Werewolves, Witches, and Wandering Spirits
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WEREWOLVES, WITCHES, AND WANDERING SPIRITS
Traditional Belief & Folklore in Early Modern Europe

Edited by KATHRYN A. EDWARDS
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INTRODUCTION

Expanding the Analysis of Traditional Belief

Kathryn A. Edwards

INCORPORATING THE ANOMALOUS

When Huguette Roy was visited by a ghost for two months in 1628, the event was believed to be so extraordinary that a local clergyman left a detailed chronicle of the haunting. A mixture of Counter-Reformation piety, demonological theory, and folkloric assumptions guided his “history,” which he wrote from his own observation of the event as well as from information provided by the myriad lay and ecclesiastical observers, by the haunted woman, and by the spirit itself. Unlike many similar visionaries, however, Huguette was never tried for witchcraft nor was she put through detailed and dramatic exorcisms, events that engender the documents by which such cases are most commonly known. For this reason, the vast synthetic literature on early modern witchcraft can seem tangential to understanding Huguette’s haunting. A central problem for research on stories like Huguette’s thus becomes where to find information about similar cases in early modern Europe.¹

This problem does not arise because of a lack of early modern reports about visions, spirits, and other “supernatural” or “paranormal” phenomena, to use perhaps anachronistic modern terminology. Embedded in the records of Inquisitorial and other courts, as well as in diverse other sources, are records about mysterious ladies in white, werewolves, poltergeists, and other less classifiable occurrences.² Millennial prophets see visions, and souls stride purposefully through castles. Integrating folkloric and theological elements in

². See the discussion of these beliefs in Jean-Claude Schmitt, Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
early modern spirituality, such beliefs persist and even develop in post-Reformation Europe despite attempts by religious authorities from every confession to "discipline" the minds and bodies of believers. Analyses of these cases contribute to the discussions raised about traditional religion and social discipline in early modern Europe, although their focus may seem to be on peripheral aspects. In this sense, each of the articles in this collection contributes to this expansion and deepening of studies on traditional belief by developing aspects of it that are less frequently studied in more synthetic monographs.

The relationship between traditional belief and social discipline is just one of the themes that has been developed recently in social and cultural analyses of early modern Europe. Over the last several decades religious history has gradually grown to include reinterpretations of popular practices and perceptions—such as pilgrimage, miracles, sacramentals, and the cult of the Virgin—alongside more traditional works that examine theology and institutions. Many of the articles in this collection provide a brief survey of these developments as they pertain to the article’s topic. Building on historical anthropology and the insights and methods of pioneering monographs, scholars working in these areas have vastly broadened the ways that early modern belief and spirituality are now approached. To provide just one example, the centrality of religious ritual and the enduring nature of ritual practice have been convincingly argued during the 1990s by Susan Karant-Nunn, Edward Muir, and Eamon Duffy, among others; their conclusions question the scope and chronology of the Reformation’s spread and its claims to success.

By its emphasis on traditional belief, such work is inherently folkloric even when its methodology may differ from that practiced by folklorists, thus the


second half of this book’s title. Essential to modern studies of traditional religion in early modern Europe are questions of transmission and interpretation. Rather than being passive recipients of a falsely dichotomous learned culture, the “people”—an admittedly broad and problematic term—have been repeatedly shown to be active creators of meaning. While their creations could vary enormously depending on culture, gender, class, and individual quirks, to name but a few qualifiers, certain concerns, perspectives, and frameworks have been found to recur in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. The Eucharist retains an almost magical power, whether it be transubstantiated, consubstantiated, or symbolic; supernatural or preternatural forces abound in this world, although they can take dozens of forms including those of demons, angels, trolls, wandering souls, or flying serpents. Although such beliefs may be interpreted differently, they remain a pervasive part of early modern culture for the literate, illiterate, and the larger community in between. Moreover, not all of these beliefs were as inherently threatening as witchcraft, whether it be viewed as the practice of *maleficia* or as a diabolical conspiracy. For this reason, as well as many others dependent on the individual instance itself, such folkloric religious beliefs, their perpetuation, and the reactions to them provide valuable nuances to interpretations of early modern sensibilities.

It is inescapable that in the last two decades one of the most intensely studied aspects of folklore and traditional belief in early modern Europe has been witchcraft, and the essays in this collection echo the concerns of those works to some extent. Witchcraft studies in particular have enjoyed increased scholarly interest since the 1980s, and a number of significant books have been recently published. Although these works have different emphases and cover varied geographical areas, they share certain characteristics. Among the

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most significant is the attempt to rehistoricize witchcraft and popular perceptions, a goal which has largely succeeded within the academic community but which remains far from achieved among the broader population. Of special interest to many of these scholars, and of particular relevance to this study, has been the social and psychological milieu in which such beliefs functioned and which allowed their perpetuation and even paranoid explosions. Through detailed reconstruction of individual cases, scholars have stressed the distinctive circumstances surrounding each witchcraft accusation and the need to understand these events within their local setting. Supported by research groups throughout Europe, the picture of the witch-hunts which has thus emerged is far more complex than that presented several decades ago. In particular, witch trials are perceived less as aberrations on the march to modernity and more as threads in the tapestry of early modern social relations and belief.

In the recent growth of witchcraft studies, two themes have dominated. The first approach examines the place of maleficia in witchcraft accusations and maleficia’s social and spiritual implications. The second focuses on demonological theories, especially those concerning conspiracy and domination, and notes the differences, at least in emphasis, between jurists seeped in demonological lore, witnesses, and the accused. One of the challenges facing either type of analysis is to provide some sort of synthesis out of the disparate beliefs and practices which could constitute witchcraft in early modern Europe among Protestants and Catholics, and among Christians and non-Christians. In the process, more unusual aspects of these cases and other such stories found in similar documentation—like helpful ghosts, cannibalistic lycanthropes, and rapturous visionaries—tend to be marginalized.

This collection is designed to provide an opportunity for the analysis and publication of such cases. Its contributors argue such matters as Heinrich Bullinger’s beliefs about the devil; El Encubierto’s interpretations of heaven on earth; or Jepthah Joseph Juspa’s descriptions of Jewish ritual magic that speak to fundamental concerns of Protestant reformers, participants in Las Germanías, and early modern Jews; but they do so following paths that are less familiar to modern scholars. Through the analyses of these themes and others which stress atypical and folkloric elements of traditional belief, this book contributes to the growing historiography on piety and popular culture in early modern Europe. Although there are unusual aspects to the stories and

7. Arbeitskreis Interdisziplinäre Hexenforschung (AKIH) in Germany is one, as is the Centre de recherche sur la littérature et les discours du savoir (LiDiSa) codirected by Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre.
INTRODUCTION

themes analyzed here, the concerns and occurrences developed in these articles were more common than they are frequently perceived to be. Finally, like other recent work, this collection aspires to motivate scholars and other readers to reexamine the categories through which early modern beliefs and perspectives are commonly approached.

In the pursuit of these goals, a variety of perspectives and methodologies as well as different geographic regions are represented here. Given the number of witch-hunts in France, Switzerland, and the Holy Roman Empire during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the intensity with which scholars have studied the documentation about these trials, and the accidents of historical survival, most of the articles focus on these areas. Every attempt has been made, however, to incorporate studies about other parts of Europe and to show how similar themes are played out between confessions as well as in both Christian and non-Christian settings. Despite these differences, every contributor shares a concern with the development, internalization, and articulation of popular belief in early modern Europe. Many have worked extensively with inquisitorial and other trial records, and most have been engaged in debates over the extent and significance of the early modern witch prosecutions, particularly the need to move such work from the margins of social and intellectual history.

OVERARCHING THEMES

The articles in this collection repeatedly stress how apparently unusual themes and stories shed light on broader concerns in the history of early modern Europe in addition to the value that they have in their own right. For this reason, rather than provide an abstract of each article, the remainder of this introduction will briefly survey these concerns and discuss their development in selected articles. This survey is far from synthetic; it is intended to highlight the themes that unite this collection and to suggest the ways such case studies and more synthetic treatments may complement each other. It is designed to provoke questions and even challenges.

Binaries in belief and practice have been one of interpretive frameworks commonly applied to social and cultural histories of medieval and early modern Europe. They have also been among the most contested.8 As philosophical, epistemological, and theological classificatory schema, the binaries developed

8. For examples of such debates, see Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey, Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 45; R. Howard Bloch, Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western
in ancient Greek and Roman thought were transmitted throughout Europe in various forms during the Middle Ages. The degree to which they interacted with binaries in Germanic thought—or even the existence and form of such binaries—is a matter for debate. Yet an emphasis on binary polarization is frequently treated as a particularly modern phenomenon, one which was more precisely and persistently articulated beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Reformation especially has been described as doing away with the “third world” of the medieval cosmos (that is, the realm of spiritually liminal figures) and stressing the supernatural as part of a binary opposition between divine and demonic forces, despite the equal insistence by contemporaries that Satan could only act with God’s permission.9 The articles by Robin Briggs, Bruce Gordon, and David Lederer argue that these binaries carried powerful resonances in early modern Europe. As presented by Gordon, Heinrich Bullinger and Jakob Ruef are disturbed by a devil who can threaten the ministry of God’s word in sixteenth-century Zurich, a demon who they fear may be a better pastor than they themselves. Lederer sees the treatment of and perceptions about ghosts in early modern Bavaria as part of a growing division between expressions of supernatural relations; for example, Bavaria’s noble elites favored a specific type of ghost. Briggs stresses that binaries shape eschatological and ontological perceptions at various levels in early modern Lorraine. Not only are the divine and ordinary worlds perceived as dichotomies, but the beliefs about shapeshifting and apparitions can be interpreted as reflecting “an object-related and narcissistic world-view” that gives tacit support to binaries.10

Despite these arguments in support of binary perceptions, all of the articles in this collection attempt to refine the practice of ideological exchange underlying binaries and argue for the hermeneutical circulation of ideas. Ideas are constantly in process; in the case of beliefs brought to trial, ideas move

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10. As cited by Robin Briggs, page 22 below.
from accuser to accused to the public through the reading of testimony, itself an action that occurs at various levels. The connections just described are among the simpler and more linear ones developed in these cases, as they omit the judges, differing attitudes held by participants, and the negotiations which occur during the entire process. More than the exchange of ideas between two poles, idea formation is a dialogue between the accused, the accusers, the jurists, the witness, and the audience. Depositions by the accused and witnesses form confessions which, in turn, form popular perceptions when recited at executions. Traditional belief in early modern Europe reflects both the syncretic and eclectic elements in Christian and, as developed by Dean Bell, Jewish religious beliefs and practices. Such questions become particularly intense in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe when, during the Reformations and the process of confessionalization, a series of beliefs and practices are “grafted” onto traditional roots, to use a term borrowed here by Sarah Ferber, and attempts are made to prune these same roots. These elements can also be seen in modern psychoanalytical approaches to the early modern witch trials and to so-called folk beliefs more generally. Applying this hermeneutic more broadly, Erik Midelfort argues here that Freud should be seen as a modern demonologist and, as such, his practices reflect folk beliefs. In this sense, while perceptions may be phrased in binary terms, or even believed to be dichotomies, in practice the exchanges and conceptions in early modern Europe reflected a greater plurality and flexibility, a tendency shared by some more modern interpretations and interpreters.

A more concrete example should clarify the relationship between binaries and the circulation of ideas as developed in this book. While such circulations appear in all of this collection’s articles, they are fundamental to Dean Bell’s piece on Jewish magic and community in early modern Worms. Bell argues that magical practices and expressions are communal events and reflect communal values. Magic is thus as a collective creation, conceptualized and enacted by a society. For the Jews of early modern Worms, Bell stresses, the way magic was practiced and perceived mattered because it expressed Jewish identity in the distinctions that were drawn between Christian and Jewish magic. In this way the practitioner of magic, whether occult or utilitarian, is not automatically the Other, an outsider to the community that gains or enhances its sense of self through opposition to that outsider. Rather, in an interpretation reminiscent of Julia Kristeva’s perspectives on otherness,

Bell asserts that the Jewish magician of early modern Worms was both a part of that community and, to some extent, its creation.12

Carlo Ginzburg has analyzed the circulation and production of traditional religion in early modern Europe on an even broader communal scale, as a religion that reflects the continuation of a pre-Christian, Indo-European shamanistic belief system and its principles.13 While Ginzburg is probably the best-known recent example among English-speaking audiences, other works of history or historical anthropology with similar themes can be found in the citations of the articles gathered here. Studies on animism and animal transformation repeatedly note that beliefs about human transformation have existed, and continue to exist, in many cultures throughout the world.14 Attempts have been made to trace these attitudes to a common human perceptual framework and to the earliest known shamanistic practices. Given the important role of skins and unguents in affecting physical transformations, these themes have also been developed frequently in both shamanism and more archetypal werewolf trials. Werewolf beliefs in early modern Europe, as developed here by Briggs, Sarah Ferber, and Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre, become aspects of a human collectivity that transcends temporal, physical, and even conscious boundaries. The animals of early modern European witch trials thus become far less domesticated than the cats and frogs common to witch iconography.

In particular, werewolves and other animalistic transformations have allowed an oppositional perspective or behavior to be expressed in many cultures and at many times. The altered state permits the articulation of an individual's distinctiveness and simultaneously retains the connection to a greater collectivity. Although early modern demonologists such as Henri Boguet and Nicolas Rémy do not explicitly make such a connection, it is implied throughout their works.15 As developed here by Jacques-Lefèvre, the


13. See especially Ginzburg, Ecstasies.

14. Such works and their underlying ideologies have been thoroughly debated in a special issue of Current Anthropology 40 (1999) on “the culture concept,” where Nurit Bird-David’s article, “Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and the Relational Epistemology,” was at the center of the discussion, S1–S115.

WEREWOLVES, WITCHES, AND WANDERING SPIRITS

INTRODUCTION

Werewolves, in particular, symbolize instability and mutability, and the werewolf’s continued humanity only heightens this symbolism. Werewolves act contrary to what is human. Moreover, they act contrary to what is expected from their domestic counterparts. The dog—loyal, useful, productive—is portrayed as the mortal enemy of its opposite, the werewolf. As both human and animal—the one ideally communal and sociable, the other solitary and fierce—the werewolf embodies the tensions within humanity itself.16

The werewolf is just one example of the supernatural, preternatural, and at times unnatural presences which early modern Europeans believed shared their world and which appear in every article in this collection. Hostile presences, not only in animal form, are frequently located in the same places as these animals; in fact, popular and authoritative perceptions could link the appearance of spiritual visitors and were-animals physically and symbolically. Early modern Europe was populated with spiritual beings whose existence could not be understood through reference to, or who only marginally belonged to, either Protestant or Catholic doctrines but whose existence was certain. As such, the common belief in these entities reflects the perpetuation of the community between the living and the dead, so cogently developed by John Bossy for pre-Reformation Europe, into post-Reformation settings.

Despite Christian theology, which calls for the immediate removal of the soul from the earthly realm after death, popular belief perceived of the relationship between the living and the dead as far more complex. In this superenchanted world, ghosts and spirits, werewolves and witches, demons and dwarves all played a role. Humankind’s ability to understand and interact with such forces assumed salvific importance.

For these reasons, defining these presences, assigning them attributes, and classifying them in some way becomes both essential and almost impossible. Reformers like Bullinger and demonologists like Claude Prieur tended to blur distinct typologies in the spirit and supernatural world, such as ghosts and the souls of suicides. Given the fear that such phenomena could actually be demonic by-products or demons themselves, such ambiguity is

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understandable. While a demonic compulsion to deform God’s order was assumed in early modern thought, the means and methods demons preferred to use were less certain. Ferber explores such ambiguities through her analysis of death and possession. The possessed and their witnesses firmly believe in a holistic community of the living and the dead that includes various entities which circulate between both realms and, in so doing, almost seem to form a third. Although unalive in a human sense, the beings that exist in this third realm have vital force, which allows them to animate the body of those they possess. Repressed and, therefore, dead to some extent, the possessed soul then becomes a temporary member of the third realm and able to bridge all three. The possession is thus a type of divination; the possessed, a spiritualist. In the process, however, the possessed’s spiritual status is thrown into even greater doubt; as a potential receptacle for either the blessed or the damned, the possessed problematizes the connections between life and afterlife. The possessor could, after all, just as easily be a demon. In fact, its willingness to overturn the divinely ordained role of human souls suggests that it is most likely a demon.

To separate the self from the possessor and to distinguish between human and animal demands a certain degree of self-consciousness on both an individual and a communal level. Thus, the exploration of early modern means of constructing and articulating identities is a theme underlying many of the articles in this collection. In addition to the work previously mentioned, the articles by Sara Nalle and Anne Jacobson Schutte explore millennialism and witchcraft from the perspective of identity formation, subjectivity, and agency. Nalle stresses the folkloric roots of the messianic leader El Encubierto, developing the way that participants in Las Germanías saw him as reflecting their own folkloric expectations; while El Encubierto’s claims for himself were quite modest, those who revolted saw him as a physical manifestation of their aspirations and the essence of their revolt. El Encubierto himself is both the embodiment of and an aspect of their folkloric identity.

As analyzed by Schutte, Asmodea’s identity as a nun-witch particularly addresses the themes of subjectivity and agency that drive so many recent literary, sociological, and anthropological works. Asmodea is simultaneously

an individual, who is conscious of her distinctiveness, and a member of a community, who shares in the values and self-perceptions of the various societies which compose it. Through her self-fashioning as both a witch and a nun, Asmodea attempts to influence her own destiny and to craft her own identity, both social and personal. Witchcraft becomes a means to create herself as a subject and to form a world in which she can be the active and influential member that she may not have been otherwise. Asmodea’s inquisitors, however, were reluctant to accept her identity as a witch. Schutte suggests that their attitude should be recognized as repressive rather than enlightened or progressive, the most common interpretations of the decline in witch prosecutions. The inquisitors’ reluctance to prosecute Asmodea curbs her autonomy as effectively as if they believed that she was married to the devil.

In the cases of Asmodea, El Encubierto, and the others analyzed here, physicality is a recurring theme, not only in questions of bodily transformation but in the physical setting of a story, the sensible manifestations of spiritual activity, and the ways supernatural phenomena are appreciated and comprehended. Physicality is both the most obvious quality of God’s creation, nature, and the most ready tool which God’s greatest creation, humanity, has at its disposal. While human nature and physical nature may seem surprisingly mutable to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans, awareness and exploitation of this mutability implies some sense of a natural standard created and sustained by God. Lorraine Daston cogently summarizes the conditions and roles of natural standards and the nature of nature as they evolve in late medieval and early modern Europe:

From the thirteenth century on, when the boundaries between supernatural, preternatural, artificial, and unnatural were fixed with at least philosophical clarity in Christian Europe, there existed considerable variations both in local practices and in theological, medical, philosophical, and legal discourses about where to draw the line between the non-natural and the natural in any given case. But the ideal types nonetheless served as reference points in contexts ranging from grafting techniques among gardeners…to ecclesiastical procedures for canonizing saints… It was only in the sixteenth century that the reference points were themselves subjected to explicitly and massive revision, with ensuing transformations of norms and practices.18


The Invention of Literary Subjectivity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
The articles in this collection repeatedly examine such transformations of norms and the attempts to establish new or modified ones in their place. In the contribution by Jacques-Lefèvre on demonological theories about the formation and reality of werewolves, assumptions about nature play a central role. At issue were fundamental eschatological and ontological questions. What distinguished the nature of humans from that of the beasts? To what extent could God’s creations—nature and all its variety—be corrupted or mutate? If nature reflects God’s law and thus provides a standard through which humans might approach God, how could nature and possible perversions of it, such as werewolves, be understood? Finally, a concern of both theologians and practitioners of natural magic: To what extent did the form of a natural object reflect its substance?  

The answers to these questions focus on truth: what or who determines it; what standards exist for its proof; is there one truth or are there a multiplicity of truths? As the articles in this collection suggest, while the perception of and standards behind truth could vary enormously in early modern Europe, agreement on the source of all truth—God—remained constant. Yet these variations in perception and assessment suggest profound shifts in worldviews, shifts which may distinguish sixteenth-century Europeans from their eighteenth-century counterparts. Ulrike Krampl argues that the changes in terminology found in late-seventeenth-century and early-eighteenth-century Parisian witchcraft trials reflect fundamental epistemological changes, particularly in the methods by which truth was determined. For example, the transformation of sorciers (witches/magicians) into séducteurs highlights their political, social, and moral danger; they seduce those who are receptive to belief (the crédule) into politically subversive social equality. By uniting powerful lords and lowly commoners in the pursuit of magical benefits—moreover, by making those lords dependent on the commoners for magic—they undermine proper secular and spiritual government. Like the devil himself, they seduce and tempt. Like the devil himself, their goal must be to overthrow the gates of Heaven, or at least those of Versailles.

**METHODOLOGICAL DEBATES**

While the preceding section touches on questions of interpretation, the articles in this collection should also be read in light of the debates over the

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19. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, esp. chaps. 6–8, where he defines “natural magic” and its role in the development and definition of science in early modern Europe. See the development of such topics by demonologists in Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pt. 2, esp. chaps. 11 and 14.
appropriate methodologies to apply to historically based studies of traditional
belief and folklore. While several contributions suggest the integration of
mythology or Jungian archetypes, others challenge them. Psychological, psy-
choanalytical, even medical interpretations have been applied and reapplied
to all of the topics studied here by both contemporary observers and modern
analysts. To highlight this aspect of traditional belief and folklore, this collec-
tion ends with articles whose emphasis is explicitly on such interpretations in
sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century theology and demonology and in
early-twentieth-century psychoanalysis.

Traditionally many of the events and ideas examined here would have
been classified as some form of witchcraft, when they were even classifiable at
all. As such, they were subject to the dichotomy between medieval and mod-
ern perspectives that still mistakenly exists in some studies about witchcraft.
Like witchcraft, these beliefs and practices were not the products of a deluded,
deprived Middle Ages. Jacques-Lefèvre notes repeatedly that the belief in
witches, and in her particular study werewolves, has most commonly and
mistakenly been attributed to the Middle Ages and to peasants, but that the
beliefs were in fact developed most thoroughly and explicitly during the
Renaissance by intellectuals. Belief in witches, ghosts, and other supernatu-
ral or preternatural forces persisted in Europe at all social levels well into the
eighteenth century. In seventeenth-century Bavaria appearances of ghosts
that took conventional and unconventional forms were on the rise, and in
eighteenth-century Paris a series of trials of “false witches” occurred during
the beginning of the so-called Enlightenment, after the time when trials and
penalties for witchcraft are perceived as being on the decline and some courts
even declared that witches did not exist.20 Despite modern rationalism, such
beliefs remain strong in the early twenty-first century.

Yet the characteristics of these witches, practitioners’ magic, and super-
natural manifestations appear to be changing. In the case of the Parisian tri-
als, Krampl notes that the accused were not witches in the older, traditional
sense of practitioners of maleficia; they were people who performed or prom-
ised services for others by using occult methods. While the functional aspects
of magical practices, apparitions, and witches had been part of sixteenth- and

20. The problems with seeing belief in witchcraft and magic as essentially premodern and, there-
fore by implication, unenlightened have been developed well by Richard Porter, “Witchcraft and
Magic in Enlightenment, Romantic, and Liberal Thought,” in The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century,
ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, Witchcraft and Magic in Europe series (Philadelphia: University
early-seventeenth-century traditional belief, it seems that functionality was
developing into their dominant, or at least most valuable, characteristic.
Ghosts become primarily treasure hunters and emissaries of justice. Magi-
cians assure love and promotion at court. Supernatural transactions are
described in mercantile terms. Such shifts complicate questions of truth and
belief. Why do people in early modern Europe believe in such manifesta-
tions or perpetuate magical practices? The reasons for such support become as
diverse as the reasons human beings have for seeking assistance from any
power perceived to be superior.

That social and intellectual elites continued to support such beliefs and
practices into the eighteenth century continued to trouble authorities on a
variety of levels. Both Catholic and Protestant reformers attempted to impose
a more rigid and structured social and political order during the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries, the process known by historians as social disci-
pline. Contemporaries saw many of the cases presented here as highly politi-
cized and, in some cases, felt the need to impose order on the apparently less
ordered supernatural realm. Lederer argues that such a politicization occurred
in the understanding of ghosts and the treatment of mediums in sixteenth-
and seventeenth-century Bavaria, while, for Ferber, the transformation of the
cult of the dead in light of political and religious debates was also reflected in
attitudes towards and treatments of possession. Possession thus represents
power from beyond the grave. Bullinger combats Satan’s pastoral strengths,
while lycanthropes are condemned by seventeenth-century demonologists for
contributing to a degenerate political and religious system. People at all levels
participate in this politicization, including the followers of El Encubierto dur-
ing Las Germanías in early-sixteenth-century Spain.

Early modern interpretations of such phenomena also emphasized their
physiological and psychological roots, particularly in relation to melancholy.
Building on Galenic principles, early modern medical theory developed an
elaborate physiological and psychological taxonomy. Human psychology was
believed to be based on a balance of four humors, each of which reflected
and enhanced an aspect of the human personality. According to this theory,
an excess of black bile caused melancholy. Those who believed themselves to
be demons or werewolves were perceived to be excessively melancholic and
psychologically unbalanced. Demonologists such as Johannes Weyer, a med-
ical doctor, developed this diagnosis to challenge the very foundations of
witch trials, arguing that those who believed themselves to be witches or
werewolves were actually delusional and, therefore, more in need of pity and
assistance than punishment and purgation. Figures like Henri Boguet and
Claude Prieur were, however, more representative of the era. They believed witches did exist in fact but considered witches and others who believed they had unorthodox spiritual and magical connections to be deluded and melancholic. In this area, Renaissance theorists built on classical models. One frequently cited source in such discussions was Aetius’s *On Melancholy*, written in the late fifth century. There he describes a disease called lycanthropia or “wolves fury” that incorporates many of the characteristics associated with werewolfism in early modern Europe albeit without the actual, physical transformation; the afflicted disturbs graves, eats bones, suffers from thirst, has a hollow, haggard appearance, and even howls.21

Some modern interpreters of phenomena such as lycanthropy have continued to apply medical diagnoses. Lycanthropy is linked to porphyria, a rare congenital disorder that is characterized by extreme light sensitivity, clay-colored teeth, and “ulcers which destroy cartilage and bone, cause the deformation of the nose, ears, and fingers. Mental aberrations, such as hysteria, manidepressive psychosis, and delirium” may also accompany porphyria. With such symptoms, connections can be made between werewolf and vampire cases.22 Following similar methods, witches are seen as experiencing ergot-induced hallucinations, from moldy rye or an overdose of magic mushrooms.23

Despite the persistent application of medical analysis to the study of witchcraft and other early modern beliefs, the most frequently used modern approach is that of psychoanalysis. Briggs introduces this collection by examining psychological constructs behind witch beliefs in early modern Lorraine. He does not claim that these beliefs were particularly unique; in fact, there were stock characteristics in the language of witchcraft. Yet these characteristics point to broader, psychological themes, particularly the libidinous aspects of transformations and the repetition of “classic narcissistic delusions.”24

In this collection’s final article, Midelfort returns to the role of psychoanalysis in studies of such phenomena. He stresses the complexities and ambiguities in modern analyses of demonism and questions the dispassionate

role of psychoanalysis in such interpretations. Midelfort points to the influence of demonism on psychoanalytical theory and challenges any presentation of psychoanalysis, and thus psychohistory, as unitary. He stresses the wide variety of psychoanalytical theories, but rather than summarize the ways that psychoanalysis can be applied to the study of witchcraft and other aspects of traditional belief, Midelfort reverses perspectives and asks how the late nineteenth-century understanding of witchcraft and demonology influenced the budding art and science of psychoanalysis. Here demons and possession impact Freud’s theories of hysteria and obsession, to name but two areas. In this sense, Midelfort argues, psychoanalysis and witchcraft have been linked since the origin of psychoanalysis.

Personality and perversion, standards and judgment, control and freedom are thus themes that bridge early modern and modern interpretations of witchcraft and traditional belief more generally. The contributors to this collection grapple with these themes. They animate early modern peasants and theologians, werewolves and wandering spirits. Most of all, they do so with great diversity, a diversity which this collection has tried to capture.
CONTRIBUTORS

DEAN PHILLIP BELL is associate dean and associate professor of Jewish Studies at the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago. His recent publications include Sacred Communities: Jewish and Christian Identities in Fifteenth-Century Germany and “Martin Luther and the Jews: The Reformation, Nazi Germany, and Today,” in The Solomon Goldman Lectures. He is currently researching the confluence of memory, communal identity, and Jewish history in early modern Germany and on the history of anti-Semitism.

ROBIN BRIGGS is senior research fellow at All Souls’ College, Oxford University. His recent publications include Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft and Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tensions in Early Modern France. He is currently researching the witches of Lorraine.

KATHRYN A. EDWARDS is associate professor of history at the University of South Carolina. Her recent publications include Families and Frontiers: Re-Creating Communities and Boundaries in the Early Modern Burgundies; “Female Sociability, Physicality, and Authority in an Early Modern Haunting,” in Journal of Social History; and The History of the Apparition of a Spirit (forthcoming). She is currently researching problems of confessionization in frontier territories and the representation of the supernatural, such as ghosts and werewolves.

SARAH FERBER is lecturer in history at the University of Queensland. Her recent publications include “Charcot’s Demons: Retrospective Medicine and Historical Diagnosis in the Writings of the Salpêtrière School,” in Illness and Healing Alternatives in Western Europe; “Le Sabbath et son double,” in Le Sabbat des sorciers en Europe, XVe–XVIIIe siècle; and Demonic Possession and
Exorcism in Early Modern France (Routledge, forthcoming). She is currently researching belief in demons and exorcism in early modern France.

Bruce Gordon is lecturer in modern history and associate director of the Reformation Studies Institute at the University of Saint Andrews. He is the author of Clerical Discipline and the Rural Reformation: The Synod in Zurich 1532–1580 and The Swiss Reformation. Gordon has edited Protestant History and Identity, and, with Peter Marshall, The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe. He is currently working on Heinrich Bullinger.

Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre is professor of literature at the University of Picardy, Jules Verne (Amiens), and a member of the Centre de recherches sur le romanesque (section–Littérature de l’Université). She is the author of Le Théosophe et la sorcière, deux imaginaires du monde des signes: Études sur l’imaginaire saint-martinien et sur la démonologie, Les Sorciers du Carroi de Marlow: Un Procès de sorcellerie en Berry, and, with Sophie Houdard, Curiosité et Libido sciendi, de la Renaissance aux Lumières. She is currently working on the intersection between learned and pious discourse in literature, particularly the philosophical, literary, judicial, ethnological, and medical treatment of witchcraft.

Ulrike Kramp is lecturer at the University of Poitiers and University of Vienna and is finishing her dissertation, “Magic and Fraud in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” at the University of Vienna and Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. She has several recent articles including “Le trésor d’Arcueil: Les chercheurs de trésor parisiens entre magie et escroquerie au début du XVIIIe siècle,” in Croyances et superstitions dans l’Europe des Lumières, ed. Clothild Prunier. Her current research interests are on the intersection of magic, religion, and justice in Enlightenment France and Germany.

David Lederer is lecturer in history at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. He is the author of A Bavarian Beacon: Spiritual Physic and the Birth of the Asylum, 1495–1803 (forthcoming) and articles on witchcraft, penance, and exorcism. He is currently working on a history of suicide in the Holy Roman Empire, 1495–1806, under the auspices of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.
CONTRIBUTORS

H. C. Erik Midelfort is C. Julian Bishko professor of history at the University of Virginia. He is the author of Witch-Hunting in Southwestern Germany, 1562–1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations; Mad Princes of Renaissance Germany, and A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany, as well as numerous articles. He is currently working on a study of the exorcist-healer, Johann Joseph Gassner (1727–1779).

Sara T. Nalle is professor of history at William Paterson University of New Jersey. She is the author of “Mad for God”: Bartolomé Sánchez, the Secret Messiah of Cardenete; God in La Mancha: Religious Reform and the People of Cuenca, 1500–1650; and “Literacy and Culture in Early Modern Castile,” in Past and Present. Her current research is on family and memory; anticlericalism, especially in early modern Spain; and on the fears that surround the year 1524 in general.

Anne Jacobson Schutte is professor of history at the University of Virginia. She is the author of Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618–1750 and edited and translated Cecilia Ferrazzi: The Autobiography of an Aspiring Saint. She is currently investigating eighteenth-century monks, friars, and nuns who applied to the Congregation of the Council for release from their vows on the grounds that they had been forced to take them.
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