

MALEVOLENT NURTURE



WITCH-HUNTING
AND MATERNAL POWER
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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CHAPTER TWO

(UN)NEIGHBORLY NURTURE

In consulting a conjurer, Mrs. Dewse was not doing anything particularly unusual. The documents about her case, however, do not make it very clear what sort of conjurer Robert Birche was. He “advises” a prisoner at Newgate named Atkinson, we are told—as an astrologer or diviner, perhaps. The relatively lowly status of his clientele would suggest he was not a magician of the learned elite like John Dee, but the anonymous informant also mentions a courtly connection: Birche “was known and well thought of by Sir Edward Hobby.” If his reluctance to accede to Mrs. Dewse’s wish to harm her enemies is indicative of his customary practice, he is probably an urban and relatively sophisticated counterpart of the “white witch” or “cunning man” of the English countryside. Such magical practitioners might employ a wide range of techniques, chiefly for benign ends, and they were normally con-
trasted with the witch who practiced *maleficium*—that is, magic used for harmful ends, to cause sickness or to kill. The charms, amulets, divinatory techniques, herbal remedies, and incantations of the white witch were used to cure sickness, help people find lost or stolen items, divine future events, and protect against harm or other misfortunes, among other things; in return for their work, such practitioners received social prestige and sometimes small sums of money.¹ They were common throughout medieval and early modern England, as the work of such historians as Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas has made clear, and though some more puritan members of the clergy condemned their magic as vigorously

1. See Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, p. 126.

as they did witchcraft, in the formative years of the witch-hunts the "cunning folk" were widely tolerated by church, state, and general populace. Shakespeare and other Renaissance playwrights refer to them frequently in benign terms.

The cunning folk included both male and female practitioners, in what exact proportions is unclear. It is also difficult to tell to what extent such practices were gendered. At the elite level, astrologers, alchemists, and learned magicians were almost always male, but at the village level most types of magical practitioners could be either male or female. Macfarlane's study of Essex cunning folk called in before the ecclesiastical courts for petty offenses suggests that specialization may sometimes have followed gender lines: males may have predominated in the finding of lost and stolen goods; females to have been preferred for counterwitchcraft measures. Thomas's more inclusive work suggests, however, that both men and women regularly engaged in healing, divination, and most other magical subspecialties.²

Given a mixed community of male and female magical practitioners, why were women viewed as the primary agents of a specifically malevolent magic? In literary contexts, in religious polemic, and in a few actual trials (usually political cases involving elite victims) the male magician was often represented in sinister terms. Presumed to have access to forbidden knowledge, he was kept under surveillance by both state and ecclesiastical authorities. Yet the male magician was rarely feared by his neighbors as a source of harmful magic, rarely made the object of accusation. In the relatively few cases in which men were actually indicted, they often escaped conviction and execution.³ Women, not men, had a virtual monopoly on maleficium; women, not men, were believed most likely to bring sickness and death to their neighbors' households.

In what follows, I explore the foundations of this belief, in popular constructions of the witch as a malevolent mother and in the quarrels—often between women—that typically led to accusations of witchcraft. Ultimately, I relate the accusatory process to the psychological fallout of the

2. *Ibid.*, p. 127; Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 177–252.

3. Father Rosimund, for example, supposedly the ringleader of the four Windsor witches executed in 1579, appears to have escaped conviction. See Barbara Rosen, ed., *Witchcraft in England, 1558–1618* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), pp. 83–90. Another example is the case of Cicely Celles and her husband, which I discuss later in this chapter.

child's experiences of anger, dependence, and fear in its earliest relationships. Put baldly, early modern women and men were most likely to fear a specifically *magical* danger when they got angry at someone who resembled their mother or nurse.

The Witch as Malevolent Mother

If, as Christina Lerner has maintained, the impetus for prosecuting witchcraft as a crime ultimately came "from above," it was nevertheless primarily villagers who identified particular individuals as witches. Moreover, by providing "information" and testifying against them, villagers played a crucial role in determining the outcome of trials. When anti-witchcraft legislation was passed in 1563, magistrates and other members of the learned elites intervened in and to some extent transformed a pre-existing body of popular beliefs about witches and a set of informal witch-hunting practices; they did not create them. Thus, to understand why those accused of witchcraft were almost always women, it is helpful to begin by looking closely at the beliefs of those most directly involved in making witchcraft accusations.

We have no direct access to those beliefs, of course. Sources for the study of popular beliefs about the witch are fragmentary and present a variety of problems for the interpreter, not least of which is the fact that popular views were almost always filtered through those of the elite magistrates, doctors, or clergymen who recorded them. Nor is it possible to speak of a *single* view of the witch, even at the village level. In the process of distinguishing popular views from elite, historians have also begun to delineate regional differences and changes across time.⁴ Yet the profile of the witch put forward by Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas in their pioneering works still remains an important guide to key features of popular belief and of the role villagers played in bringing particular women to trial. The profile I offer here relies heavily on their findings, supplemented and at times modified by the work of other historians and by my own reading of pamphlets and other documents related to specific witchcraft cases in the period 1563–1611 (for the title page of one such pamphlet,

4. See Clive Holmes, "Popular Culture?" and "Women: Witnesses and Witches," *Past and Present* 140 (August 1993): 45–78; also Annabel Gregory, "Witchcraft, Politics, and 'Good Neighborhood' in Early Seventeenth-Century Rye," *Past and Present* 133 (November 1991): 31–66.

see figure 1).⁵ Because four of the pamphlets relate cases from Essex County, as does Macfarlane's book, my profile is skewed toward that county. Some pamphlet authors, moreover, do more than reprint or summarize informants' statements and may be biased according to ideological agendas not evident to the modern reader. My profile, in addition, is based on a relatively limited number of examples, chosen because they offer the most detailed accounts (outside the archives) of the quarrels leading up to the accusations for the early period of the witch-hunts. My generalizations must be evaluated with these limitations in mind. Nevertheless, although my emphases differ, the profile I set out is, for the most part, consistent with those of historians who have done in-depth archival work.⁶

The "typical" witchcraft case began when an older woman had a falling out with a neighbor—often another woman, usually a younger one. The older woman tended to be poorer, and frequently the falling out occurred after she had gone to her neighbor with a request for food or some domestic item or for access to land, and the neighbor refused her request. The woman went away, cursing her neighbor openly or muttering

5. Aside from the accounts of Macfarlane, Thomas, and other historians, my profile of the witch is derived from the abstracts of trial records contained in C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism: A Concise Account Derived from Sworn Depositions and Confessions Obtained in the Courts of England and Wales* (London: Heath Cranton, 1933); and from pamphlets about witchcraft trials from the period 1563–1611, most of which incorporate informants' statements from the trials into their text. The following pamphlets have been especially important to my discussion: *The examination and confession of certaine Wyches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex* (London, 1566); *A detection of damnable driftes, practized by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex* (London, 1579); *A Rehearsall both straying and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stille, Alias Rockingham, Mother Dutton, Mother Deuell, Mother Margaret, Fowler notorious Witches, apprehended at winsore in the Countie of Barks* (London, 1579); W. W., *A true and iust Recorde, of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S. Oses in the countie of Essex: whereof some were executed, and other some entreated according to the determination of Laue* (London, 1582); *The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches, Arraigned and by Justice condemned and executed at Chelms-forde* (London, 1589); and *The Witches of Northamptonshire . . . Who were all executed at Northampton* (London, 1612). These pamphlets are reprinted (some abridged, all with modernized spelling) in Rosen, *Witchcraft in England*. The pamphlet by W. W. about the St. Osyth witches is also available in a facsimile edition edited by Anthony Harris (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1981). In this chapter, when I quote material from these pamphlets I cite the Rosen anthology, except in the case of lengthy quotations from the pamphlet by W. W., which I quote from the facsimile edition.

6. Themes with which this chapter is especially concerned—of the witch's malevolent mothering and of women accusers preoccupied with issues related to the maternal role—are evident in Holmes, "Popular Culture?" Holmes, "Women"; and Gregory, "Witchcraft, Polity, and 'Good Neighborhood'"; and especially in Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century Yorkshire* and "Witchcraft and Women."

A Detection of damnable driftes, practi- zed by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex, at the laste Assises there holden, whiche were executed in Apriill. 1579.

Set forthe to discover the Ambushementes of
Sathan, whereby he would surpryse vs
lulled in securitie, and hardened
with contempte of Gods
vengeance threatened
for our offences.



Printed at London for Edward White,
at the little North-dore of Pauls.

Figure 1. Title page from *A Detection of damnable driftes* (1579), STC 5115, by permission of The British Library.

under her breath. Later, some misfortune happened to the neighbor or her family. A child fell sick, a wife or husband died, cattle or sheep died, a freak storm destroyed the crops, the milk went sour, the butter would not turn. The neighbor recalled the cursing of the old woman and suspected the misfortune was the product of her witchcraft.

What happened next? There were several possibilities. The neighbor might appeal to one of the local "cunning folk" to confirm the diagnosis of witchcraft, identify the witch, and procure some form of countermagic to "undo" the witch's maleficium. The neighbor might turn to the church or to prayer. She might also try to appease the witch in some way. Or she might try any combination of these. Such were the major remedies available to villagers throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. But after the passage of anti-witchcraft laws, the neighbor might also appeal to the local justice of the peace—that is, she might inform against the suspected witch. The justice might then open an inquiry and interview other informants. A grand jury would determine whether indictments should be handed down and a trial held. If so, the accused witch was on her way to imprisonment, execution, or if she was lucky, acquittal. The trial itself functioned as a kind of countermagic, with judges and jury taking over some aspects of the role of the cunning folk: the witch's exposure and forced confession also dissolved her magical powers.

What did it take to convict and sentence to death someone accused of witchcraft? It was not usually possible to catch the witch in the act of practicing her art; instead, the gathering weight of circumstantial evidence determined the fate of the accused. Reports of her curses and angry words, followed in a timely fashion by misfortunes, were key items of circumstantial evidence leading to indictment. But other factors provided valuable support, such as sightings of small animals (cats, weasels, ferrets, dogs, frogs, toads, "imps") around her home or in her vicinity, accounts of visions or dreams in which the accused appeared to the victim or the victim's relatives, and deathbed identifications of the witch. By the time a woman was brought to trial, she had already developed a reputation for troublesome behavior and hostility toward her neighbors, and she was suspected of having practiced maleficium for many years. Indictment was most likely when she was "notoriously defamed" by her neighbors and a number of "the better sort" came forward to testify against her.⁷ The

7. *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtney Press, 1970), p. 602.

death penalty would typically be applied when she was convicted of using her magic to cause a human death. Once an investigation was under way, the accused woman's body would be examined for the devil's mark or "teat." Any unusual fleshy protuberance, especially one in a "private place," would be taken as further confirmation of the charge of witchcraft. Finally, a confession (extracted under duress but seldom torture) would help to seal the witch's fate.

It is possible that the behavior that focused suspicion on a particular individual was more likely to be exhibited by a woman than by a man. Was it the woman's role in sixteenth-century village communities to go to neighbors with requests for food or other items? Were they more likely to become dependent on resentful neighbors as they aged? Were they more likely to indulge in verbal abuse or to resort to harmful magic when they became involved in a quarrel? Men had alternatives not available to women: they could take up the sword or go to court with their grievances. Even approximate statistics for such matters are not easy to come by, but anecdotal evidence suggests that men also asked to borrow items from neighbors; they too could be poor and downwardly mobile; they too uttered curses and practiced many types of magic. That women might be more likely to fall into at least some of these categories is probable; yet such factors, taken by themselves, seem insufficient to explain women's near monopoly on the witch's role.

Another approach to explaining the witch's gender is suggested by the witch stereotype itself, which associates the practice of harmful magic with misdirected nurture. Although popular beliefs do not assume the witch must be biologically female, they do represent the witch in terms of the maternal. The mark or teat that confirms her as a witch is also the means by which she acquires her demonic power; it is in effect a third nipple by which she feeds her familiars, or "imps"—the demonic spirits who inhabit the bodies of small animals and help her to carry out her magic. The witch, moreover, is older, usually postmenopausal; her body—already a source of anxiety—in effect encodes maternal rejection of the human child.⁸ Her womb no longer fertile, her breasts no longer

8. Even a critic of witchcraft beliefs such as Reginald Scot is willing to lend some credence to the notion of the "evil" or "witching eye," relating it to the bodily state of postmenopausal women. He describes the views of a number of authorities who believed the eyes can send a tangible power or "vapor" to infect others with the diseases or corruption of their own blood. "Old women," he says, "in whom the ordinary course of nature faileth in the office of purging their naturall monethlie humors, shew also some prooffe hereof. For . . . they leave in a looking glasse a certaine froth, by means of the grosse vapors

capable of producing milk, she nevertheless can feed and care for a counterfamily of demonic imps. Her witchcraft is frequently directed against the children of her neighbors and almost always against domestic activities associated with feeding, nurture, or birth. When animals rather than people are targets of the witch's magic, cattle and the milk they produce are especially likely to be affected.

Village-level witchcraft beliefs encode a fantasy of the witch as a mother with two aspects. She is a nurturing mother to her brood of demonic imps but a malevolent antimother to her neighbors and their children. Over and over again in the trial records, the accused women are addressed as "Mother"—Mother Grevell, Mother Turner, Mother Dutten, Mother Develt, Mother Stile—following everyday village convention.⁹ These women continue to be associated with the social role of mother even after they have aged and their own children are grown. And if we read the "confessions" of women accused of witchcraft as to some degree revealing beliefs they, or others, may have actually held and enacted, it is possible that these women find in their supernatural children—who are fed blood of the witch's body as well as human food, wrapped in wool and tucked into pots to sleep for the night, fussed over and called pet names—substitutes who fill the gaps left by the earthly children they no longer have to care for. At the same time, however, the witch is a monstrous mother to her neighbors. She uses her maternal powers perversely, to enlist the aid of the demonic in bringing sickness and death to the households of other mothers, in defiance of her neighborly obligations.

To a large extent, the witch's symmetrical opposite in the village community can be thought of as the "gossip"—a word derived from godpar-

proceeding out of their eyes. Which commeth so to passe, because those vapors or spirits, which so abundantlie come from their eyes, cannot pearse and enter into the glasse, which is hard, and without pores, and therefore resisteth: but the beames which are carried . . . from the eyes of one bodie to another, doo pearse to the inward parts, and there breed infection, whilst they search and seek for their proper region. And as these beames & vapors doo proceed from the hart of the one, so are they turned into bloud about the hart of the other: which bloud disagreeing with the nature of the bewitched partie, infeebleth the rest of his bodie, and maketh him sicke" (*The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, ed. Hugh Ross Williamson [1584; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964], p. 399). The old woman's body is a site of contagion because it is presumed to be the site of too much unpurged blood. Scot is quoting classical authorities, it should be added, not popular belief; the "evil eye" does not seem to be a factor in English trials. But his willingness to entertain such views suggests that even an educated, skeptical Englishman could be prone to a profound suspicion of the postmenopausal female body.

9. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, pp. 154, 158, 159.

ent and still related to that more specialized role.¹⁰ The gossip was the female neighbor called in to assist at childbirth and during the "lying in" period, a "nurturing neighbor" who acted as midwife and helped to care for her neighbor's children, who participated in an informal village network in which women offered each other aid and advice about child care, sickness, and other areas of domestic management. These women were mothers in several senses: they "mothered" each other, they mirrored each other as mothers, and they acted as substitute mothers for each other's children. The aid and advice they offered each other could involve magic—midwifery, for example, included a range of magical techniques for helping ensure the safety of mother and child during the difficult time of childbirth. But midwives could use their magic to cause miscarriage or injury to mother and child, just as other gossips might seek to harm instead of help. The witch was in a sense the gossip "gone bad," a woman who brought envy, anger, and hatred into a community's informal networks of female neighbors.¹¹ She used her mothering powers to betray other mothers.

Such beliefs seem driven in part by women's anxieties about situations in which they or their children were especially vulnerable and over which they had little control. It is clear, at any rate, that women were actively involved in making witchcraft accusations against their female neighbors. Macfarlane finds that as many women as men informed against witches

10. Fairy tales in which the witch is set against the fairy godmother have an obvious relevance here.

11. Michael Macdonald's study of the seventeenth-century physician Richard Napier, whose patients included over a hundred who suspected they had been bewitched, provides some suggestive evidence. Macdonald's exploration of these cases led him to criticize Macfarlane's emphasis on the failure to give alms as a source of witchcraft quarrels. "[The witchcraft] allegations Napier's clients made were occasioned by a wider range of social and personal obligations than almsgiving," he notes. "The most interesting of these concerned the custom of inviting village women to assist at a childbirth. . . . When birth was at hand, village women were invited to attend. The importance contemporaries attached to these displays of feminine solidarity is plain. The law prevented midwives from delivering babies without other women present; women whose travails had been marred by strife were said to have consequently gone mad. Mary Aussenpe became anxious and utterly depressed after a disgruntled neighbor cursed her during her labor. The woman burst into the house, fell to her knees and 'prayed unto God that Mary Aussenpe might never have herself [i.e., be at peace]. . . . The plague of God light upon her, and all the plagues in hell light upon her.' Five of Napier's clients thought that women whom they had not invited to their deliveries had bewitched them: Participation in this feminine rite was an essential duty and privilege of village women, and omitted neighbors had reason to be angry" (*Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], pp. 108-9).

in the 291 Essex cases he studied; about 55 percent of those who believed they had been bewitched were female.¹² The number of witchcraft quarrels that began between women may actually have been higher; in some cases, it appears that the husband as "head of household" came forward to make statements on behalf of his wife, although the central quarrel had taken place between her and another woman. In the 1581 St. Osyth trials, for example, in which indictments were handed down against at least twelve witches, two-thirds of the quarrels described involved women.¹³ Husbands were the named informants for wives' quarrels in about six cases. It may, then, be misleading to equate "informants" with "accusers": the person who gave a statement to authorities was not necessarily the person directly quarreling with the witch. Other studies support a figure in the range of 60 percent. In Peter Rushton's examination of slander cases in the Durham church courts, women took action against other women who had labeled them witches in 61 percent of the cases. Ronald Sawyer's study of the medical practice of Richard Napier shows that, among those patients who thought themselves bewitched, 59.3 percent were women. J. A. Sharpe also notes the prevalence of women as accusers in seventeenth-century Yorkshire cases, concluding that "on a village level witchcraft seems to have been something peculiarly entrenched in women's quarrels."¹⁴ To a considerable extent, then, village-level witch-hunting was women's work.

Given the fragmentary nature of the trial records, it is difficult to reconstruct the series of events that brought a woman to accuse her neighbor. It is clear, however, not only that many quarrels involved women but also that female networks of shared mothering involved competition and conflict as well as mutual support. For example, take the case of Cicely Celles. In one informant's statement she is seen "chiding and railing" at another woman who has been engaged to replace Cicely as a wet nurse

12. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, pp. 160-61.

13. According to my reading of the statements, sixteen quarrels took place between women; five between a woman and an accusing male-female couple; nine between a woman and an accusing man. See W. W., *A true and iust Recorde*.

14. See Peter Rushton, "Women, Witchcraft, and Slander in Early Modern England: Cases from the Church Courts of Durham, 1560-1675," *Northern History* 18 (1982): 116-32; Ronald C. Sawyer, "Strangely Handled in All Her Lymes: Witchcraft and Healing in Jacobean England," *Journal of Social History* 22 (Spring 1989): 461-85; Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century Yorkshire*, p. 18. Sharpe develops this point more fully in his article "Witchcraft and Women." Macfarlane's findings also suggest that most witch-finders were women. *Witchcraft*, p. 127.

for a neighbor's child. "Thou shalt loose more by the having of it, than thou shalt have for the keeping of it," Cicely predicted ominously; within a month, the neighbor's own four-year-old daughter was dead.¹⁵ In another statement, Cicely was involved in an incident with a young mother who was preparing to go to church with her new baby. Several women, including Cicely, gathered around. After the other "gossips" cooed over the baby and complimented it, Cicely uttered a dark prediction: the child would die soon, and the mother would never bear another. And indeed, a short time later, the child died.¹⁶ The mother, however, refused to accuse Cicely of witchcraft, instead praying God to forgive Cicely if she had "dealt in any such sort." But the husband of the woman who replaced Cicely as wet nurse was not so forbearing. He came forward to accuse Cicely of causing the death of his young daughter, and it was for this death that she was indicted, along with her husband, for witchcraft. Her husband was acquitted, but Cicely, though eventually reprieved, was convicted and sentenced to death.

As these examples suggest, the witch had much in common with the shrew and the scold. Such village "types," objects of informal social control as well as legal regulation, indicate the high anxieties aroused by women's tongues, especially when exercised in anger and directed against husbands.¹⁷ The ideal wife, in the male view, was "silent but for the Word" or had a voice that was "ever soft and low." But the witch directed her angry words especially at other women, and the level of verbal violence could reach alarming proportions when one woman vilified another for her neighborly failings. One vivid example of an accused woman's verbal violence was recorded by Sir Thomas Smith, a judge who presided over several early witch trials, including that of Anne Vicars in 1570:

Another woman of Stapleford Abbots said, that about three years past she was coming from Rumford market with this Anne Vicars, and suddenly the said Anne cast up her nose into the air and smelt; which the other marvelled at, and

15. W. W., *A true and iust Recorde*, sig. D8v. For abstracts of the documents connected to this case, see Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, pp. 155, 162-63.

16. W. W., *A true and iust Recorde*, sig. D3. The incident recalls the christening scene in "Sleeping Beauty."

17. For attitudes toward shrews and scolds, see especially Lynda E. Boose, "Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (Summer 1991): 179-213; and D. E. 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), pp. 116-36.

asked her if she saw any thing, or if there were any carrion there? And she said, she smelt either a whore or a thief. At last she espied the wife of one Ingarsole, going a great way before them: whereat the said Vicars cried out with an oath, "I told you, I smelt either a whore or a thief;" and making great haste to overtake her, when she came at her, she cast her apron upon the side of her face next unto her; and then went backwards a great way, with her face towards the said Ingarsole's wife, casting her apron over it, and making many crosses, saying, as it were, certain prayers; but what, this examinant could not tell; but marvelled much at her behaviour, and said she was to blame to slander her that was an honest woman, and so known among her neighbours for twenty years. But upon this, Ingarsole's wife fell extremely sick, and lost one of her eyes with a stroke, as she thought, that came unto her, she could not tell how, in the plain field, where neither was bush nor tree, or other creature.¹⁸

It is impossible to tell if Anne was in fact casting a spell upon Ingarsole's wife. Did the wife have a guilty conscience about some past indiscretion which manifested itself as a psychosomatic "stroke" in response to Anne's "slander"? The incident suggests, among other things, how easy it might be to confuse verbal violence with the casting of a spell, and clearly such bitter personal attacks were capable of generating intense emotional reactions whether or not magic was suspected.

In "chiding and railing" at her female neighbor, Cicely Celles was not directly violating gender hierarchy. Nor was the accuser playing a primarily "male-identified" role, compliantly enforcing a patriarchal model of feminine behavior, as Christina Larner, Catherine Belsey, and others have suggested.¹⁹ The witch, in fact, was as likely to be the one urging

18. John Strype, *The Life of Sir Thomas Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1820), p. 99. For some other examples of the witch's verbal (and even physical) violence, see Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 144, 155.

19. Belsey explains women's frequent appearance as accusers by paraphrasing Larner: "Witches were, as their appearance tended to demonstrate, 'unwomanly' . . . As Larner points out, other women were as readily offended as men, because women who conformed to the requirements of patriarchy felt threatened by its repudiation" (*The Subject of Tragedy*, p. 187). The example from *The Witches of Northamptonshire* used by Belsey in illustration rests on what appears to be the pamphlet writer's interpretation, and even he puts things in more equivocal terms: the series of events that led to Mistress Belcher's witchcraft accusation against Joan Vaughn began when Joan "whether of purpose to give occasion of anger to the said Mistress Belcher, or but to continue her vile and ordinary custom of behavior, committed something either in speech or gesture so unfitting and unseemly the nature of womanhood that it displeased the most that were there present" (Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 345). Belsey quotes only the last half of the passage. It is not clear from the pamphlet if Joan and Mistress Belcher had a history of friction, but it does seem clear that Joan insulted Mistress Belcher as well as violated standards of proper feminine behavior.

conformity to a patriarchal standard: her angry words might call into question her neighbor's credentials as a nurturer or stress some other failure of female identity. The accuser might in turn become as angry and sharp-tongued as the witch herself, defaming her as a perverse and destructive mother. Patriarchy helped to shape the terms of these quarrels: in a culture where women's value was crucially determined by their ability to bear children and nurture others, women readily perceived their own prestige and access to power as dependent on their performance as mothers and domestic workers.²⁰ Women's conflicts circulated in and through narcissistically charged objects closely associated with the maternal function—children, hens, butter, cows, milk, and so forth—and women competed with other women in a world where priorities were set largely by men. But these quarrels also enacted women's strategies for empowerment within patriarchal culture. Moreover, quarrels were used to negotiate what women wanted and needed *from one another*, not merely what men wanted from them. As quarrels played themselves out, village women tested and redefined the limits of acceptable female anger, sanctioning some forms of expression and punishing others, distinguishing excessive demands from reasonable requests.

Through reciprocal acts of defamation, women participated in a larger rhythm of early modern life: the English village could be a highly fractious place.²¹ While neighborly cooperation made mutual survival possible

20. On the centrality of maternity to early modern women's identity, see, among others, Cahn, *Industry of Devotion*, pp. 94–108, 178–81: "Maternity, of course, was important for all social classes, not just the aristocracy. The aspect of maternity that all classes most valued was fertility—the ability to conceive live infants" (p. 94); also Patricia Crawford, "The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*, ed. Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 19: "When a couple was childless, this was usually considered to be the wife's fault." A childless woman was labelled a barren woman . . . Barren wives lacked social status and respect, and the higher their social position, the unhappier was their lot." Moreover, as housewife and domestic manager, a woman was expected to nurture adults as well as children. "Both men and women regarded the care of children, the preparation of meals, and the nursing of the ill as exclusively the woman's duty," according to Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 63. Women's agricultural work also tended to link them to the maternal function: milking cows, caring for hens, attending to the birth of live stock.

21. Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, pp. 134–79; Anthony Fletcher, "Honour, Reputation, and Local Officialdom in Elizabethan and Stuart England," in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 92–115; Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Mar-*

ble, neighborly disagreements of many sorts and competition over everything from local officeholding to seating in church regularly provoked insults, quarrels, brawls, lawsuits, hurt feelings. Informing much of this competitiveness was an intense concern with social position: to maintain or—better yet—to improve one's standing in the community required constant exertion. In theory one was "born" to a particular station in life, but in fact, one's situation was far more precarious. Social identity was determined by factors such as wealth, conduct, and accomplishment, as well as "birth" and kin relations, and no real consensus existed on the relative importance of different factors.²² As a result one's position was often in flux and open to contestation, as one's wealth and "reputation" ebbed and flowed.

What was true of villages, moreover, was replicated at higher social levels. The honor quarrels of aristocrats, duels, blood feuds, "faction" at court, and treason trials offer further testimony of the fractiousness of early modern English society as well as the overriding importance of "reputation." All classes had a long tradition of using aggression as a means of resolving disputes over status and position. A slight to one's reputation had to be met with some form of action to repair it. At the same time, forces were at work to keep that aggression from turning into open violence. In the sixteenth century, state and religious authorities took steps to curb brawling and dueling and to discourage blood feuds.²³ Litigation offered an attractive alternative. Slander suits, common already at the beginning of the century, increased considerably after 1560, as people took to both secular and ecclesiastical courts to clear their good names.

²² On the complexity of rank and status and the ambiguity of social identity, see Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, pp. 137–51; Ruth Kelsso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964); Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1982), pp. 17–38; Joyce Youngs, *Sixteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 110–29.

²³ For references regarding the honor quarrels of the upper classes and the measures taken by the central government to curb them, see Chapter 5, notes 24 and 25.

Among these suits, those brought by women against other women made up a large percentage of the total—evidence, again, of the conflictual aspects of women's relationships.²⁴ Both witchcraft trials and slander suits show that women shared in the culture-wide obsession with reputation, displaying much the same sensitivity to slights as men. Both originated in quarrels and reciprocal defamation, which played out complex struggles to control the signifying practices that determined social identity and power. At the same time, there were important differences. Slander cases regularly focused on women's sexual behavior: the defendant in a slander suit had called another woman dishonest, a base quean, an arrant whore. Witchcraft cases focused on what I am calling neighborly nurture.²⁵ The witch's words generally involved a threat as well as an insult. The female defendant convicted in a slander suit was required to perform public penance or pay money damages. The convicted witch was imprisoned or executed.

Most important, witchcraft quarrels produced not only insults and anger but also anxiety, visions, "fits," fears of magical harm. More than a contest over social categories was involved. Thomas and Macfarlane contend that the anxieties generated in the course of a witchcraft quarrel arose from the conflict between "neighborliness" and "individualism." As they see it, an accusation of witchcraft was fueled by the guilt a neighbor experienced and simultaneously resisted after denying another neighbor's request for help. This denial constituted an "individualistic" transgression of traditional codes of communal sharing.²⁶ Guilt manifested itself in the

²⁴ For women's slander suits against other women, see especially Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, pp. 101–4; Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp. 302–3; and Laura Gowing, "Gender and the Language of Insult in Early Modern London," *History Workshop* 35 (Spring 1993): 1–21. Gowing's essay focuses on gender differences in the language of insult but, in the process, also makes it clear that, like the female accuser of a witch, the woman who called another woman "whore" was not merely mouthing patriarchal injunctions against improper female conduct but might be involved in a complex battle to control her own environment. Defaming someone for "loose" behavior was one of the only ways a wife could take action against another woman's adulterous relationship with her husband, and the "whore" might threaten not only to alienate a husband's affections but also to drain money from the household and disrupt family life.

²⁵ To be sure, there is an area of overlap here. Sometimes women used slander suits to defend themselves against charges of witchcraft, and in the course of a witchcraft quarrel, either party might call the other a whore. For slander suits involving a charge of witchcraft, see Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp. 298, 300; Rushton, "Women, Witchcraft, and Slander"; Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century Yorkshire*. For cases in which the accused witch was called a whore or loose woman, see Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 115, 150, 185.

²⁶ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, pp. 192–98; Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 552–69.

apparently psychosomatic illnesses that sometimes befell victims and in the dreams and visions sometimes experienced by the accusers or their families. It manifested itself especially in the accusers' habitual interpretation of subsequent misfortunes as retaliation for the injury to the refused neighbor.

Thomas and Macfarlane cast the accusing neighbor in the role of "individualist" and the witch as the defender of older norms of "neighborliness" in place before the Protestant Reformation and the sixteenth-century poor laws. But in the quarrels involving Cicely Celles, for example, it is difficult to see what norm of neighborliness her opponents would feel they were violating. Quarrels could begin when the accused refused to pay a debt, when she wanted to buy goods at too low a price, when she trespassed on a neighbor's land.²⁷ Moreover, one could be unneighborly by asking for too much as well as by giving too little; in several cases, in fact, informants drew attention to the excessive expectations of the accused.²⁸ Neighborliness required courtesy and a certain balance in exchanges, not just one-way giving. Accusers did sometimes retrospectively come to view their actions as lacking in charity, but in many quarrels the situation was far more ambiguous.²⁹

27. The accused witches Agnes Herd and Joan Robinson both owed money to their accusers. See Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 147-49, 156. On another occasion, Agnes Herd refused to return a dish she had borrowed (p. 147). Cicely Celles wouldn't meet Richard Ross's price for malt (p. 132) and the Celleses' cattle trespassed on the Rosses' grounds (p. 132). In such situations, the witch seems arguably as "unneighborly" as her neighbor, if not more so.

28. Macfarlane mentions a few cases in which informants suggested that they might have been too stingy with the witch. Others, however, suggested a history of generous giving which informants felt the witch had not sufficiently appreciated. According to an osterler's testimony, Mother Stile, "using to come to his master's house, had oftentimes relief given her by him. And on a time not long since she coming to his master's house when there was little left to be given her, for that she came somewhat late, yet he giving her also somewhat at that time, she therewith not contented went her ways in some anger and, as it seemed, offended with the said osterler for that she had no better alms" (Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 89). Mother Staunton "came often to the house of one John Hopwood of Walden, and had continually her requests. At the last, being denied of a leathern thong, she went her way of-fended" (p. 98). Joan Pechey became angry when the collector for the poor gave her bread that "was too hard baked for her" (p. 110).

29. Some cases, I should also add, do suggest the accuser's abuse of the woman accused. My point here is not that accusers never experienced "real" guilt for their actions. Anxiety symptoms can look the same whether "real" guilt or unconscious fantasy or—most likely—some combination of the two is causing them. But historians and critics should avoid routinely reading such symptoms as the product of guilt for actual wrongdoing, especially when many cases suggest that in the original quarrel, the accused is at least as out of line as the accuser. And feminists should avoid automatically reading accusers' responses as knee-jerk

Such cases suggest a more complex dynamic was at work than Thomas and Macfarlane's formulation allows for. Neighborliness involved more than an obligation to give alms, and violating its codes was unlikely to be the sole cause of guilt.³⁰ Conflicts over neighborliness could become intertwined with gender issues; both the witch and her female accuser stood in an uneasy relation not only to ideals of neighborly conduct but also to definitions of female identity which privileged nurturing behavior and well-governed speech. But witchcraft quarrels undoubtedly had an intrapsychic dimension as well as an interpersonal one: the social factors offer only a partial insight into the fears, anxieties, and resentments that shaped particular experiences of bewitchment and motivated accusations. Psychoanalytic theory can supplement social history and cultural analysis, enabling us to better understand the emotional dynamics of accusers' illnesses, visions, and interpretations of misfortune.

The accuser felt anxiety and feared retaliation after a quarrel with her neighbor, I believe, not so much because she had violated the code of neighborliness as because she had injured a body unconsciously associated with the mother of childhood. The accuser confronted in her neighbor a woman of her own or her mother's generation whom she addressed as "Mother" and who was associated with the quasi-maternal "gossips" to whom she turned for help and advice. But instead of offering support, the older woman required it for herself. Generally, her age and social circumstances were making her more dependent on her neighbors and less able to participate in the reciprocal exchanges that made for good relations between them. At the same time, her requests for help were often expressed as demands and she became angry and difficult when refused, murmuring against her neighbor if not cursing her outright. She was needy but also anger-provoking. Many in her community may have been content to put up with her: whether

conformity to patriarchal constraints upon "woman's tongue." We need to acknowledge the emotional complexities of women's quarrels with one another (and the complexities of their power relations). Thomas and Macfarlane do, in fact, recognize that the "typical" witch is a woman with a difficult temper (as do Lerner, Demos, and many other historians); what they don't do is take bad temper into account in their formulations about "neighborliness." Judgments about individual quarrels will remain open to interpretation, especially since the evidence is so fragmentary. Some cases do suggest verbal violence is coming more from the accuser than the accused. See Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 117, 131, also 122. My overall impression is that in most of the cases in this period "blame" was mixed, that is, the accuser was both justifiably and unjustifiably angry with the witch and (I suspect) had trouble distinguishing the two; hence the ambivalence encoded in subsequent responses.

30. On the ambiguity of "neighborliness," see especially Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 51-57.

refusing or extending help, they afterward thought no more about it; she was a scold or a nuisance but not a witch capable of magical harm. But other neighbors felt increasingly threatened by her sinister presence and suspected her of causing their misfortunes. Such neighbors—the old woman's future accusers—may have unconsciously experienced their own anger as a form of magical attack, giving them reason to fear magical retaliation.

The selection of a particular woman as a witch thus depended not only on behavior of the accused and its social meanings but, even more decisively, on the type of intrapsychic conflict the quarrel aroused in the accuser. Many, if not most, "difficult" older women were not thought of as witches: magical endangerment was at least partly in the mind of the beholder. The work of Melanie Klein and those who have built on it seems especially suggestive with regard to the accuser's experience of magical persecution in the course of a witchcraft quarrel.³¹

31. For Klein's collected work, see *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, ed. Roger Money-Kyrle et al., 4 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1975). For an introduction to her work, see Phyllis Grosskurth, *Melanie Klein: Her World and Her Work* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* (London: Hogarth Press, 1973); and R. D. Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Free Association Books, 1991). For a selection of significant writings, see *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: Free Press, 1987). For one attempt to adapt Klein's thought for social theory, see C. Fred Alford, *Melanie Klein and Critical Social Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Klein's work has been influential in the American and British psychoanalytic communities, though not without criticism and revision. Grosskurth's biography traces Klein's conflicts with Freud, Anna Freud, and others during her lifetime. For a guide to more recent controversies, see Phyllis Tyson and Robert L. Tyson, *Psychoanalytic Theories of Development: An Integration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 71-74. D. W. Winnicott, Otto Kernberg, and Margaret Mahler, among others, have been important revisers of her work. The continuing dialogue between Kleinian and other psychoanalytic theorists is evident in such articles as Howard B. Levine, "Freudian and Kleinian Theory: A Dialogue of Comparative Perspectives," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 40 (1992): 801-26; and Joseph Sandler, "On Internal Object Relations," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 39 (1991): 859-79. Feminists have increasingly engaged with her work. See Juliet Mitchell's introduction to *The Selected Melanie Klein*; Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 199-218; Doane and Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva*; Claire Kahane, "Questioning the Maternal Voice," *Gender* 3 (Fall 1988): 82-91; Susan Rubin Suleiman, "On Maternal Splitting: A Proposal of Mary Gordon's *Men and Angels*," *Signs* 14 (Autumn 1988): 25-42; Ann Scott, "Melanie Klein and the Questions of Feminism," *Woman: A Cultural Review* 1 (November 1990): 127-34; this issue was entirely devoted to appraisals of Klein's work. "Womanliness as a Masquerade," an essay that has significantly influenced feminist film criticism, is by Joan Riviere, a Kleinian analyst (reprinted in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin et al. [London: Methuen, 1986], pp. 35-61). An important earlier feminist text influenced by Klein is Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), esp. pp. 91-114.

Her theoretical formulations and clinical findings often focus on the persecutory fantasies of infants and young children, fantasies that reappeared also in the analyses of some adults, taking forms that eerily parallel many witchcraft beliefs. While it is risky to apply theories derived from clinical work with twentieth-century subjects to the early modern period, the parallels seem striking enough to warrant further exploration.

For Klein, persecutory anxiety has origins in infancy and early childhood, when the growing child experiences inevitable frustrations and must learn to cope with feelings of anger and aggression toward the mother (or other caretakers). At this early stage of development, the child is still dominated by primary-process modes of thinking and conflates angry wishes with destructive acts; at the same time, the mother is experienced as having extraordinary, seemingly omnipotent powers. Also referred to as "magical thinking," primary-process modes of cognition should not automatically be equated with the magical beliefs of the early modern or premodern periods. Such culturally legitimated magical beliefs organize and in various ways revise childhood perceptions, bringing them into line with "adult" cognitive processes. The young child, for example, at first equates almost any wish with an act, only slowly learning to separate internal from external reality. For the early modern magical practitioner, however, wishes only became acts under certain conditions or after following special procedures—rituals, incantations, manipulations of image or word.

Nevertheless, such beliefs could allow anxieties about hostile feelings toward one's caretakers to persist into adulthood, tacitly confirming the child's notion that angry thoughts can cause damage to loved ones or bring on other misfortunes. Klein's clinical work led her to conclude that the fear of magically damaging the mother was a crucial factor in the formation of persecutory anxiety. When a child experiences its hostile fantasies about the mother as actually injuring or destroying her, the child often comes to fear that the mother will retaliate in kind.

Among little girls in particular, Klein found, the "leading female anxiety situation" occurs when "the mother is felt to be the primary persecutor who, as an external and internalized object, attacks the child's body and takes from it her imaginary children. These anxieties arise from the girl's phantasied attacks on the mother's body, which aim at robbing her of its contents . . . and result in the fear of retaliation by similar at-

tacks."³² At first the child copes with its hostile feelings by splitting mental representations of the mother into "good" and "bad," one to be loved, the other to be hated with impunity. But sooner or later, the growing child recognizes that the "good" and "bad" mothers are really aspects of the same person; angry feelings then endanger the mother who is loved and depended on. Under "good enough" conditions, the child learns to tolerate ambivalence about the mother, to view her on a more human scale and make reparation for the injuries (real and imagined) done to her, and to integrate the internalized "good" and "bad" representations of her which form the basis for the adult superego. But for some this integration may be only partly successful; a variety of factors may mean that even as adults they will have difficulty tolerating ambivalence about the women they place in the position of mother and will be vulnerable to inner persecution from an aspect of the superego which embodies an "attacked and therefore frightening mother."³³ When provoked into anger and unconscious destructive fantasy by those associated with the mother, the vulnerable adult may again resort to splitting in an attempt to protect the internalized mother from damage, projecting her "bad" aspects onto "other" women, who resemble the mother but need not be protected. The woman who comes to represent this split-off "bad" mother will be experienced as a persecutor, poised to retaliate in response to the initial attack.

Klein links the child's hostile feelings and fantasies about the mother to envy. Envy is experienced as the child becomes increasingly aware of its

32. "The Psycho-analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance," in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, p. 48. Note the flexible boundaries of the maternal body in the child's imagination: it may include not only what an adult understands to be "in" that body—breasts, breast milk, womb, etc.—but also things outside that body the mother is associated with or assumed to control, such as children.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 49. For Kleinian and non-Kleinian psychoanalysis, the superego is to be considered not a unitary mental structure but the result of an ongoing series of internalizations at different developmental stages: what is referred to as a single entity may have both "primitive" (i.e., infantile) and "adult" features, and the rules, values, and prohibitions one internalizes will almost inevitably have some inconsistent or contradictory features. "Integration" is a relative term here (Tyson and Tyson, *Psychoanalytic Theories of Development*, pp. 207-27). It is also important to stress that for Kleinians the "mother" the child internalizes is not an accurate representation of the mother's actual behavior; rather, this representation will be affected ("distorted") by the child's level of cognitive and psychic development and the severity of the mother's imagined retaliation will be a function of the intensity of the child's rage. Nor is rage at the mother to be assumed to be the result of "bad mothering." To what extent and in what ways the mother's actual behavior participates in producing persecutory anxiety or a harsh superego is a complex question, the subject of debate within the psychoanalytic community.

dependence on a figure separate from itself; it is "a spoiling hostility at the realization that the source of life and goodness lies outside," leading the child to seek to appropriate the attributes of the mother it especially needs and desires and to fantasize about stealing and incorporating parts of her body.³⁴ Both boys and girls at first envy the breast, and envious, hostile fantasies about the mother along with the persecutory fears to which they give rise may become especially intense at the time of weaning.³⁵ Narcissistic wounds later in life may reactivate the sense of powerlessness and dependence associated with infantile envy in adults who have not securely established "narcissistic equilibrium."³⁶ Sensitive to external criticism, they may end up in what Kleinians identify as the "paranoid vicious circle." Prompted to angry fantasy and projection, the vulnerable adult becomes anxious about further attack by a persecutory figure, in what becomes an ever-escalating cycle of hostility and fear.³⁷

Witchcraft quarrels resemble such vicious circles of escalating hostility and fear, and neighbors frequently seem to have been responding in the light of persecutory fantasy to the women they came to call witches. In the early stages of a quarrel, the accuser already saw the older woman as troublesome and intrusive. By gestures or speech—or perhaps merely by her neediness—the older woman implied criticism of her neighbor and

34. Hanna Segal, quoted in Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*, p. 357.

35. See Klein, "Weaning," in *Writings of Melanie Klein*, vol. 1. Early modern families may have intensified the child's experience of envy in a number of ways: the lack of alternatives to breast-feeding would have heightened the importance of the mother's breast; weaning, as Janet Adelman and Gail Paster have described it, could be an especially harrowing experience; and hierarchies within the family unit based on birth order and gender may have intensified sibling rivalry and competition for the mother. If Adelman (*Suffocating Mothers*, pp. 4-5) is right that early modern child-care practices tended to prolong infantile dependence in circumstances that heightened the child's experience of maternal deprivation, the child's envy of what the mother (or wet nurse) had and might take away would similarly have been heightened.

36. Not a Kleinian phrase; see Tyson and Tyson, *Psychoanalytic Theories of Development*, p. 111. My use of it perhaps indicates a non-Kleinian element in my argument; my emphasis on the narcissistic vulnerabilities of the participants in a witchcraft quarrel—so evident in the early modern sensitivity to slights—may be at odds with the Kleinian tendency to downplay "external reality." It may not be irrelevant that analysts of other theoretical orientations have criticized Kleinians for their insensitivity to the narcissistic vulnerability of patients. See Sidney Fine and Esther Fine, "Four Psychoanalytic Perspectives: A Study of Differences in Interpretive Interventions," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 38 (1990): 1017-41.

37. Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*, p. 377. The paranoid vicious circle, though especially associated with the deep disturbances of psychotic adults, is also to be observed in milder, less pathological forms in children at a certain stage of development, neurotics, and the bereaved.

could easily be resented for setting an excessively high standard of neighborly nurture. The accuser's sensitivity to criticism would have been culturally reinforced by the great stress placed on "reputation" at all social levels. But for those especially vulnerable, the quarrel could set in motion a darker complex of feeling, reviving in the unconscious hostile fantasies about the envied, omnipotent mother and mobilizing fears of her magical retaliation. Such fantasies, I suggest, are what gave these fears their specifically magical character, producing the phenomena contemporaries grouped under the term *bewitchment*.

When the accuser refused the old woman who came to her for food or help, she also replayed a hostile attack on the figure who gave her life, food, and support in childhood and who provided her with a basis for her own identity. The misfortunes construed as punishments for such refusals regularly involved the loss of things a child envies about the mother's body and believes she controls: milk, milk products, food, domestic items, birth, babies, children, husbands. Having injured the old woman, the accuser came to fear that her own extended maternal body was threatened by a mother far more powerful than herself.

The old woman's curse externalized those inner fears and put them into words. Refusals of help frequently prompted a threat to "get even" or an appeal to the vengeance of God.³⁸ The curse was itself an act of "notorious defamation," sometimes publicly humiliating to the accuser, who was wounded with words even before she was convinced of their magical power. Age, if not social position, gave the older woman who spoke those words some authority. Though not family or kin, she was nevertheless a potential member of the accuser's "extended family" of neighbors and friends. Because the older woman was neither inside nor fully outside the ambit of the accuser's affiliative networks, her angry words could be neither readily accepted nor wholly dismissed: they dramatized the ambiguity of neighborly obligation. It was the misfortune that followed the curse which turned the old woman into a witch, confirming the accuser's inner

38. Threats to "get even" or words to that effect were, for example, made by the accused witches Elizabeth Bennett, Anne Kerke, and Alice Trevisard; See Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 122; Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, pp. 189, 194-95, 199. The wish that the "vengeance of God" be visited upon someone also seems to have been a fairly common expression. In George Gifford, *Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (London, 1593), one suspected witch is described as "wishing the vengeance of God to fall upon" her neighbor (p. E). Thomas Cooper, in his tract *The Mystery of Witchcraft* (1617), described the typical witch as "invocating on her bare knees (for so the manner is) the vengeance of God" upon her enemies. Quoted in Thomas, *Religion*, p. 512.

expectation of attack and calling into question her psychic and bodily boundaries—and those of her household as well. Once a curse seemed to "light," when it accurately predicted misfortune, it would be clear that the old woman had "forspoken" her neighbor—the supernatural equivalent of putting out a contract on one's gangland enemy. Imputed to her curse was the uncanny compelling power the child first imputes to its own anger and to its mother's words of reproof.

Before the curse took effect, the accuser might consciously feel the older woman was a "bad" mother who deserved to be rejected; unconsciously, however, she might also feel that she herself had injured the "good" mother of childhood. Ultimately, the accuser sensed the two were the same; to preserve her attachment to the "good" mother, she must accede to the "bad" mother's request or be overwhelmed by anxiety. Many of the physical ailments interpreted by accusers as bewitchment may have been anxiety related. The wife of Robert Cornell watched Mother Staunton draw a circle with a knife outside her door after being denied milk; the next day when Mrs. Cornell passed through that door, she was "taken sick, and began to swell from time to time as if she had been with child."³⁹ Mistress Belcher, after striking Joan Vaughn for publicly insulting her, at home that night was "suddenly taken with . . . a gripping and gnawing in her body"; servants could scarcely hold her and get her into bed. Her face "was many times so disfigured by being drawn awry that it bred both fear and astonishment to all the beholders," and she continually cried out, "Here comes Joan Vaughan! Away with Joan Vaughan!"⁴⁰

39. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 97. A preoccupation with swelling is a theme in a number of cases; here it is explicitly linked with pregnancy. In other cases as well, swelling affecting both adults and children perhaps become attributed to witchcraft partly because of associations in children's fantasies with the mother's pregnant body. Strange swellings attributed to witchcraft also occurred in the course of food production, as when Edmund Osborne's wife, making beer after requesting that Agnes Herd pay a debt of three pence, found her mash "wrought up . . . a handbreadth above the vat and then sinked again; then she did heat an iron red hot and put the same into it and it rose up no more. And then she let go, and then she did see the [boil] the wort [unfermented beer], and when it was soddin it stank in such sort as that they were compelled to put the same in the swill tub" (p. 150).

40. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 346, and see 9, 150. One might add many more examples, including the possible epileptic fit of a young girl, brought on by Anne Kerke, in Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, p. 189. Men also exhibit seemingly "hysterical" symptoms. Robert Sanner, for example, used "threatening words" to a servant of his (the daughter of a suspected witch), and found "his mouth drawn awry, well near up to the upper part of his cheek" (p. 130). A male servant of one Thomas Spicer offended Mother Nokes by taking the gloves of her daughter, "which he protesteth to have done in jest." When Mother Nokes asked him to return the gloves, he laughed and walked off to fetch home certain cattle.

Occasionally, ailments seem to encode attempts to "undo" the injury done to the witch; digestive disorders, for example, could be read as symbolic attempts to return food to the mother whom the child has deprived. After a quarrel, John Chandler "never ate any meat that digested in him, but ever it came up again as soon as it was down." The quarrel had been with his stepdaughter over some money she had received from her mother, a convicted witch (as well as his wife). His digestive ailment, perhaps, was the symbolic "undoing" of his attempt to deprive his stepdaughter of her mother's "food."⁴¹

But the largest number of witchcraft accusations were responses to misfortunes that must have had only a coincidental relation to the quarrel. Those misfortunes likely to be interpreted as the product of witchcraft affected those types of things over which the young child believes the

Mother Nokes then reportedly said to her daughter, "Let him alone, I will bounce him well enough," at which point the servant lost the use of his limbs and had to be sent home by his master in a wheelbarrow, where he lay in bed "with his legs across" at least eight days (pp. 98-99). Rosen comments that this is "a classic position of certain kinds of hysteria."

This particular story raises some interesting questions. Is the servant flirting with the daughter? If so, does the daughter welcome these attentions or resent them? Is the daughter testifying against her mother or is she being quoted by another source, perhaps the servant's master? The mother may be intervening to protect her daughter, or to control her; in either case, the servant has "injured" the mother by a sexual advance upon the daughter and is accordingly (self-)punished by his strange paralysis. John Demos's analysis of New England cases may be relevant here: he notes that males in young adulthood were especially vulnerable to bewitchment, and he relates this vulnerability to the conflicts over autonomy men often experienced at this stage of their lives. *Entertaining Satan*, pp. 156-57.

The most spectacular instances of apparently hysterical symptoms, however, are associated with cases of possession. In these, the witch's "victims" are usually (pre)adolescent girls. The Throckmorton children were one of several such cases in the 1590s to gain widespread public attention; they provided material for several pamphlets, among them *The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys, arraigned, convicted, and executed at the last Assizes at Huntingdon, for the bewitching of the five daughters of Robert Throckmorton Esquire, and divers other persons* (London, 1593), a substantial portion of which is included (along with related materials) in Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 227-97. In this case the children eventually persuaded the adults that the source of their affliction was Mother Samuel, a seventy-six-year-old neighbor. The course of their possession resembles that of the young girls who precipitated the Salem trials and enacted mother-daughter conflicts even more transparently than usual.

In some later cases, "fits" brought on by witchcraft were rediagnosed by doctors as cases of "the Mothee," that is, *hysterica passio*, the wandering womb; see the cases of Mary Glover and Joan Harvey in Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, pp. 196-99, 191-93. Cases of possession were also notoriously open to fraud, as in those staged by John Darrel. See Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 298-302.

41. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 94. Here money is equated with food. For another case involving a digestive ailment, see Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, p. 199.

mother to have "omnipotent" control. Women in particular blamed the witch for disruptions of the birthing process and for the sickness and death of young children. Shortly after refusing to sell Joan Robinson a pig (and angry to be criticized for not doing so?), Alice Walter blamed her because the Walters' "sow would not let her pigs suck, but did bite and fly at them as though she had been mad." Two years later, when she again refused Joan a pig, another sow gave birth, and "all the farrow of pigs, being ten, came out . . . and stood one before another in a tracked place like horses in a team, being all dead to the number of nine, and the tenth was drowned by the pond side."⁴² Alice perhaps saw in the pig the retaliatory mother whom she had unconsciously attacked and projected the image onto Joan; the first sow in particular enacted a fantasy of maternal retaliation quite explicitly.⁴³ In many other cases, mothers (sometimes along with the children themselves) attributed the "strange" sicknesses of children to the witch. Richard Saunder's wife, after refusing Mother Staunton yeast, found her "young child in the cradle . . . taken vehemently sick, in a marvelous strange manner, whereupon the mother of the child took it up in her arms to comfort it; which being done, the cradle rocked of itself six or seven times."⁴⁴ Agnes Leatherdale attributed her child's illness to the witch Ursula Kemp when the child was "taken . . . with a great swelling in the bottom of the belly and other privy parts." Many more examples could be offered. Not uncommonly, quarrels between children became quarrels between their mothers. The daughter of Ellen Smith "did fall out and fight" with the daughter of one Widow Webb, for unexplained reasons. The next day, Ellen Smith crossed paths with Widow Webb's daughter and gave her "a blow on the face." As soon as the child arrived home she "sickened and, languishing two days, cried continually 'Away with the witch! Away with the witch!' and so died. And in the morning immediately after the death of that same child, the said Goodwife Webb espied, as she thought, a thing like to a black dog go out at her door, and presently at the sight thereof she fell distraught of her wits."⁴⁵ Here, both daughter and mother blamed a mother who had

42. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 155.

43. These examples recall one of the ingredients the witches use in the cauldron scene of *Macbeth*: "Pour in sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow," commands the first witch (4.1.78-79).

44. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 96. At least two other mothers blamed Staunton for their children's sickness.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 95.

taken punitive action against the daughter. The fantasy of magical retaliation merely repeats and extends an actual deed.

Women also frequently blamed a witch when things went wrong with their butter making, their milking of cows, their bees' production of honey, their hens' laying of eggs.⁴⁶ Not only do these things relate to the mother's role in feeding, they also suggestively parallel the transformative powers of the mother's body—that is, the power of her body to produce life within it and to transform (as early modern belief would have it) blood into mother's milk. Hens that refused to lay or cows that gave blood instead of milk suggested the disruption and diabolical reversal of this process.

Just how the witch-performed her magic could be ambiguous, but most often the witch's curse was believed to be carried out by her familiars or demonic imps (see figure 2). Such beliefs bring into relief the centrality of the maternal breast in village constructions of the witch, for the witch characteristically acquired her power over the demonic through her power to feed. Imps would do her will in exchange, often enough, for human food; informants' statements offer many instances of witches who fed their imps milk from a bowl, beer, bread, small pieces of meat, and so forth (see figure 3). But the imps were hungriest for the old woman's blood. They would suck greedily from the witch's mark or teat—sometimes described in great detail as a nipplelike protuberance. Thus, examiners found on Elizabeth Wright "a thing much like the udder of a ewe that giveth suck with two teats, like unto two great warts, the one behind under her arm-hole, the other a handfull off toward the top of her shoulder."⁴⁷ But the familiars seem to have been willing to suck at almost any place on the body. Joan Prentice confessed to having a spirit named Bid, who came to her in the likeness of a ferret (see figure 4). He sucked blood from the forefinger of her left hand and from her left cheek; she summoned the spirit by calling "Bid, Bid, Bid, come Bid, come Bid, come suck, come suck, come suck."⁴⁸ Joan Robinson's maid reported seeing her mistress feed her cat by making her nose bleed.⁴⁹ The significance of blood as food is suggestive in more than one way. Mothers were believed to provide food to their infants

46. Examples are many; for a sampling, see *ibid.*, pp. 143, 148 (butter making), 149, 187 (beer brewing), 98, 144 (cow milking), 154 (loss of brood goose's eggs).

47. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, p. 177.

48. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 187–88.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 154. Note also that in some cases the witch would prick her body for the blood rather than allow the imp to suck.



Figure 2. Witch sending familiar into action against her neighbor, from *A Rehearsall both straying and true* (1579), STC 23267, by permission of The British Library.



Figure 3. Witch feeding familiars, from *A Rehearsall both straying and true* (1579), STC 23267, by permission of The British Library.

**The Apprehension and confession
of three notorious Witches.
Arreigned and by Justice condemned and
executed at Chelmsford, in the Countye of
Essex, the 5. day of Iulie, last past.**

**¶ With themanner of their diuellsish practices and keeping of their
spirits, whose fourmes are heerein trueely
proportioned.**

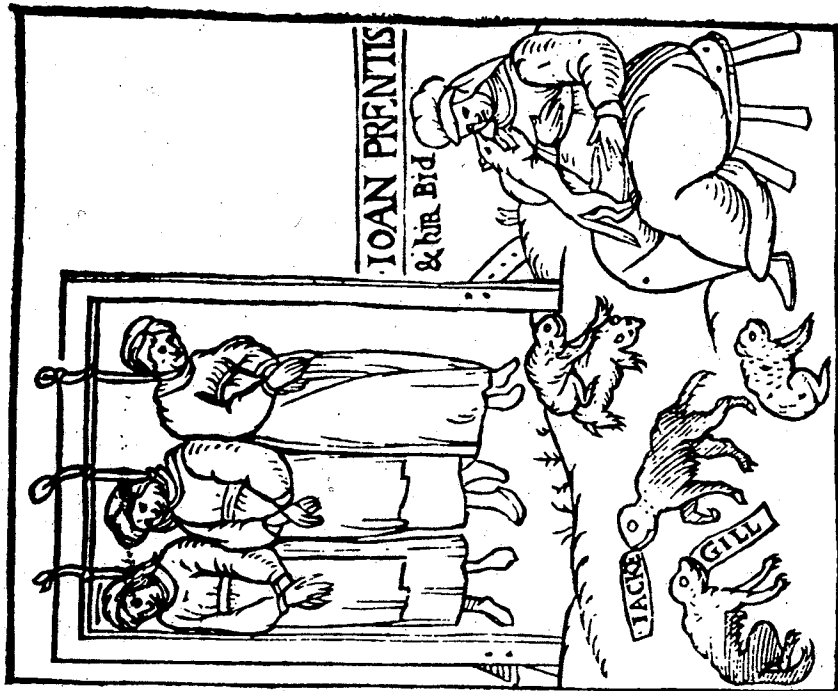


Figure 4. Title page from *The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches* (1589), STC 5114, by permission of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Trustees of Lambeth Palace Library.

by converting their blood into breast milk, through a mysterious process taking place deep within their bodies; the witch, usually beyond her child-bearing years, inverted that process, providing blood as a substitute for milk.⁵⁰ At the same time, the shedding of her own blood to nurture her followers was an unholy parody of the sacrifice of Christ.⁵¹

The Kleinian notion of the “bad breast” is especially suggested by the notion of the demonic imp sucking at a nipplelike witch’s mark. As Klein has it, this infantile fantasy begins in the infant’s own oral sadism; and the image of the demonic imp, sucking at a nipple until it bleeds, is a central feature in “confessions” and informants’ statements that describe the witch’s relation with her familiar. The breast becomes “bad” and persecutory when the child, as result of her envy and anger when the breast is withheld, projects this sadism on to the breast and fears its retaliation. The demonic imp seems to represent the infant’s own dangerous sadistic impulses, but then becomes an extension of the “bad” breast’s persecutory will. Oral desires of early childhood may play a significant role in the shaping of this aspect of witchcraft belief.

The witch’s maternal care did not stop with feeding, however. She also provided herimps with a cozy place to sleep, most often in womblike earthen or wicker pots lined with wool.⁵² Theimps themselves appear with frequency in informants’ statements, often Janus-like in aspect. On the one hand, they were extensions of the witch’s malevolence, carrying illness to her victims, causing accidents, sometimes displaying hunger or nipping them; on the other hand, they made the witch herself a target of a good deal of oral greed, sucking blood, sometimes against the witch’s will, leaving marks, and causing the witch pain, in one case even burning her.⁵³ Like children, theimps could get a little out of the witch’s control. Elizabeth Bennett, for example, sent her imp to kill the animals of her neighbor, William Byett, but the spirit exceeded his instructions and “plagued Byett’s wife to death.”⁵⁴ If theimps enacted the witch’s destruc-

50. Beliefs that constituted witchcraft as an inherited power may follow from the notion that witches’ power over demonic spirits came from “blood.”

51. One woman in her confession made this point explicitly, but her admission may represent the doctrinal concerns of the examiner. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 167.

52. For examples, see Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 95, 110, 112, 123–25, 128, 138–39.

53. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 157–58, 144, 145, 149, 159, 160, 167. See Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 123, for the burning incident. Elizabeth Bennett seems to have had an especially difficult time with herimps. Lierd and Suckin; they imposed themselves upon her despite her pleas to God to be delivered from these evil spirits.

54. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 158. Another example is on p. 167.

tive will, they also in a sense enacted the child's rebellious resistance to the mother.

Sometimes, but by no means routinely, the witch was believed to employ wax images or doll-like figures to carry out her magic—that is, like Mrs. Dewse, she used sorcery. These images were called not only “puppets” (poppets) but also “child’s babies” and “maumets” (mammets—a term for the breast-fed infant). Alice Hunt denied “having any puppets, spirits, or maumettes.” Alice Manfield had an imp called “Puppet alias Mamee”—a name that raises the interesting question of the relation between familiars and image magic.⁵⁵ Both, in any case, linked the witch to the role of mother. In the case of the familiar, the witch was a mother whose sacrificial feeding of a childlike imp enabled her to acquire magical power. In the case of image magic, the “child” was the one sacrificed. Through sorcery the witch turned her adult target into a child in the hands of a deadly mother.

Imps seem sometimes to have been actual animals—pets perhaps—kept by an old woman or sighted in her vicinity; sometimes they were apparitions or fantasies. Testimony about imps comes from the witches' own “confessions,” from a few adult accusers, but especially from children—some of whom were children of the accused. This testimony has often been considered the most “doctored”; children may have been easily led to say what their examiners wanted to hear.⁵⁶ But their statements may also have registered their own fantasies about the witch (fantasies undoubtedly influenced by stories and beliefs heard from adults),⁵⁷ in which

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 159. Ewen discusses “puppets” in his introduction, on p. 79.

56. Reginald Scot is especially contemptuous of the use of children's testimony in trials. Commenting specifically on W. W.'s pamphlet about the St. Osyth trials, he writes, “See whether the witnesses be not single, of what credit, sex, and age they are—namely, lewd, miserable, and envious poor people, most of them which speak to any purpose being old women, and children of the age of 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9 years” (quoted in Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 161).

57. Thus, before the onset of the Throckmorton daughters' “fits,” one of them had Alice Samuel already pegged as a witch. Brought in to tend upon ten-year-old Jane, who had fallen sick of a “strange kind of sickness and distemperature”—later to be diagnosed as the beginnings of her possession by the devil—Alice Samuel appeared to the child to be a witch merely because of her hat: “She had not been there long but the child grew something worse than she was at her coming, and on the sudden cried, saying, ‘Grandmother, look where the old witch stiteth, pointing to the said Mother Samuel. ‘Did you ever see’ said the child, ‘one more like a witch than she is? Take off her black thrummed cap, for I cannot abide to look on her.’” (Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 241). In addition, the second set of Lancashire trials was set in motion by a ten-year-old boy, who “having invented or assimilated some stories of witches, for the purposes of gain, was put forward as . . . a witch-finder” (Ewen, *Witchcraft and Devonianism*, p. 244). This case forms the basis of the play by Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, *The Late Lancashire Witches*.

Joane Willmott.

Alice Baker.

Ellen Greene.



Figure 5. Witches with familiars, from *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower* (1619). Courtesy The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

the imps formed a central concern. In one sense the imp was the child's “evil twin”; these fantasies seem informed by the child's desire to disassociate him- or herself from sadistic or devouring oral impulses that threatened the mother with injury. In another sense the demonic imp was the rival child the mother appeared to favor, who was pampered and fed special treats while her own or a neighbor's child was neglected. The child so well treated also became an extension of the mother's malevolent will.

It is difficult, of course, to tell from the statements what the child really experienced. Did the child witness the mother with actual pets or with creatures she really treated as her familiars? (See figure 5). Was the child reporting a fantasy or dream? Was the child merely saying what the examiner wanted to hear? Some of the statements do seem believable as children's fearful fantasies of mothers they have come to distrust. They can suggest also a troubled family environment. In the case of Cicely Celles, two of her accusers were in fact her own children.⁵⁸ Her two sons

58. Their statements, from which the following quotations are taken, may be found in W. W., *A true and iust Recorde*, sig. D-D2v.

testified that she fed and sheltered a rival set of demonic siblings, who threatened the sons in various ways. Henry, aged nine, described a spirit who came "one night about midnight" and took his younger brother John by "the left legge, and also by the litle toe." The spirit, he said, resembled his sister, "but that it was al blacke." John, according to the statement,

cried out and said, "Father, Father, come helpe me, there is a blacke thing hath me by the legge, as big as my sister": wherat his father said to his mother, "why thou whore cannot you keep your impes from my children": wherat shee presently called it away from her son, saying, "come away, come away," at which speech it did depart. . . . The next day he [Henry] tolde his mother hee was so afraid of the thing that had his brother by the legge that he sweat for feare, and that he could scarce get his shirt from his back: his mother answering "thou lvest, thou lvest, whoreson."

Henry also reported seeing his mother feed the imps "out of a blacke dish, ech other day with milke," and carry them out to a hiding place in the roots of a crabtree near the house. One, "a blacke one, a he," was called Hercules or Jack; the other, "a white one, a she," was Mercury, and they had "eyes like unto goose eyes." On the night that a neighbor's maid, Alice Baxter, reported a sudden but temporary illness, Henry said he heard his mother tell his father that she had sent Hercules to the maid, the father answering, "Ye are a trim fool."

John corroborated Henry's story, and though there are some discrepancies in their accounts, taken together, they suggest a sadly conflict-ridden family in which husband abuses wife, wife abuses children, and the children fear further abuse from a set of rival siblings. The cycle of conflict has undoubtedly intensified by poverty, and the family is suggestively fractured along sex lines: the father protects his sons—"my children"—from the mother's imps, who remind the sons of their sister. Did the mother neglect her sons while favoring a daughter as well as the alleged imps? Were the sons envious as well as afraid of the rival siblings whom their mother fed and set against them? Difficult as it is to draw any firm conclusions from such fragmentary evidence, it is hard to avoid the impression that the son's destructive impulses toward other siblings and toward the mother who seemingly favored them was being recycled in the form of fearful apparitions that enacted the will of a mother literally experienced as a witch—a witch who nourished her brood of demonic imps while tormenting her human children.

Statements from adults also contain descriptions of encounters with demonic imps. Adults too could be frightened, even paralyzed, by such encounters. Alice Baxter reported that while she was milking one of her master's cows, it suddenly started, kicking over the pail of milk, and she saw "all the rest to make a staring and a looking about." She then "felt a thing to prick her under the right side, as if she had been stricken with ones hande, and she saith that after, as she was going homewards with her milke . . . there came a thing all white like a Cat, and stroke her at the hart, in such sort as shee could not stand, goe, nor speake, and so she remained until her said master and two of his workmen did carry her home in a chaire: she saith, she saw the said thing to go into a bush by the stile, and that she knew not her master when he came unto her."⁵⁹ Alice may have found in witchcraft a convenient explanation for this lapse on the job, or she may have been prompted by her master, another informant against Cicely, to come forward with this story. But the linkages are suggestive: the milk spilled, the pain in the region of the maid's breast, the cat white like milk. It is possible, at least, that anxiety about an injury to the maternal body—specifically to the breast—was here coming back to haunt Alice Baxter. Whatever its motivations, her story contributes to the construction of the witch as malevolent mother, enemy of her neighbor's access to maternal nurturance and its substitutes.

But sightings of demonic imps were not in themselves sufficient grounds for indicting someone as a witch. The witch must be believed responsible for death or at least serious illness to galvanize community opinion against her and elicit the interest of authorities. Throughout most of this period, she was not subject to the death penalty unless a human death had occurred. Nor did the emotions generated by a neighborly quarrel always trigger a witchcraft accusation. For some accusers, at least, the experience of terrible misfortune itself—for example, the death of a child or a loved one—may have produced a sense of bewitchment without any clear notion of its source. In such cases, what followed was truly a witch-"hunt," a search to "discover" a witch hidden in one's midst. The woman eventually selected for the role of witch may have been chosen for reasons even more superficial than usual. Quarrels recalled from months or even years back were given sinister significance once serious misfortune occurred.

59. Ibid. sig. D4v.

Especially in the post-Reformation context, the death of a child or loved one could be a deeply disturbing experience. In any period, grief can be accompanied by troubling feelings of anger at the dead person and a guilty sense of responsibility; such feelings are especially evident in children but can also be observed in adults. According to Melanie Klein, bereavement is an experience especially likely to revive persecutory anxieties, even in "normal" adults; the death of a loved one may revive infantile fears that one's hostile feelings can literally kill, producing guilt and anxiety that complicate the mourning process.⁶⁰ In early modern England, the Reformation transformed religious practice in ways that reinforced and intensified such feelings. Misfortunes were routinely characterized as God's tests of the faithful or, much more frequently, as his "corrections" for sin. When a child died, parents were exhorted to scrutinize their past behavior to discover the sin or lapse of faith that had warranted this display of divine wrath. Often, they were persuaded that their sins had in a sense "caused" the child's death.⁶¹ Parents were also reminded that their child had only been "lent" to them. The child was a gift that God had every right to reclaim at his whim, its life a "bond" that could be canceled.⁶² Grief then displayed one's possessiveness; it implied one's child was one's private property when the child "really" belonged to God, as land "belonged" to the feudal master or to the commons.

Other post-Reformation changes in religious practice may also have exacerbated the guilt experienced when a loved one died. The medieval church had tolerated and even encouraged lavish displays of grief, but Protestants discouraged them, even to the point of making grief itself a sign of a sinful lack of faith. The medieval church authorized a variety of practices by which one could ease the suffering of loved ones in the afterlife: almsgiving, bell ringing, the singing of masses for the dead—all provided means for persons close to the deceased to assuage any lingering guilt feelings about them. Through pilgrimages, flagellant societies, and other penitential practices sinners could atone for their sins and improve their standing in God's eyes. The Protestant denial of the existence of

60. See especially Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940), in *Writings*, 1:344-69.

61. Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 78-89. Note also Macduff's response to the death of his family in *Macbeth*: "Sinful Macduff / They were all struck for thee—naught that I am, / Not for their own demerits but for mine / Fell slaughter on their souls" (4.3.224-27).

62. Cf. *Richard III* 4.4.77: "Cancel his bond of life, dear God, I pray."

purgatory and of the efficacy of "works" led to the abolishment of all such practices.⁶³

Protestant doctrine, moreover, reinforced people's sense of powerlessness to repair the damage caused by their sins. Protestant preachers not only sought to initiate a process of self-scrutiny which would lead to repentance and amendment of life; they also emphasized human inability to achieve salvation without God's help. The recognition of one's powerlessness in the face of sin was a necessary step in the Protestant conversion process, designed to make sinners aware of their utter helplessness and dependence on God and his Word for salvation and renewal. But "justification by faith" could be difficult to accept intellectually, not to mention emotionally. For many, perhaps especially the less educated, doctrinal changes led not to "new birth" but to melancholy, madness, and despair. According to Michael Macdonald, over 10 percent of the clients of the seventeenth-century doctor and clergyman Richard Napier consulted him for symptoms related to religious anxieties. Of these, a third came to him because doubts about salvation were causing them mental disturbances and suicidal thoughts.⁶⁴

The death of a child, then, could leave some parents feeling not only guiltily responsible but even suicidal. Since women were in charge of child care, they might feel especially vulnerable to such feelings. Traditional beliefs joined forces with new ones to intensify the burdens of guilt for bereaved mothers and wives at the same time as older modes of making reparations to the deceased were being taken away. Women, as the weaker sex, were in any case believed to be more prone to sin; and the stereotype of the "natural" mother who felt only love, compassion, and pity for her children may have generated additional guilt when a woman's feelings were more ambivalent. As the person most directly involved with the child, the mother might also be the most likely to feel a resistant anger at God or a sense of responsibility when the child died. At least 134 persons sought medical help from Richard Napier for mental disturbances associated with bereavements. Of these cases, 58 involved the death of children, and 51 of the sufferers were their mothers. Another 42 cases involved the death of spouses; 33 of the distressed survivors were wives.⁶⁵

63. Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 602-6.

64. See Macdonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, pp. 89, 136, 217-31. Napier's experiences with these patients made him critical of Puritan zeal in much the same way as his contemporary Richard Burton.

65. Macdonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, pp. 82, 103.

Others may have transformed or forestalled such mental disturbances by means of an accusation of witchcraft. As Thomas and Macfarlane have noted, using witchcraft to explain misfortune had its advantages. If an illness, say, was caused by witchcraft, there was hope that it could be alleviated once the witch was discovered and countermeasures were taken. If death had already occurred, the witch provided a target for one's anger and a way to share the blame. Citing witchcraft as the immediate cause of the death of one's child did not rule out the possibility that one's own sinful behavior was also a cause. Theologians maintained that God could be using the witch as his rod of correction, just as he also used more natural means. Nevertheless, blaming the witch might provide a means of diminishing the intensity of the bereaved person's self-blame; one could divert a self-destructive, possibly suicidal impulse by venting one's rage on the witch.

Moreover, the belief that one's child or spouse had been a victim of witchcraft may have been the explanation that most closely corresponded to the emotional state of the bereaved person. The death of a loved one might arouse feelings of persecution along with grief and guilt. Death places the human subject back in the position of the child, powerless, at the mercy of forces it cannot control. God himself may seem a persecutor when his "corrections" do not seem to fit the crime; the parent does not "deserve" to have the child taken away. Blaming the witch may protect one from the guilt of being angry at God as well as at the "good" mother one has internalized, encoding the fantasy—especially common to women—that the dead child or spouse has been "stolen" by a bad, retaliatory mother.⁶⁶ Beliefs about the witch and her demonic imp provided images that "made sense" of the bereaved per-

66. Melanie Klein comments, "If for instance a woman loses her child through death, along with sorrow and pain her early dread of being robbed by a 'bad' retaliatory mother is reactivated and confirmed. Her own early aggressive phantasies of robbing her mother of babies gave rise to fears and feelings of being punished." Klein goes on to discuss the dream of one patient following the death of her much loved son: "She saw two people, a mother and son. The mother was wearing a black dress. The dreamer knew that this boy had died, or was going to die. No sorrow entered into her feelings, but there was a trace of hostility towards the two people." In the course of analyzing the patient's associations with the dream, Klein finds embedded in it the patient's hostile wishes against her brother and the desire to punish her mother by means of his death. The patient experiences the death of her own son as retaliation for this hostile fantasy. "Compassion and love for the internal mother were denied, feelings of revenge and triumph . . . were reinforced, partly because, through her own vengeful feelings, they had turned into persecuting figures" (Klein, *Writings*, vol. 1, pp. 353-54).

son's feelings of persecution, giving them a local habitation and a name.

In transferring blame from self to witch, the accuser was not necessarily acting weakly or insincerely, as contemporaries sometimes charged.⁶⁷ Accusation of the witch can be seen in some cases as a form of resistance to the imposition of Protestant doctrine "from above." The bereaved mother who accused a witch may, among other things, have been rejecting the notion that she was to blame for her child's death and that every misfortune required anxious examination of her conscience and submission to a new clerical elite's interpretation of God's word. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind the very real fears of many village-level accusers. In coming to perceive another woman as a witch, the accuser may have been driven by unconscious processes over which she had little control; the impulse to defend the ego from excessive, self-destructive guilt through projection is enacted automatically, creating the impression of a magical persecution that seems quite real.

But if witchcraft accusation could provide a much-needed defense against a profoundly felt inner threat, it could also be a defense against an external one. It is likely that some women accused of witchcraft did in fact intend to harm or kill their neighbors and their children by magical means. And some of these women succeeded; they "caused" the symptoms of illness and perhaps even brought on death in neighbors who shared a belief in magic and whose personal histories had made them vul-

67. One comment on the accuser's "vulgar Plea" can be found in a poem of Sir Francis Hubert (d. 1629):

Besides, when any Error is committed
Whereby wee may Incurrre or losse or shame,
That wee our selves thereof may be acquitted
Wee are too ready to transferre the blame
Upon some Witch: That made us doe the same.
It is the vulgar Plea that weake ones use
I was bewitch'd: I could nor will: nor chuse.

Quoted in Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, p. vii. Nor did contemporaries think all witchcraft accusations sincere. Holinshed refers to Richard III's charges against Jane Shore and Queen Elizabeth as "but a quarrel." Just as in elite contexts the witchcraft accusation was sometimes a smear, so, undoubtedly, it sometimes was at the village level. Reginald Scot suggests that some witchcraft accusations derive not only from the ignorance of country "butter wives" and "dairie maides" but from their need for a convenient cover: the surest way to protect your butter from witches is "to looke well to your dairie maid or wife, that she neither eat up the creame, nor sell awaie your butter" (*Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 238).

nerable to the witch's craft. It is also possible, as Thomas suggests, that others found a reputation for witchcraft a useful means of pressuring recalcitrant neighbors into meeting their requests.⁶⁸ But many women undoubtedly were falsely accused. They were merely older women who "persecuted" their neighbors with no more than their economic need, their sharp tongues, or their associations with the maternal body, whose ability to arouse an excess of unconscious guilt in their neighbors gave them an unwitting magical power. Read as persecutors by their neighbors, they provoked persecution in response.

But it was especially the ambiguity of these women's behavior which made them a disturbing force in the village community. The women who ended up accused of witchcraft provoked both anger and anxious self-scrutiny, calling into question assumptions not only about good neighboring but also about good mothering, with which it intersected. Macfarlane and Thomas remind us that it took a long time—often years—for a woman to acquire a reputation as a witch. She was at first perceived as merely another neighbor, another gossip, another white witch. When a quarrel broke out between her and another woman, it was not necessarily clear who rightfully occupied the position of "nurturing neighbor." The accuser must appeal to the larger community to confirm her choice. The witch trial helped a community move from ambiguity toward clarification, helped it draw many distinctions important to the village social order: good neighbor/bad neighbor, gossip/witch, cunning woman/witch, healing magic/maleficium, justice/vengeance, curse/prayer, natural body/unnatural body, good mother/malevolent mother. But the events that led up to a trial showed the troubling ways such categories could overlap. The witch's power to awaken fear partly depended on the possibility that "right" was on her side. Once the community had made up its mind that a particular woman was clearly "bad," no longer confused with the "good" nurturing neighbor—that is, that she was a witch—her power dissolved.

The revelation of the witch's teat was usually among the last pieces of evidence to be entered against the accused woman.⁶⁹ It is as if the full fantasy—of witch as malevolent mother feeding a brood of rival chil-

68. Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 514, 565.

69. According to Ewen, the belief in the witch's teat was a peculiarly English variation on the notion of the devil's mark—sign of the witch's servitude to the devil, rather like the liveries worn by servants identifying them with their feudal masters. The belief in the witch's teat, moreover, became widespread in England only in the sixteenth century, just as witch-hunting was about to begin in earnest. See *Witchcraft and Demonism*, pp. 63, 73-74.

dren—could be confronted only in the relative safety of the courtroom. Only then, in the presence of male authorities deemed to serve a power greater than that of the witch, and after a relative consensus about her danger to the community had been reached, could the ultimate source of conflict—the mother's breast—be confronted and allowed to become a target for aggression. That the witch's teat is an *extra* one seems significant; it can be destroyed while leaving the "good" mother's body intact. The grotesque body of the witch could be punished and executed, leaving the community the maternal body in its "natural" and purified form. And since the trial was also a demonstration of legal, paternal, and divinely sanctioned authority over the witch, the maternal bodies that remained, those of the female accusers, had in effect found access to an orthodox magic of the father's body far more powerful than that of the witch.

The Witch and the Early Modern Mother

The woman who was labeled a witch wanted things for herself or her household from her neighbors, but she had little to offer in return to those who were not much better off than she. Increasingly resented as an economic burden, she was also perceived by her neighbors to be the locus of a dangerous envy and verbal violence. It was unsettling as well as exasperating when her curses, uttered in response to the smallest frustrations, seemed to be backed up by an unseen power, when "bad" things happened to "good" people. For refusing her some milk, a child would die, a husband fall sick. When neighbors—often but not always other women—put their resentments and their fears into words, they represented the witch as a malevolent mother who used her power to suckle, feed, and nurture a brood of childlike demonic imps in order to bring sickness and death to the households of other mothers. In doing so they punished a woman who resembled the mother who had once punished them.

If witchcraft beliefs in an important sense construct the witch as a malevolent mother, does that mean witch-hunting in early modern England was related to new anxieties about mothers and the maternal role? There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that such anxieties were increasing during the sixteenth century. Mothers and other women in caretaking roles came under a new scrutiny, especially as the Reformation gathered force; elites located a dangerous potential in women's caretak-

ing roles, requiring stricter forms of surveillance and social control. These efforts had implications for all social levels. Infanticide, for example, was newly criminalized at this time and, as in witchcraft cases, most trials involved lower-class women. There appears to be a surprisingly close correlation between infanticide and witchcraft cases, in fact; communities that hunted witches also prosecuted murderous mothers, in roughly similar numbers.⁷⁰ After 1512, regulation of midwives also increased, through licensing by local religious authorities; among other things, midwives had to swear oaths not to use magic and not to harm the infant.⁷¹ Wet-nursing became a site of intensified controversy, as religious authorities and others decried the practice, encouraging mothers to feed their own infants, lest the lower-class wet nurse pass on diseases and unsatisfactory lower-class character traits to the nursing infant through her milk. Such anxieties combined with centuries-old attitudes about the maternal body. Even when the milk the child imbibed was its natural mother's, it might pose a variety of dangers. Some believed mother's milk to be wholesome in the days immediately following birth; it too could be a medium of disease and undesirable character traits. The womb was another site of anxiety, a source of trouble and danger for both mother and child.⁷² Through the womb, the mother could damage the fetus if she ate the wrong foods or too many of them or was given to unnatural imaginings; she could also deform the fetus with her sins. The empty womb could make trouble when it moved out of its proper place, causing *hysterica passio*, or the "suffocation of the mother"; sufferers experienced a choking sensation in the throat, extremes of emotion, and sometimes had fits or episodes of bizarre behavior.⁷³

70. See Peter C. Hoffer and N. E. H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1538-1803* (New York: New York University Press, 1981). Perhaps cases sometimes overlapped; the case of Elizabeth Francis, accused of witchcraft, also involved self-induced abortion and infanticide. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 74-75.

71. See Thomas R. Forbes, "Midwifery and Witchcraft," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 17 (1962): 264-83, later expanded into the book *The Midwife and the Witch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); also see Jean Towler and Joan Bramell, *Midwives in History and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 55-63.

72. Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, pp. 4-5; Pastier, *The Body Embarrassed*, pp. 198-208; Cahn, *Industry of Devotion*, pp. 104-5; Patricia Crawford, "The Sucking Child: Adult Attitudes toward Childcare in the First Year of Life in Seventeenth-Century England," *Continuity and Change* 1 (1986): 23-54; Valerie Filides, "The English Wet-Nurse and Her Role in Infant Care, 1538-1800," *Medical History* 32 (1988): 142-73.

73. Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 300 n. 27, and see 5-7; For a guide to medical writings on the female body and its disorders, see Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 76-79 and esp.

Furthermore, the concern of Renaissance humanists with education brought new attention to the potentially negative influence of mothers in educating the young child. Juan Vives worried: "For children rounne unto their mother, and aske her advice in all thyng[s]: they inquire every thyng of her: what some ever she answereth, they beleve and regarde and take hit even for the gossPELL." Mothers, in his view, must limit themselves to instilling basic virtues. The "good" mother was the nurturing mother, often one who confined herself to the care of infants and very young children. She was warned to keep the bad influence of her doting nature from spoiling not only sons but daughters.⁷⁴ Among elites, male tutors would take over the more serious business of preparing sons for the public domain. Conduct books advising mothers on their "special vocation" appeared as a new genre around this time, putting a Protestant spin on many traditional ideas and weighting them with the authority of the printed book; in general, they stressed the importance of the mother's role in caring for infants and shaping the character of the young child, while downplaying her duties as a producer of domestic goods.⁷⁵ Yet they also suggested the mother's attentions to her child had to be carefully monitored. Mothers received sometimes contradictory advice to be devoted, sacrificing, loving, and tirelessly attentive, yet also to avoid indulgence and to insist upon the duty of children to obey their parents. The "bad" mother might either neglect her infant or spoil her older children, en-

pp. 43-57. See also Pastier, *The Body Embarrassed*, pp. 168-97. As noted earlier, bewitchment was sometimes reinterpreted as suffocation of the mother. On p. 74, Eccles quotes William Harvey's mid-seventeenth-century summary of the womb's unruly effects: "No man (who is but never so little versed in such matters) is ignorant, what grievous *Symptomes*, the Rising, Bearing down, and Perversion, and Convulsion of the *Womb* do excite; what horrid extravagancies of minde, what Phrenesies, Melancholy Distempers, and Outragiousness, the *praeternatural Diseases* of the *Womb* do induce, as if the affected Persons were enchanted: as also how many difficult *Diseases*, the depraved effluxion of the Terms, or the use of Venus much intermitted, and long desired do foment." The womb's diseases hover on the borderline between natural and supernatural, creating wild disturbances in mind and body.

74. Quoted in Mary Beth Rose, "Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (Fall 1991): 300; see her essay for a fuller discussion of Vives and his relation to sixteenth-century English conduct books for mothers.

75. For surveys of this literature, see Cahn, *Industry of Devotion*; Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982); Betty S. Travitsky, "The New Mother of the English Renaissance: Her Writings on Motherhood," in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Broner (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1986), pp. 33-43; and Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 266-87.

couraging a dependent, egocentric disposition; the "bad breast" provided either too much food or too little. Even the best mother could not escape the general curse of Eve. As a woman, she was the conduit for sin, passing on to her child the general condition of fallen man. A Protestant poetics of conversion elaborated the idea of a "new birth" in Christ, in which the milk of one's natural mother was to be replaced by the "marvelous sweet" milk of God's Word; by contrast, earthly mothers were the site of sin, ignorance, and general deficiency. Truly sustaining spiritual nourishment was to be had only from the Father, his Word, and his male representatives on earth, the Protestant clergy.⁷⁶

If the mother's influence over her young children could be cause for concern, her effect on her grown children could be maddening. Among elite families in particular, patrilineal inheritance customs handed down from the Middle Ages restricted and yet empowered mothers in ways that could generate intense conflict between them and their children. Though a woman's property was ordinarily absorbed into her husband's estate upon marriage and she had no independent standing under the law, her dowry returned to her control upon his death and she was able to name her own heirs. Furthermore, husbands frequently named their wives executors and left them a portion of the family estate, to be enjoyed for the duration of their lives before it passed to male heirs. Under these conditions, conflict was structured into the relationship between mother and eldest son. Mothers could interfere with sons' control of their inheritance and their dowers could disadvantage them economically: bitter quarrels were frequently the result.⁷⁷ As the sixteenth century progressed, more mothers initiated legal struggles over property, as married women and widows gained significant rights to file suit on their own behalf in Chancery court. John Webster's early seventeenth-century play *The Devil's Law-Case* dramatizes one such legal battle. A mother, Leonora, seeks vengeance on her son by bringing a lawsuit to have him (falsely) named a bastard and thus to disinherit him. For those whose interests were threatened by women's new legal powers, gender provided a language with which to express their disapproval. Webster's subtitle exemplifies the demonizing strategies that could be used: *When women go to law, it is the Devil's Business*; within the play, Leonora's actions are

76. This was also a medieval theme; see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California, 1982).

77. See Barbara J. Harris, "Property, Power, and Personal Relations" and "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England."

specifically denigrated in terms of perverse maternity. Though Leonora also is at odds with her daughter, the success of her suit would mean that her daughter would inherit the son's lands. The wills of elite and "middle" families show that her attitude was not unusual. Mothers frequently thwarted primogeniture expectations, making provisions for daughters and younger sons which aroused the resentment of their eldest sons and kin with ties to the husband's patrilineage.⁷⁸ Inheritance customs thus empowered mothers to undermine strict patrilineality.

In a number of ways, even as a new emphasis was being placed on maternal power, it was likely to be experienced as dangerous or anger-provoking by children and by others with an interest in monitoring mother-child relations. Concerns about the dangers of mothering were tied in with broader post-Reformation efforts to monitor marriage and family life, which often involved what Lawrence Stone has called the "re-enforcement of patriarchy": the father's authority was strengthened, his prerogatives extended, and a new symbolic importance was conferred upon his role.⁷⁹ Wives were to submit to their husbands' authority in all things; yet at the same time, they ran the household, and their mothering role was gaining a new importance and prestige. As the mother of her husband's children and mistress of his servants, the wife asserted authority over subordinates, issuing her own commands and demanding obedience. But the habits of a mother and domestic manager were in many ways opposed to those a husband was supposed to expect from a wife. Women had to shift roles deftly from playing the master to playing the servant. Linda Pollock has made the important point that a woman (at least an upper-class woman) had to learn in effect two roles—to be "the weaker vessel" in her husband's presence and yet "the best steward" in his absence. She must negotiate between submission and competence, be properly female and yet also have a masculine part. Susan Amussen has brought out the mixed messages women received in household manuals

78. See Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, pp. 78, 91-93. On women's suits in Chancery, see Clont, *Women and Law in Elizabethan England*.

79. The phrase is from Lawrence Stone's widely influential but also much criticized book *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (Abridged edition; New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 109-46. The "reinforcement of patriarchy," to the extent it took place, was not necessarily bad for women in all its aspects. See Rose, "Where Are the Mothers?" pp. 293-98. In addition, Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 1-61, offers an important look at the mother's contribution within a patriarchal family structure.

as they were advised to submit to their husbands and yet assist them in the management and supervision of the household.⁸⁰ Slippages were bound to occur, and the husband might find himself being spoken to and treated as if he were a child. The fear of such role reversal was expressed in the imagery associated with shrews and scolds. Woodcuts and drawings show the "husband-dominator" as the punitive mother, spanking her kneeling husband.⁸¹ In turn, husbands may have had a special sensitivity to being treated like children. As many critics have observed, sons in this culture had an extended period of dependence on the mother and thus of identification with her, and they may have found the differentiation from the mother which patriarchy required of them especially difficult to achieve.⁸² The wife who stepped out of place and asserted herself too vig-

80. Pollock, "Teach Her to Live under Obedience": The Making of Women in the Upper Ranks of Early Modern England," *Continuity and Change* 4 (1989): 231-58; Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, pp. 41-47.

81. See the illustrations that accompany Natalie Davis's essay "Woman on Top," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 124-51. For an English example, a woodcut from *The Deceyfe of Women* (London, 1557) is included in Laura Cowing, "Gender and the Language of Insult."

82. That early modern culture rendered the patriarchal imperative for males to "identify with mother" particularly problematic is a point familiar to many Shakespeareans from the work of Adelman, Kahn, Sprengnether, and others. Adelman, for example, sees the "violent unmaking of the maternal body" as the point of origin for a tragic masculine selfhood not only in Shakespeare's plays but in his culture. *Suffocating Mothers*, pp. 7-10. See also Coppelia Kahn, *Mari's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 1-20; and "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 33-49; Madelon [Gohlke] Sprengnether, "I Woodee Thee with My Sword": Shakespeare's Tragic Paradigms," in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppelia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 170-87; Valerie Traub, "Prince Hal's Falstaff: Positioning Psychoanalysis and the Female Reproductive Body," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989): 456-74. Such claims depend for their historical force on early modern child-care practices, in particular that of "breaching" (Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage*, p. 238), and on tensions between the single-sex and two-sex models of gender differentiation current at the time. See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, pp. 166-97. For their psychoanalytic argument they depend on the feminist recasting of the work of Robert Stoller, Ralph Greenson, and others by Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

While ultimately this account of early modern male subjectivity needs to be complicated by a recognition of the sites in early modern culture where male identification with the mother (or the feminine) was tolerated or even encouraged, I am in substantial agreement with it. What I consider more problematic is the relatively serene and untroubled account of mother-daughter relations which sometimes surfaces alongside it.

orously brought the mother back into the masculine domain, challenging her husband's masculinity and even his adulthood: enraged by her violation of gender hierarchy, he must also resist the temptations of a regressive return to dependence on maternal power.

Anxieties about mothering, then, went hand in hand with anxieties about female power; the one often implied the other. When women, by virtue of the tensions inhering in early modern systems of gender and class, were catapulted into positions of power over men—as queens, as patrons, as stewards in their husband's absence, or as managers of households—their power might be a potent and potentially threatening reminder of the mother's power over her child and all the emotional freight that carried. However legitimate their claims to those positions, women who ruled over men were unsettling presences, in part because they threatened to bring a maternal subtext back into patriarchal view.⁸³ John Knox's "monstrous regiment of women" was in an important sense a monstrous regiment of *mothers*.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, whereas these social practices and the anxieties with which they were associated have a good deal to do with the male interventions in witch-hunting I discuss in subsequent chapters—that is, with state prosecution of the witch—they have limited relevance to witch-hunting at the village level. As midwives, wet nurses, and unwed mothers, lower-class women were subjected to intensified regulation. At least some lower-class mothers would have been exposed to the new ideology of

83. I allude here to Kahn, "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*," p. 35: "Patriarchal structures loom obviously on the surface of many texts, structures of authority, control, force, logic, linearity, misogyny, male superiority. But beneath them, as in a palimpsest, we can find what I call 'the maternal subtext,' the imprint of mothering on the male psyche, the psychological presence of the mother whether or not mothers are literally represented as characters." Also see Louis Montrose's suggestive discussion of Simon Forman's dream about Queen Elizabeth in "A *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Shaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture: Gender, Power, Form," in *Rewriting the Renaissance*, pp. 65-87. Montrose highlights the ambivalence toward Elizabeth as a quasi-maternal figure, tracing also the ways in which a tension between the impulse to submit to female power and the impulse to reassert male dominance similarly shapes Shakespeare's play.

84. Mary Beth Rose in fact shows that John Knox's argument in *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* depends heavily on the idea that the "legal incapacities" of mothers show women to be unfit for political rule. "Where are the Mothers?" p. 303. The literature on early modern debates about the "female regiment" is now vast. See especially Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540-1620* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Pamela Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pp. 205-50.

mothering promulgated by a reform-minded clergy. Yet what is "new" about sixteenth-century discourses about mothers tends to bespeak the elite son's anxieties and not the village-level daughter's. Like magical beliefs in general, witch-hunting in some form was probably a regular feature of peasant culture for centuries before the Reformation; we would expect to find the main sources of village-level witch-hunting not in post-Reformation changes in child care or in discourses of mothering but in aspects of social practice continuous through the Middle Ages and into the early modern period.⁸⁵

Unfortunately, data about peasant family relations in either period are hard to come by, and data about mother-daughter relations harder still. English peasant discourse is for the most part an oral tradition in effect "outside" of history because it produces no written texts. The written texts that report it, such as the documents related to witchcraft cases, are heavily mediated by the elites that make up "officialdom." Even upper-class mother-child relations have received little attention from the males who largely "make" history, who write and preserve in the records of the past the "line" of the patrilineage, passing from father to first son. What can be pieced together, however, does suggest that conflict was structured into the relations between children and mothers, stepmothers, and nurses in ways that, at least in some families, may have promoted persecutory anxieties and fueled witchcraft accusations.⁸⁶

Gail Paster has noted one irony of child-rearing practices: whereas aristocratic and gentry-level mothers frequently employed wet nurses to feed and care for their infants and young children, mothers of the lower classes tended to do their own breast-feeding—a physically and perhaps psychologically healthier situation for mother and child alike. Moreover, they generally did not deny their infants the valuable colostrum that flowed from their breasts in the first few days following birth, as was recommended to upper-class mothers.⁸⁷ Still, other features of early and pre-modern child care suggest that babies of all classes might experience

85. On the longevity of witchcraft beliefs, see Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 437–38; Clive Holmes, "Popular Culture?" pp. 85–111, esp. 94–99.

86. For general accounts of family structure and the position of daughters within that structure, see Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 66–118; Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, pp. 38–49, 91–93; Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, pp. 81–89, 113–27. For education of daughters in more well-to-do families, see Cahn, *Industry of Devotion*, pp. 109–18; Pollock, "Teach Her to Live under Obedience"; and Harris, "Property, Power, and Personal Relations."

87. Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 201.

disruptions in nurture, deprivations of the sort likely to intensify their sense of the breast's importance. Lower-class children might not be sent out to nurse, but they might be displaced by a nurse-child if their mothers found such employment. Peasant mothers, in any case, had to be busy with many domestic or farm-related tasks, and economic pressures could make hunger and competition for food a significant factor in poorer families. The period of breast-feeding was often prolonged—mothers could use it as a form of birth control—encouraging strong attachment. When weaning came, it tended to be abrupt and involved not only frightening the child but also inculcating shame about its oral desires.

Such experiences could heighten the aggressive and envious fantasies about the breast which Melanie Klein has identified as sources of retaliatory fears. As the child grew older, envy of the mother's attention to other siblings might also contribute to the intensity of aggressive fantasies. This envy assumed a historically specific form in a patriarchal, primogenital culture, moreover. Privileges were often meted out according to birth order and gender, and parents also appear to have had relatively few inhibitions about openly selecting favorites. Whatever anger the child felt about these or other experiences of deprivation, he or she (and for gender reasons especially she) was probably allowed few opportunities to express it. Historians of the family who are otherwise at odds agree that families at all social levels strongly stressed children's obedience and deference to adults. Aggression might be directed toward peers or social inferiors and even take violent form, but it could not be allowed to flow upward, towards mothers, fathers, or other "masters."

If anger toward mothers was largely unspeakable, it might come to seem to the child even unthinkable when it was followed by loss or separation. During premodern and early modern times mothers frequently died in childbirth as well as from other causes; a majority of children, Lawrence Stone has concluded, were bereaved of at least one parent before they reached adulthood.⁸⁸ Serious illnesses and accidents were common as well. Such losses or misfortunes were likely to reinforce the child's (particularly the young child's) sense of the "magical" quality of its anger, hence also the fear of its destructive power.

Situations that heightened a child's hostile fantasies about the breast and the mother and then reinforced their magical character might make the child especially subject to persecutory anxiety; such fears would be

88. Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, p. 48.

confirmed and intensified if the mother were actually punitive in her behavior. Early death, moreover, meant remarriage was frequent, and resultant family structures could encourage splitting: a lost, idealized mother could be replaced by a "wicked stepmother," an alien presence especially suited to step into the role of persecutor. In many a fairy or folk tale, her alter ego is clearly the witch.

Some evidence from the early modern period suggests that the mother-daughter relationship could be particularly untroubled and warm. But it is clear that there were also many conflict-ridden, "dysfunctional" families, especially at lower social levels and when remarriage brought together unrelated children and stepparents. We have glimpsed conflict along gender lines in the Celles family, in which sons harbored resentments against their sister and mother, and husband fought with wife. Other witchcraft cases show evidence of fractious mother-daughter relations: daughters accused mothers of witchcraft in several cases recorded by Ewen. In one seventeenth-century case, a cunning woman became caught in the cross fire between a mother and her two stepdaughters, each side at first suspecting the other of murderous intentions. As the conflict unfolded, it became convenient for both mother and stepdaughters to transfer their anger and suspicion onto the cunning woman, who eventually was executed as a witch.⁸⁹

Perhaps especially pertinent to witchcraft quarrels between women were the relations between young mothers and their aging parents (or parents-in-law). On these women could fall the burdens not only of child rearing and domestic management but care of elderly kin who might be sick or incapacitated. Maintenance agreements allowed for the transfer of property from aging parents to children in exchange for the children's support; such agreements suggest, among other things, that parents could not rely on mere gratitude.⁹⁰ Children of both sexes might feel resentment, but even if the parents were still healthy, the burdens of day-to-day feeding and other forms of care would fall most heavily upon their

89. For example, Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, pp. 214, 220, 223. See also Edward Bowet, *Dr. Lamb Revived; or, Witchcraft Condemn'd in Anne Bodenham a Servant of His (London, 1653)*, discussed in Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 232-34.

90. On care of aging parents, see especially Stephen Greenblatt, "The Cultivation of Anxiety: King Lear and His Heirs," *Raritan* 2 (Summer 1982): 92-114; and Lucinda McCray Beier, *Sufferers and Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 5.

daughter or their son's wife. Affectionate ties might be weaker and resentment stronger when in-laws were involved, but there is plentiful evidence of tensions between those bound by ties of blood. "Old fools are babes again," complain Goneril and Regan when their father becomes their unwanted responsibility: *King Lear* provides an aristocratic example of a situation common among the lower classes, except that then, as now, women tended to live longer; widowed mothers were thus more likely to end up dependent on the "kind nursery" of their children.

The mother of young children who also had to provide food and shelter for elderly relatives had particularly good reason to want to limit her care-giving responsibilities; she might thus be especially resentful of demands made by a needy older female neighbor not her kin. The unacceptable anger she felt toward a dependent, aging parent could readily be transferred to this neighbor, but not without anxiety and fear of retaliatory attack. Though the younger woman might now possess the life-giving breast that gave her value and made family members depend on her, she confronted in the old woman not only a "bad" mother but also a version of the envious child she once was and of the postmenopausal "hag" she would become. To reject and accuse her was in a sense also to reject and accuse herself. The anxiety produced by this set of unconscious identifications was legible as bewitchment. Lacking milk, the old woman nevertheless had excess blood in her postmenopausal body. Following a cultural logic of inversion as well as an intrapsychic logic of retaliatory fantasy, with this blood she could feed her imps and magically retaliate against the recalcitrant "daughter"-neighbor who refused to mother her.

Informants' statements taken in witchcraft cases, distorted as they may be by their interlocutors' expectations, provide some of the only textual traces of peasant mother-daughter relationships. To an extent, they support the idea that tension or conflict was structured into the relations of female accusers with mothers or other women in mothering roles. But witchcraft documents provide evidence of women's alliances as well as quarrels: the women accused of witchcraft may have come from families that encouraged strong mother-daughter bonds. Witches were often believed to have learned their craft from their mothers and sometimes came in mother-daughter pairs.⁹¹ They sometimes shared imps or knowledge of their craft with other female friends. Ursula Kemp confessed to sharing her spirits with Alice Newman after first quarreling with her, and Eliza-

91. Holmes, "Popular Culture?" Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 94, 127-28.

beth Francis reported sharing with Mother Waterhouse.⁹² It is well to remember that such statements may testify more to animosity than to amity, since they call down the suspicion of authorities on the other woman. Nevertheless, if the statements of women who "confessed" to witchcraft are at least to some extent indicative of their actual beliefs and practices, it would appear that "real" witches were poor women who passed on to their daughters and friends strategies designed to help them survive psychically as well as pragmatically in a world where they had few opportunities, especially as they grew older and lost the husbands or other connections that had provided them with support and status. Such mothers taught their daughters to locate deprivation outside the home, to perceive female neighbors as, in effect, split-off "bad mothers" who denied them the food and nurture they were entitled to. At the same time, witches passed on to their daughters an alternative maternal identity, the witch's role, with its own powers and compensations.

The witch's care and feeding of her familiars might provide her with at least the illusion of control over a world in which she was largely powerless; moreover, they gave her a sense of companionship, a surrogate family. Women who confessed to the crime of witchcraft dwelled in detail on their maternal care of their imps, and they described conversations with them. Thus Alice Manfield, who had four imps serving her (Robin, Jack, William, and Puppet alias Momet), confessed to hearing from them what might be thought of as gossip about the activities of other witches; she also described their polite requests to make trouble for her neighbors.

This examinee saith, that litte before Michaelmas last, her said four imps said unto her, "I pray you, Dame, give us leave to go unto Little Clacton to Sellis," saying, they would burn barns and also kill cattle; and she saith, that after their return they told her that Sellis his wife [that is, Cicely Celles] knew of it, and that all they four were fed at Sellis' house by her all the time they were away from this examinee, which she saith was about a sevennight; and that Puppet sucked upon this examinee's left shoulder at their return unto her, and the rest had beer.⁹³

Witches shared their imps with other witches and cared for them, just as women linked in village networks helped one another and cared for one another's children; upon their imps' return, touchingly, they welcomed

92. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 116, 75.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

them with blood and beer. Imps at times even became the witch's advocates. Thus Elizabeth Bennett, though at first harried by her spirits into adopting them against her will, found that one of them had acted on her behalf without her instructions. After she fell out with William Byatt and his wife, she asked her spirit Lierd to kill their livestock, but her other spirit, Suckin, took it upon himself to "plague" Byatt's wife to death. "I know that Byatt and his wife have wronged thee greatly," he told his mistress, "and done thee several hurts, and beaten thy swine and thrust a pitchfork in one of them." Bennett was skeptical of his motives, however, and told the examiner he was merely attempting "to win credit."⁹⁴ Bennett's reluctance to accept her spirits' assistance may have been a sign of her own ambivalence about her vengeful wishes, or it may have been designed to win sympathy from the authorities. But witches less conflicted about their craft may have considered their spirits consoling allies, who in exchange for a mother's care returned loyalty and gratitude as well as a means to "get even" with hostile neighbors.

Such descriptions appear in many statements taken in different times and places; they suggest, if not a shared set of practices, at least a shared fantasy life, in which marginalized women dreamed of an "oppositional" female network paralleling those of the female villagers who had come to exclude them.⁹⁵ Like infants, supernatural spirits were above all hungry—hungry for food, attention, and care. A witch could feel as needed by them as any neighbor was by her human child. Indeed, it is striking how much the witch had in common with her female accuser. Both got angry and sought vengeance when they felt wronged. Both shared many assumptions about maternal identity and a fantasy of maternal omnipotence. Whether these women were "blaming the mother" or exploiting her powers, witchcraft beliefs allowed escape from a patriarchal symbolic that located deficiency in the female. The witch gained magical power through her powers of maternal nurture. The mother of merely human children could use a variety of antiwitchcraft techniques as well as the legal process to reclaim a magic of her own by defeating the witch.

But what of the sons who were subject to bewitchment and could also become accusers of the village witch? If I am right to believe that a majority of quarrels leading to witchcraft accusations took place between

94. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 124.

95. This discussion of female networks is mainly inferred from the witchcraft documents themselves—with help from accounts of village-level relations between neighbors cited earlier. See also Quaife, *Godly Zeal*, p. 108.

women, it is nevertheless true that many men also quarreled with old women and displayed anxieties and symptoms similar to those of their female counterparts. In many village-level cases, the intrapsychic dimension of bewitchment does not appear to have been markedly gender-differentiated, and fear of the witch's retaliatory anger seems to have been capable of producing persecutory anxiety or hysterical symptoms in a man as well as in a woman. Though Klein stresses that persecutory fantasies about the proedipal mother lead to a "primary female anxiety situation," she believes such fantasies also create problems for males.⁹⁶ Klein (in contrast to Freud) postulates an early "femininity" phase for boys, whose earliest sense of self is modeled on the mother, and she maintains that they display a strong envy of the maternal body. As the son shifts to identifying more strongly with his father, his earlier identifications with the mother tend to be absorbed and obscured; afterward, persecutory anxieties are more likely to be linked to a father-figure or to a male-female pair (such as the witch-devil partnership I discuss in later chapters). But many variations are possible; ultimately there is no hard and fast line between "male" and "female" fantasies or developmental histories. It may also be that in agricultural communities (where women's labor is more obviously central to survival and where male and female work spaces often overlap), less emphasis is placed upon the son's identification with the patriarchal father.

At the village level, in other words, the son's story about the witch could closely resemble the daughter's; a refusal to nurture or aid an older female neighbor, unconsciously experienced as an attack on the mother, could make a man or his household a target of her retaliatory magic. We may, however, note a few differences. Though both men and women had investments in their own health and that of their children, men, because they performed different tasks in a village economy, in some cases blamed the witch for different types of misfortune than women did—for example, the sickness of cattle or other livestock, often tended by men.⁹⁷ A more significant difference is that when a witch quarreled with men she may in-

96. See *The Selected Melanie Klein*, pp. 50, 69–83; Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary*, pp. 84–93. See note 40 for some examples of possible male hysteria. Others include an osier, victim of Mother Stile, in Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 89, and the son of a vicar, victim of Margaret Simons, in Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, p. 154.

97. It may be that fear of a witch's retaliation was especially likely to be felt by men whose occupational identities had a quasi-maternal aspect; as caretakers of cattle, horses, or sheep, male accusers had a certain resemblance to mothers taking care of children.

deed have been challenging gender hierarchy in some sense. Elizabeth Francis, for example, confessed to using her witchcraft against a man who refused to marry her after having sex with her. She married another man and then caused his lameness when it turned out "they lived not so quietly as she desired, being stirred, as she said, to much unquietness, and moved to swearing and cursing."⁹⁸ Even when a quarrel involved more "typical" violations of neighborliness, a new element could be introduced when a man was the target of the witch's anger. The witch might not only arouse retaliatory fears about an injury to the maternal body, she might also challenge the man's right as husband or master to control that body. When the milk wouldn't come or the butter wouldn't churn, when wives or children or milkmaids fell sick, an occult maternal malevolence was undermining his control over those aspects of his household most closely associated with the maternal function. A witch's attack on another woman, moreover, was also an attack on the husband (or father) whose "property" she was. For men so affected, the witch was not only a malev-

98. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 74–75. This case has other features that suggest Elizabeth Francis's transgression of gender norms and gender hierarchy; she appears to have been the initiator of the relationship with Andrew, the man she first desired, she induced an abortion when she became illegitimately pregnant, she had sex with the man she married before they were married and got pregnant; she killed this child when it was one and a half. In this case, there are certainly grounds for seeing the witch as an embodiment of "proto-feminist" resistance to patriarchal control. The case also has a few problematic features, however. While asserting her right to control her body and choose her own sexual partners, she killed her child for causing them to live "not so quietly as she desired" or perhaps (Medea-like) to get back at her husband. It is difficult to tell whether her husband abused her or whether they abused each other. Finally, despite her confession of causing the death of her ex-lover, her fetus, and her child, she was not convicted for any of these crimes, but was imprisoned for one year for causing the illness of a neighbor's child. That was not the end of her story, however. Six years later she was again given a one-year sentence for bewitching a female neighbor; and she may be the same Elizabeth Francis who was convicted and hanged in 1579 for causing the death of Alice Poole. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, pp. 145, 150; Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 92–94.

Other cases with proto-feminist potential include that of Mother Waterhouse, who appears in the same pamphlet as Elizabeth Francis at the time of her first arrest. She also confessed to bewitching her husband to death but was executed for the death of a neighbor. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 76–82; Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, p. 145. Ellen Smith quarreled with her stepfather, John Chandler, over an inheritance from her mother. Rosen, p. 94; Ewen, p. 150. Elizabeth Bennet's possibly "romantic friendship" with William Bonner's wife enraged the husband. Rosen, pp. 120–21. Nevertheless, such cases were exceptional, I believe. It is not surprising, though, that conflicts about the limits of women's rights in a patriarchal culture would sometimes provide the basis of a witchcraft quarrel, especially when the quarrel was between a man and a woman.

olent mother but also a disorderly woman who threatened patriarchal control.

Because a woman was almost always the property of some man, was embedded in a network of patriarchal rights and privileges, to attack another woman was inevitably to attack her husband or father or master. Quarrels between women extended to the men who had rights in those women. Similarly, quarrels between neighbors—relative equals of lowly social status—affected the masters or authorities who were responsible for them. “Masters” became concerned when witchcraft seemed to be causing disturbances among their servants just as they did when their immediate families were affected. Just as husbands came forward on behalf of wives, masters came forward to give information about bewitched servants. They had a stake in seeing the witch subdued, for bewitchment might cause a work slowdown, so to speak, or compromise a master’s reputation for godliness or keeping good order.

In the chapters that follow, I explore what happened when “masters” were affected by or intervened in witchcraft quarrels, when, in short, the village-level witch was rewritten by male elites, producing a strikingly different sort of discourse. To a large extent in this discourse the witch is stripped of her powers as malevolent mother and featured more prominently as a transgressor of state, religious, and gender hierarchies. Here, however, in the village-level quarrels between women which made up half to two-thirds of witchcraft cases in this period, witch and accuser tended to meet as relative social equals, each insisting on an aspect of neighborliness which the other denied: the witch’s rudeness and failure to reciprocate confronted the accuser’s less than satisfactory charity; what one perceived as “getting even” the other saw as excess. Both were felt to fail each other as nurturing neighbors—in a sense, as mothers. Given the similarities between witch and accuser, it is not surprising that in some cases we find a good deal of slippage between the two roles: witches accuse other witches, accusers are accused. These anger-driven quarrels took place in a world that lacked a satisfactory solution to the problems of aging, dependent women and, more broadly, to the problems of the poor in general. One woman’s “right” to charity clashed with another woman’s “right” to limit giving. The women who turned to a “real” witchcraft invented their own solution, becoming victims who enacted (or at least intended) further victimization, holding an individual neighbor responsible for a collective problem, sometimes, perhaps, taking out their frustrations on the very neighbors who had given most in the past.

For the feminist critic rereading the witch-hunts in search of exemplary instances of female resistance, neither the position of witch nor that of accuser, it seems to me, should be uncritically endorsed. Their clashes called out for a rethinking of neighborliness and women’s identities which their culture could not deliver at that time. But in the end it can hardly help but appear to those of us who lack a theory of magical causation that ultimately the accuser was the agent of excess. For a few words mumbled in anger, she did her best to send her difficult neighbor to a cold imprisonment, a cruel and untimely death.