and malefic magic are not infrequently described in terms of blackness: for example, the Devil's many appellations included "Prince of Darkness" and "Black Prince," and witchcraft and occult practices were frequently condemned as "Black Art."[67]

Race and sex in witchcraft pamphlets

The experience of a woman in Ormiston, Scotland, who reportedly saw the ghostly apparition of the minister's deceased servant, Isabel Heriot, might be one of few accounts linking

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[65] Furthermore, as Sabrina Strings explains, the juxtaposition of white and Black women in the visual art of the seventeenth century diverged from earlier works in terms of the "growing aesthetic distinctions" between white and Black subjects. Black women's role was to "communicate not just difference but destitution … to evoke inferiority" compared with the "well-apportioned physiques and abundant locks of the white Venus." Strings, *Fearing the Black Body*, 93, 98-99. For more analysis on the semiotics of race see Hall, *Things of Darkness*, especially ch. 4.
[66] Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle'," 192.
[67] See, for example, James VI and I, *Daemonologie, In Forme of a Dialogue, Diuided into three books* (London: Printed by Arnold Hatfield, 1603), Preface; Daniel Defoe, *The secrets of the invisible world disclos'd* (London: Printed for J. Watts, 1735), 57.

witchcraft and Black people, rather than invoking discourses of blackness. Isabel Murray, the woman who had identified the apparition, said that before her death, Isabel Heriot had been possessed of a "drooling and jearing humour," an "ill Nature," and a "Black complexion." Her service to the local minister apparently had little effect on her, as it was widely known that she was "not profiting in the knowledge of God." She was not suspected of witchcraft in her lifetime, but the above qualities, along with her frequent nightly excursions to unknown places, seemed not to have endeared her to her neighbours. Her apparition, which haunted both Isabel Murray and the minister, "was black like the mouten soot (one of [Isabel Murray's] own expressions) the very colour which her face had when she died." It was not until Isabel Heriot's ghost appeared that she was explicitly linked to witchcraft: because it appeared soon after she died, and because it was principally targeting the minister, it became likely that while alive she had been a witch, or had at least been possessed by the Devil.[68] The qualities contributing to Isabel Murray's low estimation of Isabel Heriot's character—her irreverence, unrefined comportment, and complexion—might suggest that Isabel Heriot was a Black woman. If she was, this anecdote might demonstrate that distrust or dislike of Black people did not necessarily translate into fears of witchcraft or demonism.[69]

Though there do not appear to be any surviving records or pamphlet accounts of Black witches, a number of witchcraft pamphlets throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries use blackness as a rhetorical device or otherwise draw upon the imagery of blackness,

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[68] George Sinclair, *Satan's invisible world discovered, or, A choice collection of modern relations proving evidently against the saducees and athesists of this present age* (Edinburgh: Printed by John Reed, 1685), 144-53.
[69] On the peculiarities of witchcraft in early modern Scotland, see Brian P. Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland: Law, Politics and Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); Michelle Brock, *Satan and the Scots: The Devil in Post-Reformation Scotland, c.1560-1700* (London: Routledge, 2016); idem, "Internalizing the Demonic: Satan and the Self in Early Modern Scottish Piety," *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 1 (2015): 23-43; and the essays in *Scottish Witches and Witch-Hunters*, ed. Julian Goodare (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

which in addition to discourses of gender and sexuality served to reinforce the sexual deviancy, corruption, and anti-Christian immorality essential to witchcraft practices and the Devil himself. This is most salient in descriptions of the Devil as a 'black man' which appear in pamphlets and tracts of the mid to late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[70] Of course, as Roxann Wheeler points out, though "black" was certainly one of several terms used at the time to signify a dark complexion, it was just as often used to signify wickedness or low moral character.[71] This latter reading of the term would naturally be consistent with contemporary perceptions of the Devil. However, though the ambiguity—and as was often the case, brevity—of such physical descriptions necessarily undermines conclusive generalization or semantic precision, textual and contextual clues allow, if not a certainty, at least a suggestion of racial ideology.

The Devil assumed many different shapes in medieval and early modern literature and folklore.[72] Putting aside for the moment the intellectual and theological debates on the corporeality or incorporeality of the Devil, tracts and treatises scrutinizing witchcraft, apparitions, and spirits, not to mention paintings and woodcuts, made reference to the somatic connection between blackness and the Devil. Reginald Scot's influential sceptical text *The discoverie of vvitchcraft*,

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[70] This is consistent also with popular descriptions of the Devil in contemporary Germany as a 'black' man, where he would also often dress in "vivacious colour combinations": Roper, *Witch Craze*, 87.
[71] Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 3.
[72] Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, 67; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, especially chs. 11 and 15; Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For topographical considerations of diabolism, see Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape*, 504-09, and *passim*. For diabolism in its European contexts, see Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, especially ch. 10; Christa Agnes Tuczay, "Witches and Devil's Magic in Austrian Demonological Legends," in *Cultures of Witchcraft in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Jonathan Barry, Owen Davies, and Cornelie Usborne (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 23-52. On the devil and demonism in colonial contexts, see Irene Silverblatt*, Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the colonial origins of the civilized world* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 161-86; Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World: The impact of diabolism in New Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); idem, "The Devil's Encounter with America," in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology, Volume I: Demonology, Religion and Witchcraft*, ed. Brian P. Levack (London: Routledge, 2004), 245-70; Fernando Cervantes and Andrew Redden, *Angels, Demons and the New World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

first published in 1584 and reissued three times over the seventeenth century, cited French philosopher Jean Bodin, who "sometimes alloweth the devill the shape of a blackmoore."[73] Bodin's 1593 text, *De la démonomanie des sorciers*, did relate the accounts of six women who confessed that "le Diable s'estoit tousiours apparu … en guise d'homme haut & noir." (The Devil had always appeared in the form of a tall and black man.) A more precise description was given by Magdelaine de la Croix, a Spanish woman who confessed that she had engaged in sexual relations from the age of twelve with "un malin esprit en forme d'un More noir."[74] (a malignant spirit in the form of a Blackmoor.) In *An antidote against atheisme* Henry More observed that it was an "ordinary confession of VVitches" that the Devil sometimes appeared "in the shape of an ill-favoured black man."[75] Though Daniel Defoe's *Political history of the Devil* made a strong case for the Devil's incorporeality—as Defoe argued, if the Devil were confined to a mortal body, by the rules of nature he would be disempowered—it pointed out the frequency with which popular depictions of and tales about him "paint him as black."[76]

Slightly more obliquely, in the same text Defoe explained that the Devil's insidious works were facilitated by "Mahometanism," or Islam, which in the contemporary literature was of a kind with popery, paganism, and idolatry in terms of the threat they posed to Christian civilization.[77] Even the most perfunctory sketches of African and West Indian ethnic groups in travel diaries and manuscript collections included assessments of these groups' customs and beliefs; these assessments often resembled John Seller's remark about the people of Biafra, who seemed to "adict

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[73] Reginald Scot, *Scot's Discovery of vvitchcraft proving the common opinions of witches contracting with divels, spirits, or familiars ... to be but imaginary, erronious conceptions and novelties* (London: Printed by R. C., 1651), 69.
[74] Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (Anvers: Iehan Keerberghe, 1593), 35, 212.
[75] Henry More, *An antidote against atheisme, or, An appeal to the natural faculties of the minde of man, whether there be not a God* (London: Printed by Roger Daniel, 1653), 128.
[76] Defoe, *The political history of the Devil*, 229.
[77] *Ibid*., 200-01.

themselves to Witchcraft, and sometimes sacrificing their children to Devils," or John Ogilby's similar observations about the "pernicious customs," devil-worship, ritual animal sacrifices, and infanticide of Africans.[78] Some cultures blatantly worshipped the Devil, only sometimes out of fear;[79] others were polytheistic; others appeared to be Muslim, Jewish, or Catholic;[80] still others were totally atheistic. Travel narratives were rich in such reports, however inaccurate or misleading they might be, of these beliefs and of barbaric or uncivil customs. These narratives would likely be, for most people in England, the only point of contact they might ever have with the non-European world and would greatly inform their views on different cultures; they might also resonate with religious imagery linking sin, sometimes literally, with blackness.[81]

The most detailed English witchcraft account of the Devil as a black man was in the 1682 trial of three women—Temperance Floyd, Susanna Edwards, and Mary Trembles—from Bideford, Devon, well-known among historians of witchcraft as the last English witch trial definitively ending in the execution of the accused. Many other pamphlets contained reference to a black Devil, particularly in the mid- and late seventeenth century, when the Devil's role in witchcraft narratives greatly expanded.[82] Three pamphlets reproduce the Bideford witches'

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[78] John Seller, *A new systeme of geography, designed in a most plain and easy method for the better understanding of that science accommodated with new mapps* (London: s.n., 1685), 92; John Ogilby, *Africa being an accurate description of Egypt, Barbary, Lybia, and Billedulgerid, the land of Negroes, Guinee, Ethiopia and the Abyssines* (London: Printed by Tho. Johnson, 1670), 148, 479. See also Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in four bookes : containing the chorographie and historie of the whole vvorld, and all the principall kingdomes, provinces, seas and isles thereof* (London: Printed for Henry Seile, 1652), 74; *An introduction to the history of the kingdoms and states of Asia, Africa and America, Both ancient and modern* (London: Printed by R.J., 1705), 507.

[79] See for example Defoe, *The political history of the Devil,* 206; Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus: or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions. In Two Parts* (London, 1681), 76; Edward Cavendish Drake, *A new universal collection of authentic and entertaining voyages and travels, from the earliest accounts to the present time* (London: Printed for J. Cooks, 1770), 393.

[80] See for example R.B., *The English acquisitions in Guinea & East-India: containing first, the several forts and castles of the Royal African Company* (London: Printed for Nath. Crouch, 1708), 13.

[81] Olusoga, *Black and British*, 171-72.

[82] This expansion is likely attributable to the emphasis on the diabolical contract in the 1604 witchcraft statute, the prevalence of contemporary European demonological theories, and the influence of Matthew Hopkins and Jonathan

testimonies, corroborated by witnesses, of the Devil appearing to them variously "in the shape of a comly Black Man," as well as a lion, a dog, and a bird.[83] This case may be an example of ambiguous language, as Thomas Eastchurch, a deponent, testified to having overheard Temperance Floyd say the Devil had appeared to her "in blackish Clothes." It is thus possible that the Devil's skin was white, but that the description of him as "black" was simply a reference to his dark clothing and or the connotations of diabolism. However, there are indications within the text, and some of a more material nature, that the Devil's human form was indeed that of a Black man. As Eastchurch further confirmed, Temperance Floyd had also described the Devil as possessing "broad Eyes, and a Mouth like a Toad,"[84] features which here served to highlight his difference and were not dissimilar to contemporary physical descriptions of Africans.[85]

Moreover, both Temperance Floyd and Susanna Edwards confessed to the Devil "having carnal knowledge" of their bodies and sucking on teats located in their "Secret Parts" on more than one occasion. Not only did Temperance Floyd confess to having been "suck'd … often times by the black Man," but she also "did kneel down to him in the Street" and he "lay Carnally with her for Nine Nights together."[86] Temperance alone cited the "temptation and perswasion" and "Suttile Insinuations"[87] of the black man; neither Susanna Edwards nor Mary Trembles appeared to have

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Stearne, the notorious witchfinders of Essex, whose efforts in the 1640s produced an outpouring of confessions invoking the Devil: Dolan, "Witch Wives," 460.

[83] *The Life and Conversation*, 2-3; *A True and Impartial Relation*, 13.

[84] *A True and Impartial Relation*, 22.

[85] See, for example, Ogilby, *Africa*, 327-28; Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: or, The Royal Slave. A True History* (London: Printed for Will. Canning, 1688), 27. An earlier description by Dürer claims that "Negro faces are seldom beautiful because of their very flat noses and thick lips." Albrecht Dürer, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 166.

[86] *A True and Impartial Relation*, 11, 14, 15; *The Tryal, Condemnation, and Execution of Three Witches*, 4.

[87] *A True and Impartial Relation*, 14-16; *The Tryal, Condemnation, and Execution of Three Witches*, 3.

enjoyed sexual intercourse with the Devil, though they both reported having lain with him, in the form of a child and a lion respectively.[88]

Female sexuality and desire, even in appropriate contexts such as marriage, was seen as "dangerous, grotesque, and unsettling" by contemporaries. This fear of female desire and pleasure had strong religious roots; the "very act of sexual arousal was tainted by sin."[89] It was a widely-held belief that women, descending as they did from Eve, were more vulnerable to temptation and the allure of sexual deviance.[90] Simultaneously, female virtue was largely dependent on contemporary gendered expectations of sexual morality, modesty, and duty, and women's transgressions of these expectations, often attributed to "moral weakness and uncontrolled sexuality," threatened the stability of family life and could become matters of public concern.[91] "Modesty," according to Laura Gowing, "readily encompassed everything else a woman was meant to show: virtue, submission, obedience, thrift and dependence. Most of all, it guaranteed an enclosure that was both concrete and symbolic, containing the wayward natures of women."[92] Expressions of female desire or unnatural sexuality, not to mention sexual misconduct, were often met with censure or punishment.[93]

The female witch's body in early modern England did not belong to her. When she "Covenanted with the Devil,"[94] who would more often than not leave visible markings on a witch's

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[88] *A True and Impartial Relation*, 3, 34.
[89] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Sex and Reproduction in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 102; Kim Phillips and Barry Reay, *Sex Before Sexuality: A Premodern History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 9.
[90] Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, 338.
[91] Lidman, "Violence or justice?," 243.
[92] Gowing, "The Manner of Submission," 28.
[93] Many historians have remarked on the gendered double standard of sexual behaviour, as men's sexual transgressions, while still disapproved of by moralists and communities alike, were not met with the same level of reproach, and furthermore, sexual behaviour was much more central to women's reputations that it was to those of men. See Wrightson, *English Society*, 107; Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, 100; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 111, 180.
[94] "The Spiritual Observator," *The Post-Angel* 3, no. 4 (April 1702), 190.

body as evidence of their diabolical pact, her body was given over to him. As Almond, Purkiss, and Millar have shown, these marks, which usually appeared to resemble teats, had multiple and imbricated implications of perversion, both sexual and maternal.[95] On one hand, these marks were often located in private areas and thus suggestive of some manner of sexual congress between witch and Devil; on the other hand, the fact that the marks were conceptualized and understood to serve the same function as teats might demonstrate the maternal, or, as Purkiss and Willis argue, *anti*-maternal, nature of the witch's relationship with the Devil and demonism.[96] Lyndal Roper suggests that "deeply conflicted feelings about motherhood" fundamentally undergirded early modern European witchcraft discourse.[97]

Early modern medical knowledge understood breast milk to be "impure" blood from the mother's womb, which became white and was propelled through the body to the breasts through the power of "maternal love."[98] Female witches were often visualized as elderly and thus post-menopausal; such women, whose bodies were unable to perform what were perceived as intrinsic and feminine functions, diminished in value to society, and when associated with witchcraft were not simply disassociated from motherhood but became anti-maternal and anti-nurturing. In fact, it was thought that witches' bodies converted breast milk to blood, "inverting" their normative

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[95] Philip Almond, *The Devil: A New Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 138; Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, 118; Diane Purkiss, "Body Crimes: The Witches, Lady Macbeth and the Relics," in *Female Transgression in Early Modern Britain: Literary and Historical Explorations*, ed. Richard Hillman and Pauline Ruberry-Blanc (New York: Routledge, 2016), 46.

[96] Diane Purkiss, "Women's Stories of Witchcraft in Early Modern England: The House, the Body, the Child," *Gender and History* 7 (1995) 411; Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, 6.

[97] The culture of witch-hunting in seventeenth-century Germany was, per Roper, driven in part by that society's "idealization of motherhood." Beyond the straightforward misogyny characteristic of those omnipresent associations of post-menopausal women with witchcraft, Roper argues that collective fears of "maternal hostility" could be sublimated through the construction of the widow figure as the inversion of the mother, "a woman who could be the repository of all the fears about evil mothers": Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 202-211, 218.

[98] Purkiss, "Body Crimes," 45.

purpose[99] and becoming "[givers] of death."[100] Furthermore, this trope of the witch as the "anti-mother who disrupts familial or marital harmony" could be by extension a motive for accusations, as sudden injuries and deaths of livestock and children, for example, were often blamed on suspected witches.[101]

The same legal and cultural imperative that held women responsible for illicit sexual activity applied to and magnified the deviance and immorality of female witches who had confessed to sexual relations with the Devil, whether pleasurable or painful, voluntary or coerced. Demonic sex, a distinguishing feature of continental European witchcraft discourse, was less ubiquitous, though still legible, in the English context.[102] The "ready language" of demonic sex in confessions of witchcraft noted by Lyndal Roper in German contexts is intelligible in English contexts as well.[103] The oft-cited *Malleus maleficarum*, perhaps the preeminent European text on witchcraft and demonology of the period, was the only such text of which the English discourse availed itself that was primarily concerned with the sexual elements of witchcraft, though the other texts which do make reference to such matters nevertheless demonstrate an "intense interest and careful attention" to them.[104] Many of these were too esoteric for popular consumption and discourse, however, and it is likely that ideas and discussions of demonic sex were most available in court or pamphlet accounts.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the belief that a witch's familiar—a demon in the form of a small animal or, sometimes, in the form of a man—or the Devil himself would suck blood from

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[99] Purkiss, "Body Crimes," 45; Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, 55.
[100] Purkiss, "Women's Stories," 420.
[101] Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions,* 119. Note that infanticide was much less commonly associated with witchcraft in England than it was in continental Europe: see Garrett, "Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge," 36; Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 218.
[102] Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 74.
[103] Roper, *The Witch*, 172.
[104] Garrett, "Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge," 38.

a teat located in the witch's private parts was well-established.[105] The erotic nature of this belief may seem apparent, yet it is complicated by the ambiguity in many extant accounts of such markings. The overlap of sexuality and maternity is most legible in accounts of familiars suckling a witch's breast: take, for instance, Susanna Edwards' confession that the Devil had taken the form of a young boy and suckled at her breast. Accounts in which a familiar or the Devil himself suckles at the witch's breast were far less common in England than in continental Europe, but they nevertheless effectively demonstrate the perverse intermeshing of maternalism and sexuality, as women's breasts function, first and foremost, as reproductive organs, but also as sexual organs. Moreover, they demonstrate both a fascination with and disgust for women's bodily functions, reflecting the perception of women's bodies as "both an object of desire and a source of pollution."[106]

The Bideford trial is one of comparatively few in England to have explicitly sexual elements, and it may not be coincidental that the Devil is so frequently described here as black. In fact, the black Devil appears in many of those pamphlets which contain erotic elements. Temperance, the eldest of the three witches, was estimated by one pamphleteer to be about seventy years old; her sexual relationship with the Devil was also the most detailed of the three, and the Devil appeared most consistently as a black man in Temperance's experience. This, in addition to the clash of eroticism and maternity in Susanna's tryst with the Devil in the shape of a young boy, and the undertones of bestiality in Mary Trembles' encounter with the Devil as a lion, is a prime example of the volatile balance between fascination and revulsion characteristic of early modern attitudes about race, gender, and sexuality, especially in their socially aberrant formulations.

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[105] Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, 118.
[106] Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 2.

The phenomenon of the monstrous birth is another extreme and complex example of such formulations, though its historiography has not been limited to its sexual connotations. For instance, public discourses of and responses to reports of monstrous births have recently been contextualized as demonstrative of the "fluid interchange" between religious and natural philosophical tenets, with cheap broadsides and learned texts alike interpreting monstrous births and other unexplainable occurrences as portentous; and as part of collective attempts to cope with, and forget, the public memory of the Civil Wars and Interregnum.[107] The "politics of monstrosity" peculiar to the Restoration era diverged from its earlier iteration, which had, since the mid-sixteenth century, "functioned both as an interpretive framework with which to explore genuine physical deformity and as pure allegory." Monstrosity gained further cultural significance and additional meaning during the Civil Wars as religious and political oppositions were reified and embodied in satirical depictions of physical deformity, and literal monstrous births could be interpreted as evincing the parents' "monstrosity of conviction." The monstrous birth could be a reflection of female deviance, God's wrath, and also of disorder in the body politic.[108]

According to conventional theological and medical doctrine, a pregnant woman's thoughts, imagination, or speech could affect the shape of the fetus.[109] The formative effect of a mother on her child, which also extended past birth, could just as easily be deformative: births of babies with

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[107] Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England," *Past & Present* 92 (1981), 20-54; Stephen Pender, "'No monsters at the resurrection': inside some conjoined twins," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 143-67; Harriet Lyon, "The Fisherton Monster: Science, Providence, and Politics in Early Restoration England," *Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (2017), 333-362; Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[108] Lyon, "The Fisherton Monster," 344-45; David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23.

[109] Sarah D. Luttfring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 165; Karen Harvey, "Rabbits, Whigs and Hunters: Women and Protest in Mary Toft's Monstrous Births of 1726," *Past & Present*, no. 238 (2018), 44.

physical deformities could also be interpreted in public discourses as symbolic of female transgression and of God's displeasure.[110] Most pamphlets on monstrous births were written by religious officials, and the monsters in these narratives "themselves are texts: their bodies are transparent to the crimes they punish."[111] Though these pamphlets hold the mother's transgressive thoughts and behaviours accountable for the appearance of deformity, her influence is ultimately secondary to that of God, whose prerogative it was to create monsters "as warnings against sin."[112]

Demonic pregnancy was far less common in English witchcraft discourse than in continental European, as it appeared in only three pamphlets.[113] Only one of these pamphlets, published in 1645, described the results of the conception: an accused witch confessed that she had "conceived twice by [the Devil], but as soon as she was delivered of them they ran away in most horrid long and ugly shapes."[114] Pregnancy worked as legal proof of consent to sexual relations, as seventeenth-century medical understandings of conception held that it occurred as the result of mutual orgasm.[115] The causal association of sexual pleasure with pregnancy thus augments the perverse and deviant nature of the witch's relationship to the Devil.

Monstrosity in witchcraft pamphlets was most often reserved for the Devil. The cloven hoof was so common in popular imagery that Defoe included an extended meditation on its meanings and evolution in his *Political history of the Devil*. Defoe observed that this particular feature had been frequently assigned to the Devil since Antiquity, such that it had become an

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[110] Luttfring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge*, 167-68.
[111] Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 4.
[112] Luttfring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge*, 169.
[113] See *A True Relation of the Arraignment of Eighteene Witches* (London: Printed by I.H., 1645), 29; E.G. and H.F., *A Prodigious and Tragicall History of the Arraignment, Tryall, Confession, and Condemnation of Six Witches at Maidstone, in Kent* (London: Printed for Richard Harper, 1652), 3. The contents of these pamphlets are discussed in Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, 133-34.
[114] *A True Relation of the Arraignment*, 5.
[115] Walker, *Crime, gender, and social order*, 60; Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families*, 58-59.

expectation universal to most cultures.[116] Numerous witchcraft pamphlets and other written media contained this trope, coverage of the Bideford trials included: in one of the three pamphlets, published five years after the trial, the Devil's initial appearance to Temperance Floyd was as an attractive black man with feet which "resemble those of an Oxe."[117] Much earlier, in 1616, Mary Smith confessed to making a contract with the Devil in the shape of a black man with horns, an image which is similarly evocative but was seldom invoked.[118] Though Defoe, for example, speculated on the metaphysical and religious peculiarity of the cloven hoof as a symbol, in witchcraft narratives it served to reinforce the grotesqueness and deformity of devilish anatomy—which, though alterable, was an embodiment of his internal evil—by imbuing it with a literally bestial quality.

Bestiality became a capital offence in England in 1533, and early moderns increasingly viewed it not only as a crime but as a grave and monstrous sin.[119] Though not all witchcraft narratives were eroticized, those that were, were preoccupied with the perverse and unnatural; as perverse and unnatural as was the confederacy between witch and Devil, sexual congress with an animalistic Devil was even more egregious. Though Millar locates a general shift in the mid-century from depictions of non-penetrative sexual relations between witches and their familiar spirits, usually in the shape of a small animal or imp, to depictions of penetrative sexual relations between witches and the Devil or a familiar in human form, Mary Trembles' confession demonstrates that this shift was not absolute.[120] More importantly, Temperance Floyd's

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[116] Defoe, *The political history of the Devil*, 229-34.
[117] *The Life and Conversation*, 2.
[118] Alexander Roberts, *A Treatise of Witchcraft … with a True Narration of the Witchcrafts Which Mary Smith, Did Practice* (London, 1616), 50-55.
[119] Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, 129.
[120] *Ibid.*, 129-130. As Millar argues, it is possible that this change is the result of slackening censorship laws in the 1640s, and that by the time of their eventual renewal in the 1660s, penetrative demonic sex had become so assimilated into witchcraft discourse that these references persisted.

confession—or at least, the versions of it that made it into print—may exemplify racialized associations of blackness with animality or monstrosity.

Finally, the historical and geographical contexts of the Bideford case may shed further light on the problem. Bideford, located in the north of Devon in the south-west of England, had become by the sixteenth century a major port town. Indeed, the location of the county at nearly the southwestern-most tip of England made several of its towns prime points of origin for coastal and transatlantic commercial ventures.[121] Ships departing from Bideford in the seventeenth century sailed primarily to and from the Americas, transporting labour and returning with tobacco.[122] Though the port at Bideford appears not to have been part of the slave trade or of trade with Africa in general, wealthy families and merchants from Bideford invested in these trades through voyages from Bristol or other ports.[123] The proximity of Bideford to other port towns, such as Plymouth, Exeter, and Bristol, as well as the participation of Bideford merchants in African trade, might suggest the possibility of contact, either immediate or mediated, with Africans.

The Devil also appeared to Alice Huson in 1661 as a "Black Man upon a Black Horse, with Cloven-Feet." He promised Alice, a widow from the village of Burton Agnes in Yorkshire whose employment seemed to consist of odd jobs for her neighbours, financial security in exchange for her compliance, and she "did Worship him upon [her] Knees." She had served him for three years at the time of her confession.[124] Several times he gave her money, requesting that she kill Alice Corbet, a woman who provided Alice Huson with work and and kindness, in return. Though she

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[121] Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 8.
[122] John Watkins, *An essay towards a history of Bideford, in the county of Devon* (Exeter: Printed by E. Grigg, 1792), 58.
[123] Nigel Tattersfield, *The Forgotten Trade, Comprising the Log of the Daniel and Henry of 1700 and Accounts of the Slave Trade from the Minor Ports of England, 1698-1725* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), 306-7.
[124] Hale, *A Collection of modern relations*, 52-58, quotations on 58.

did not succeed in killing Corbet, she did admit to having killed a man "by this Evil Spirit." Alice Huson further confessed that the Devil would spend the entire night sucking at a teat on her body, though the location of the teat and the duration of this particular arrangement is unclear.[125]

Elinor Shaw and Mary Phillips, two women tried for witchcraft whose trial appeared in a pamphlet published in 1705, both confessed to making a pact with the Devil, who appeared to them as a "black tall Man."[126] Northamptonshire, the East Midlands county where Elinor and Mary lived, had connections in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the slave trade through merchants and noble families, and there is archival evidence of Africans living there from as early as the 1580s, as well as around the turn of the eighteenth century.[127] It is possible, then, due perhaps to geographical mobility and print and oral culture, that people throughout Northamptonshire might have some idea of the presence of Africans in England. Elinor and Mary lived together, and were infamous even in neighbouring towns for their "lude" behaviour. Elinor, born in Cotterstock, whose "very obscure" parents had not granted her an education, had been left to fend for herself from the age of fourteen when she met and befriended Mary, who had been born in Oundle, about two miles from Cotterstock. By her early twenties, Elinor had begun "exposing her Body to almost every Man that would take the pains to Debauch her" and had gained a reputation as a notorious whore. Mary, Elinor's "Partener in Knitting, and Bedfellow also," was ostracized for similar behaviour.[128]

Seeking revenge against their detractors, the two women, "resolv'd to go Hand in Hand … to the Devil together for Company." The Devil upon his first appearance to the women offered

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[125] Hale, *A Collection of modern relations*, 58-59.
[126] Ralph Davis, *The Northamptonshire Witches. Being a true and faithful account of the births, educations, lives, and conversations, of Elinor Shaw, and Mary Phillips* (London: Printed for F. Thorn, 1705), 5.
[127] Habib, *Black Lives*, 224-28, 367.
[128] Davis, *The Northamptonshire Witches*, 3.

them the use of his power to "do what Mischief they pleased," and after they signed contracts in their own blood, they engaged in sexual intercourse with the Devil.[129] Two pamphlets, both authored by Ralph Davis, describe the events of the night during witch Elinor and Mary pledged themselves to the Devil. In the first, a trial pamphlet, Davis wrote that "the Devil came to bed with them both, and had Carnal knowledge of 'em, as if a Man, only with this difference instead of being Warm, his Embraces was very Cold and unpleasant."[130] The second pamphlet is more brief: "the same Night [the Devil] had carnal knowledge of them both, and in the Morning he told them, they were now as substantial witches as any."[131] Given that Elinor and Mary lived together, and the subtext of their relationship may even allow for a romantic interpretation, it is possible that they both had sexual relations with the Devil at the same time. Davis' descriptions seem to support this idea, as they only refer to Elinor and Mary collectively. If this was the implication, it would likely have enhanced the deviant and prurient nature of the witches' diabolism.

The purpose of this chapter is not to attempt to rationalize or provide 'real' explanations for witchcraft beliefs. Regardless of the incontrovertible truth about how or why or in what form these women, their accusers, and their prosecutors enacted, witnessed, felt, or judged what was determined to be witchcraft or diabolism, witchcraft was a sensical and sensible phenomenon to early moderns in ways impenetrable to modern historians. Accounts and narratives should not necessarily be taken at face value because of this, but it means that historians can afford to deprioritize discussions of reality and verifiable fact when the focus is on discursive meaning and

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[129] Davis, *The Northamptonshire Witches*, 4, 5.
[130] Ralph Davis, *An Account of the Tryals, Examination and Condemnation of Elinor Shaw and Mary Phillip's (Two Notorious Witches)* (Printed for F. Thorn, 1705), 6.
[131] Davis, *The Northamptonshire Witches*, 5.

language. Whether or not Temperance Floyd or Alice Huson truly had sexual intercourse with the Devil in the form of a Black man; whether or not the Devil gifted Mary Phillips and Elinor Shaw with demonic familiars to carry out their nefarious deeds; whether or not any of these women were mentally ill, induced to confess incredible things, or deliberately enacting a form of agency or dissent, their stories are revelatory of the trajectory of witchcraft beliefs, of the collective manifestations of discomfort and fear in the face of the abnormal or perverse, and perhaps of attempts, even unconscious, to reconcile the expansion of English mental worlds and the presence of the racialized other within existing frameworks and ideological constructions, of which racial difference was a nebulous, but legible one. Contemporary associations of Blackness with impiety, depravity either moral or sexual, and barbarity and animality, had religious and intellectual foundations in traditional understandings of inversion and opposition in nature and in society and were enhanced by theories of biological determinism. The appearance of these paradigms in discourses of witchcraft, also profoundly concerned with sin and difference, are suggestive of the ways in which English men and women may have adjusted their worldviews to accommodate racialized difference.

CONCLUSION

Fears and anxieties about witches, and their disruptions of the complex and dynamic arrangements of social relations, mutated and acquired additional meanings across time and space in response to local conditions and customary ways of thinking and to the broad changes, though incremental, occasioned by the political, religious, and economic turbulence of the long Reformation and beyond. Charles Zika's synthesis of the direction of the last several decades of witchcraft historiography—the "abandonment of monocausal explanations for the witch hunt" and of the "model that privileges intellectual formulation over the dynamics of local factors and input"—is a testament to the unabated scholarly urge to recover those polyphonic elements of early modern mental worlds and lived experience that remain obscure.[1] This thesis has built upon the social, witchcraft, and feminist historiographies of early modern England in highlighting the interconnectedness of identity categories and constructions of difference with popular beliefs in and public discourses about witchcraft in Augustan England. Court records, trial pamphlets, newspapers and periodicals, and other printed texts provide insight into the social and communal tensions for which witchcraft discourses and accusations could provide a release. Tangled up with actual fears of witches and *maleficium*, this thesis has argued, were expressions of social distinctions, disruptive and disorderly bodies, and efforts of early modern Britons to compartmentalize and make sense of encounters with the non-European world.

Superstition was slowly being effaced in the mental worlds of the elite and gentry. By the 1690s the broad strokes of the dichotomy of educated and plebeian attitudes were crystallizing,

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[1] Charles Zika, "The European Witch Hunt: From Mountain Credulity to Multiple Cultural Beliefs," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 50, no. 1 (2019), 102.

but the poorer and better sorts were not, of course, ideologically heterogeneous: while the mental worlds of the commonalty are often too inscrutable for the historian to decisively generalize, they can nevertheless be teased out in court documents and pamphlets, and to some extent the debates and the plurality of opinions among the middling and better sorts have survived in printed and unprinted sources. Empirical and 'rational' thinking about witchcraft and transformations in legal standards of evidence and proof widened social fissures already exacerbated by the economic and religious changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The better sorts gradually dissociated from the poorer, ignorant sorts, dismissing superstition and traditional beliefs. This led to the elaboration of a language of social and economic differentiation used to transform the representation of believers into "*the* people" with whom they were incompatible.[2] Over time, witch beliefs and the witch herself came to symbolize, at least among much of the élite, the division between modernity and the "rural past," between rational and scientific inquiry and superstition.[3]

This superstition lingered, however, and sparked intermittent, but violent, episodes of local retribution throughout the eighteenth century. The cases of Sarah Morduck and Ruth and John Osborne, though half a century apart, demonstrate the continuation of witchcraft beliefs as well as the self-regulatory methods of communities feeling threatened. In 1701, supporters of Richard Hathaway pursued Sarah Morduck, a woman whom Hathaway was convicted in 1702 of falsely and maliciously accusing of witchcraft, from her home in Southwark to her lodgings in St. Paul's Wharf in London, and on several occasions harassed and brutally beat her. Her exoneration did little to ensure her safety. Almost fifty years later, the torture and murder of Ruth Osborne at the hands of a mob resulted in the conviction and execution of one of the men responsible; public

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[2] Wrightson, "'Sorts of People'," 34-38; Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 1-78.
[3] Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 2-3.

outrage at the sentencing led to the delay of Colley's execution as well as the appointment of a guard to discourage protestations.[4] In the intervening years between these two cases, reports appeared in periodicals of similar incidents throughout the English countryside. Legal commentators, pamphleteers, and other writers were derisive of, or at best patronizing to, the "credulous and unthinking Multitude,"[5] further reinforcing social distinctions; and local social relations continued to make space for suspicions of witchcraft and their sometimes retributive resolution.

Little is known about Ruth Osborne aside from the circumstances of her murder. Her age, poverty, and gender, however, place her within a larger pattern of English witchcraft accusations. The witches whose stories and trials received the most attention in print were elderly, poor women, often though not always single or divorced. These women already resided in the margins of society, and may have been associated with witchcraft by virtue of their lack of patriarchal supervision, reliance on neighbourly largesse, and unrespectable behaviour. Since they lived independent lives, beyond the immediate patriarchal and paternal boundaries of family or community, and because of the 'symptoms' of old age and poverty visible in their bodies, they were therefore also vulnerable to antipathy and accusation, to ostracism or worse. The denial of charity, a model for witchcraft accusations developed by Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas from research into Essex witch trials, is a simplistic but effective starting point for making sense of certain observable patterns in accusations elsewhere in England. Beggars angered by rejection might be held responsible for occasioning later misfortunes; accusations might be made in an unconscious attempt to assuage guilt for refusing alms. Perceptions and attitudes about the poor and personal

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[4] *Tryal of Richard Hathaway*, 25-30; *Tryal of Thomas Colley*, 1-6; "News," *General Evening Post*, no. 2763.
[5] *Hertfordshire Witchcraft Consider'd*, 1.

obligations toward them shifted throughout the seventeenth century, which saw a gradual surveillance and criminalization of poverty that continued into the eighteenth century. Social alienation of the poor, compounded by the visceral and corporeal power ascribed to disruptive human emotions, may have led neighbours to be suspicious of those members of society whose presence was disorderly.[6]

Mary Johnson, Alice Huson, and Thomas Whiteing, among others, complicate this reading: Mary Johnson was a wife and mother, Alice Huson had an ally in a social superior, and Thomas Whiteing was a labourer. Their cases are perhaps reminders of the dynamism and fluidity both of local social relations and of witchcraft beliefs.[7] Early modern systems of belief were to a degree mutable, and their encounters with lived experiences and changes thwart broad assessments of predictable and consistent patterns of thought and behaviour. Our understandings are further complicated by the mediation of many of these accounts by either the legal system or the perspectives of educated writers.[8] Local traditional beliefs and conflicts were largely excised from charges and depositions, and pamphlets and newspaper columns could be dismissive of details that might have been crucial to those involved. With these caveats in mind, what emerges from the cases considered is an indication that observable difference from normative standards, whether of behaviour or emotional control, or of appearance or aspect, were frequently constitutive elements of witchcraft accusations and discourses.

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[6] On social order and disorder, see Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder*; Amussen, *An Ordered Society*; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*; Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, 82-115.
[7] On this fluidity, see for example Wrightson, *English Society*, especially chs. 2 and 6; the essays in *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society*; Gaskill, "Witchcraft, Politics and Memory," 289-308; idem, "Witchcraft and Neighbourliness," 211-32; Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, especially ch. 3.
[8] See Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 88; Davies and de Blécourt, "Introduction," 1-8.

The early modern body was a site of order and disorder, a physical projection of one's internal state, and was simultaneously necessary for the formation and performance of biologically-determined identities and "[unstable] as a foundation for empirical investigation."[9] In multiple overlapping ways, witches transgressed the boundary between 'self' and 'other,' inhabiting a space that rendered their antisocial deviations grotesque, prurient, and even monstrous. Male or female, the witch was capable of transferring their faith from God to the Devil, of expanding the Devil's influence in the world, of channeling inhuman power, of contravening or exaggerating gender norms. The perceptions, referents, and signifiers informing the language of witchcraft were geographically and temporally bound. Ideology, prejudice, religious belief, social status, locality, and other such factors shaped the narratives and discourses of witchcraft that were available even to the poorer sorts of people. Consensus between social groups is not always clear in extant documents, particularly as these documents are limited mostly to court records, pamphlets, and periodicals written and edited by educated men often with little interest in reproducing the beliefs of their social inferiors, but the themes and patterns visible in these documents are suggestive of profound anxieties about faith, physical difference, and existential uncertainties. These anxieties and perceived disruptions were not *redirected* into witchcraft suspicions and accusations; they were intertwined. To its victims and witnesses, witchcraft could be incredibly personal and immediate, and this immediacy was bound up with local social order and conflict, relations of power, and encounters with the alien and unfamiliar.

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[9] Wells, "Confusion Embodied," 51. See also Gowing, *Common Bodies*; Peter Spierenburg, *The Broken Spell: A Cultural and Anthropological History of Preindustrial Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991); Richard Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

They are also, as this thesis has argued, suggestive of anxieties about the widening world.[10] Intellectual, cultural, and economic exchange, as well as migration of peoples, increased as never before over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and England's imperial efforts, including its gradual dominance of the transatlantic slave trade, introduced ideas, narratives, material items, and, importantly, people, into a populace whose mental frameworks assimilated these novelties with difficulty. Existing epistemologies and taxonomies were adapted to cognize and discuss the unknown. As has been demonstrated, the English drew on biblical and scientific knowledge to classify and explain the existence and appearance of people of colour, especially Black Africans. The developing language of race, relying as it did on assessments of physical and somatic difference, was consistent, and overlapped, with other articulations of alterity, including those based upon wealth, gender and sexual norms, and religious confession. All of these articulations are visible in records of witch trials, popular narratives about witches, and intellectual meditations on witchcraft.

The appropriation of existing moral vocabularies of opposition, such as the biblical meanings of light and dark, and good and evil, for racial discourses facilitated the development of causal connections between somatic features like skin colour with notions of beauty, piety, and behaviour. Most received knowledge of Africans characterized them broadly as barbaric, hypersexual, and idolatrous. Though still nebulous, these connections and characterizations had some measure of coherence and consent, as demonstrated by the demonological texts offering descriptions of the Devil as an explicitly Black man, as well as those trial pamphlets in which the

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[10] On encounter and race, see Hall, *Things of Darkness*; Loomba, "Identities and Bodies," 227-46; Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle,'" 167-92; Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*; Traub, "History in the Present Tense," 15-54; Lewis, "'Like Devils Out of Hell'," 107-20; Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*; Strings, *Fearing the Black Body*; Olusoga, *Black and British*.

accused witch confessed to dealing with a Black Devil. The Devil's appearance in the shape of a Black man is an ambiguous description given the equivocality of racial discourse, but it gains more certainty when, as in the cases of the Bideford witches, Alice Huson, and Mary Phillips and Elinor Shaw, it is accompanied by other significant discourses: namely, those of physical deformity and deviant female sexuality. The Devil's animalistic cloven feet and his seduction of the witches, as well as the witches' own aberrant behaviours and desires, including demonic sex and bestiality,[11] are compelling hints, if not that these witches or their prosecutors encountered or visualized Black Devils, then perhaps that witchcraft was a site of reckoning with the racialized other, a means to process physiognomic difference in a familiar framework.

Further research is needed to interrogate the applicability and extent of these conclusions. To better understand their implications, future studies could attend to the evolution and imbrications of racial or proto-racial ideologies—not limited to those preoccupied with Blackness—with intersecting perceptions and articulations of physical and social difference. More concerted archival research might reveal the presence or absence of Black English men and women in the villages and towns in which the above witches resided. Opportunities exist to explore comparisons between colonial American and English witchcraft trials and discourses in terms of racialized and gendered discourses, or to examine subversions of gender and sexual norms in cases of male witches and Devils. Future research might also consider continuities between the perceptions of difference legible in witchcraft beliefs and those in the ideologies of gender and race that had begun to ossify by the turn of the eighteenth century.

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[11] *The Life and Conversation*, 2; *A True and Impartial Relation*, 11-39; *Execution of Three Witches*, 4-5; Hale, *A Collection of Modern Relations*, 58-59; Davis, *An Account of the Tryals*, 6; idem, *The Northamptonshire Witches*, 3-6.

Peter Laslett's enduring insights into the social, customary, and mental worlds inhabited and constructed by early modern English men and women, worlds of which our understandings have eroded over time and distance, remain vital over fifty years after their introduction into the historiography.[12] The world of witchcraft in its early modern English contexts has gradually been lost, first in the legal realms and the expectations of the state, then in the cosmologies of the aristocracy and gentry; today it is part of a mental world that is, in many ways, inaccessible. This thesis has built upon the efforts and achievements of social and feminist historians and scholars of witchcraft—efforts and achievements which have produced a body of scholarship that, sprawling, inventive, and sometimes contradictory as it is, bears some resemblance to the very subject of its study—in pursuit of recapturing this world we have lost.

[12] See Laslett, *The World We Have Lost.*

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