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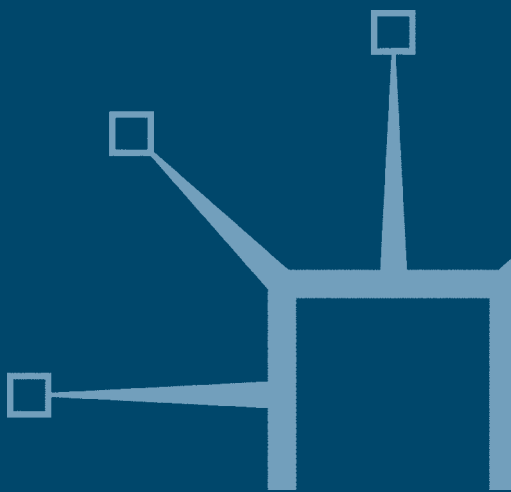
Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland

Edited by
Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin and
Joyce Miller



Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland

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Preface

This book had its gestation while work was in progress on the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, an online resource funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and carried out at the University of Edinburgh between 2001 and 2003 by Julian Goodare (director), Louise Yeoman (co-director), Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller (researchers). A day conference was held to mark the completion of the Witchcraft Survey in January 2003, organised by Dr Martin and Dr Miller and convened by Dr Yeoman, and with Helen Brown as conference administrator. Several of the papers in the present book were presented on that occasion.

The book has been planned to complement an earlier collection of essays, which also involved the Witchcraft Survey team among others: Julian Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002).

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Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller
February 2007

Series Foreword

The history of European witchcraft and magic continues to fascinate and challenge students and scholars. There is certainly no shortage of books on the subject. Several general surveys of the witch trials and numerous regional and micro studies have been published for an English-speaking readership. While the quality of publications on witchcraft has been high, some regions and topics have received less attention over the years. The aim of this series is to help illuminate these lesser known or little studied aspects of the history of witchcraft and magic. It will also encourage the development of a broader corpus of work in other related areas of magic and the supernatural, such as angels, devils, spirits, ghosts, folk healing and divination. To help further our understanding and interest in this wider history of beliefs and practices, the series will include research that looks beyond the usual focus on Western Europe and that also explores their relevance and influence from the medieval to the modern period.

Abbreviations

HP	*Highland Papers*, 4 vols. (ed.) J. R. N. Macphail (SHS, 1914–34).
NAS	National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh.
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*	L. Normand and G. Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI's* Demonology *and the North Berwick Witches* (Exeter, 2000).
Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*	*Criminal Trials in Scotland, 1488–1624*, 3 vols. (ed.) R. Pitcairn (Edinburgh, 1833).
PSAS	*Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*.
RPC	*Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 38 vols. (eds) J. H. Burton *et al.* (Edinburgh, 1877–).
SHR	*Scottish Historical Review*.
SHS	Scottish History Society.
SJC	*Selected Justiciary Cases, 1624–1650*, 3 vols. (eds) S. I. Gillon and J. I. Smith (Stair Society, 1954–74).
Spalding Misc.	*Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 5 vols. (1844–52).
SSW	J. Goodare, L. Martin, J. Miller and L. Yeoman, 'The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, 1563–1736' (www.shc.ed.ac.uk/witches/, archived Jan. 2003, updated Nov. 2003).

Contributors

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Edward J. Cowan is Professor of Scottish History at the University of Glasgow and Director of the University's Crichton Campus, Dumfries. His most recent books are *Scottish Fairy Belief: a History* (East Linton, 2002) (with Lizanne Henderson) and *For Freedom Alone: Scotland's Declaration of Independence* (East Linton, 2002). Recently he has edited *The Ballad in Scottish History* (East Linton, 2000), *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era* (East Linton, 2000) (with R. Andrew McDonald) and *Scottish History: the Power of the Past* (Edinburgh, 2002) (with Richard Finlay).

Owen Davies is a Reader in Social History at the University of Hertfordshire. His books include *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999), *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London, 2003) and *Murder, Magic, Madness: the Victorian Trials of Dove and the Wizard* (London, 2005). He has edited *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, 2004) (with Willem de Blécourt) and *Witchcraft Continued: Popular Magic in Modern Europe* (Manchester, 2004) (with Willem de Blécourt). He is co-editor of the Palgrave series 'Cultures of Magic'.

Julian Goodare is a Reader in Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh. He is author of *State and Society in Early Modern Scotland* (Oxford, 1999) and *The Government of Scotland, 1560–1625* (Oxford, 2004). He has edited *The Reign of James VI* (East Linton, 2000) (with Michael Lynch) and *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002). He is an Associate Editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and was Director of the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.

Lizanne Henderson is a Lecturer in History at the University of Glasgow Crichton Campus, Dumfries. She is author of *Scottish Fairy Belief: a History* (East Linton, 2002) (with Edward J. Cowan), and editor of *Fantastical Imaginations: the Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture* (East Linton, forthcoming). She is Editorial Assistant of *Folklore*. She has lectured on witch belief and popular culture in Canada, America and Australia.

Brian P. Levack is John Green Regents Professor of History, University of Texas at Austin. His most recent books are *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 5: *The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1998) (with Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter) and *The West: Encounters and Transformations*, 2 vols. (London, 2004) (with Edward Muir, Michael Maas and Meredith Veldman). His book *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (1987; 3rd edn, London, 2006) has been translated into eight languages. He has edited *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (London, 2004) and two multi-volume series of collected articles on witchcraft.

Lauren Martin completed her PhD thesis in Anthropology at New School University. Her thesis, entitled 'The Devil and the Domestic: Witchcraft, Women's Work and Marriage in Early Modern Scotland', blends methods and theories in anthropology and history. She was a designer and researcher of the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft at the University of Edinburgh. She is the author of several articles on the history of Scottish witchcraft and on anthropological methods. As head of research and development for a non-profit organisation that serves a high crime and poverty area of Minneapolis, Minnesota, her experience in the academy is applied to issues of social justice.

Joyce Miller completed her PhD thesis 'Cantrips and Carlins: Magic, Medicine and Society in the Presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling, 1603–1688' at the University of Stirling in 1999. She has written several popular books on Scottish history and magic and belief, including *Magic and Witchcraft in Scotland* (Musselburgh, 2004), and a number of articles on witchcraft and magical medicine. She was a research fellow with the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft at the University of Edinburgh and currently teaches a number of courses in Scottish History at the universities of Edinburgh and Stirling.

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the witches: the curtailment of witchcraft prosecutions in Scotland, 1597–1628', *Scottish Historical Review*, 82 (2003), 20–46. He is currently working on a book provisionally titled *Violence on Trial: Elite Violence and State-Building in Early Modern Scotland, 1573–1638*, which incorporates his doctoral and post-doctoral researches.

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Introduction

Julian Goodare and Joyce Miller

There have been many studies of witch-hunting, but the crucial issue behind the execution of thousands of people as witches is one of belief. Why did people in early modern Europe believe in witches? This is not the same question as asking why people hunted witches, since many people believed in witches but did not hunt them. Still, it was the witch-hunts, which in Scotland lasted from the middle of the sixteenth century to the early eighteenth, which made these beliefs historically important; they were a matter of life or death. Witch-hunting also generated most of the evidence for witchcraft beliefs. But witchcraft has almost always had an important place in people's cosmology, helping them to organise their ideas about neighbourliness and charity, good and evil, and indeed God and the Devil. Hence the idea for this book.

People 'believed' – in what? In God and the Devil; in angels; if they were Catholic, in saints and the Virgin Mary; in fairies; and of course in witches. These are fields which we, today, assign to the realm of 'belief' in the sense that they are beyond scientific proof. But in the early modern period, 'beliefs' could range more widely. We can also say that people 'believed' that south-running water had curative properties, that field strips should be divided among the farming community in a 'sunwise' (clockwise) pattern, or that gifts should be given at New Year. The first of these 'beliefs' would today be assigned to the realm of science – it is testable empirically; the second and third would belong to cultural convention or even fashion.

'Belief' is thus a problematic term. One problem is that it appears to be about people's inner thoughts, which are not themselves directly accessible; we have only their words, written or spoken, which we must use as indirect evidence for their thoughts. Another problem is that the

word may be value-laden. Today, 'knowledge' is something we approve of; 'superstition' is something we disapprove of; 'belief' tends to lie somewhere in between. Early modern folk, by contrast, mainly used the term 'belief' in the Christian sense, to refer to aspects of their religious system that were so important as to be beyond knowledge. God was held ultimately to be unknowable by mere humans, so that 'belief' was the best that they could manage. Unlike God, witches were perfectly knowable, but if we wrote of people's 'knowledge' of witches, we would appear to endorse their ideas. Perhaps we should write about people's 'ideas', 'thoughts', 'modes of thought' or even 'modes of reasoning'. These terms, however, might be cumbersome and hard to use accurately, and the term 'belief' has become conventional. We hope that its use in the following pages will be accepted once these caveats are acknowledged.

Witchcraft beliefs were about witchcraft, but those who have studied them have generally assumed that they have a wider relevance: only a particular kind of society could have held such beliefs. Such an assumption must take into account the monumental work of Stuart Clark, who has argued for the essential autonomy of witchcraft belief. Clark's arguments are drawn directly from the thought of an intellectual elite, but are also applicable in principle to other strata of 'belief'. To the extent that he is saying that witchcraft beliefs should not be made into surrogates for 'some set of circumstances (social, political, economic, biological, psychic, or whatever) that was objectively real in itself but gave rise to objectively false beliefs', then he has our support.[1] As historians it is our job simply to explain the beliefs of the past; we do not have to endorse these beliefs, nor do we have to denounce them. Nor would we wish to explain them away as being 'really' about something else – misogyny, for example, or state formation.

Still, what emerges in the following pages is not a sharply-defined picture of witchcraft as a single entity, detached from everything else. Witchcraft beliefs were articulated in a broader system of thought and action, and 'witchcraft' itself is hard to see as a single entity anyway. Owen Davies's chapter below ranges from treasure seeking and the staunching of bleeding to learned speculation about the reading habits of the fairies. Edward J. Cowan's chapter takes in the jew's harp used for a witches' dance, charms used in midwifery, and visits to a standing stone. Julian Goodare's chapter discusses spirit-voyages to another world. All these were 'witchcraft', at least in a broad sense, making it a singularly diverse and indeed almost omnipresent phenomenon.

I

This book is about witchcraft and belief at all levels of Scottish society, from the learned elite to the common folk. One of the many achievements of Christina Larner, the greatest scholar of Scottish witchcraft, was to draw attention to the issues connected with studying the beliefs of a pre-industrial European society – neither a 'primitive' society in which it was assumed that everyone would share traditional, magical beliefs, nor a 'modern' society in which it was assumed that everyone would share rational, scientific beliefs. Pre-industrial Scotland, Larner pointed out, was a 'middle-range' society, with elements of both. She went on to observe that even the beliefs of allegedly 'modern' societies were far from entirely rational or scientific, partly because not everyone in them was all that well educated, and partly because many areas of life were not amenable to scientific treatment. This might have allowed her to regard pre-industrial Scotland as similar to modern society, but she instead argued that it should be treated as an 'alien belief system'. The point was that the partial continuities of belief between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries tended to distort people's understanding. The seventeenth-century idea of a trinitarian God seemed reasonable because it had survived into the twentieth century, but this made the seventeenth-century idea of witchcraft, which had failed to survive, seem more 'exotic' than it really was.[2] Whether the beliefs discussed in this book are 'exotic' may be left for the reader to determine, but some of them will certainly seem quite unusual.

If early modern Scotland, then, was a 'middle-range' society, its different levels could be categorised in different ways. The basic distinction, made in many witchcraft studies, is that between elite and popular belief. As Peter Burke has shown, the elite were not detached from popular culture, but they had distinct beliefs and traditions to which the common folk had no access.[3] Within the elite there were subdivisions; we may wish to focus on the propertied elite or the intellectual elite. The two were not identical, and we should beware of assuming that elite women, in particular, were necessarily well educated (a point to which we shall return). Still, all these 'elites' moved in at least some of the same circles, and significant divergences of belief were unlikely to pass without comment.

Scotland seems to have had relatively little witchcraft in its courtly ceremonies. The 'triumph' of 1566 for the baptism of Prince James included three 'contrefait devillis' as part of a disparate group who

ritually assaulted Stirling Castle. Much of the imagery for the 1566 triumph was taken from the French festivals at Bayonne in 1565, but at Bayonne there was more magic. There, Elizabeth of Valois broke a charm by which the classical witch Circe had metamorphosed some knights and ladies into rocks and trees, and finally an enchanted castle, defended by demons, was successfully assaulted by Charles IX. At Stirling, by contrast, the royal castle was successfully *defended* against a motley band of attackers who included Moors and highland men as well as the 'devillis'.[4] The theme of divinely-ordained royal power as the only force able to overcome evil magic, which became increasingly common in European courtly festivals in the later sixteenth century, seems to have been even more strikingly absent from the festivals of James VI.[5]

One of the ways in which Stuart Clark has demonstrated the embeddedness of witchcraft in early modern society is by linking it to the divine right of kings. When 'political authority was thought to be theocratic', the crime of witchcraft 'assumed the terrible proportions of a threat to cosmological order'; in a constitutional regime, by contrast, it became 'little more than a particularly nasty felony'.[6] This is surely relevant to Scotland – a country which, for its size, may have contributed more to the divine right of kings than any other, but which became a constitutional regime after two seventeenth-century revolutions. Scotland's two most notable divine-right theorists, James VI and Sir George Mackenzie, are also noted for their interest in witch-hunting – though James was keen on it while Mackenzie was a sceptic.[7] It has been suggested that Mackenzie was able to articulate the divine legitimation of monarchy in practice by persecuting the covenanters who challenged the regime of Charles II, and so had no need also to hunt witches;[8] more work on this subject would be desirable.

Witchcraft beliefs were closely linked with religious beliefs, at least for the elite, and religious commitment varied. This is linked to the issue of intellectual life, since the most prominent and public Scottish intellectuals were ministers. A charismatic minister could have a remarkable effect on his congregation.[9] There were also distinct movements of committed Protestants, which in the complex political history of early modern Scotland sometimes found themselves in opposition to the government. A few regions had enclaves of surviving Catholics. However, witchcraft was not, on the whole, a weapon in religious controversy. This is in contrast to places like France, where cases of demonic possession were exploited by the Catholic authorities. Brian Levack's chapter below shows that the Scots had hardly any cases of demonic

possession until after the very late outbreak of Protestant possession at Salem.[10]

There seems to have been considerable elite interest in necromancy in sixteenth-century Scotland. Necromancy involved summoning of demons; it was a learned concept, distinct from witchcraft, though demonologists made use of what was known about necromancers and demons in conceptualising the demonic pact made by witches. An 'eldritch' comic poem from the early sixteenth century, 'Lord Fergus's Gaist', parodied necromancers' activities in erudite detail.[11] John Knox was repeatedly accused of necromancy by Catholic opponents, and responded by preaching frequently against it.[12] His concern may have influenced the Scottish Witchcraft Act of 1563, which condemned 'necromancie' as well as witchcraft.[13] Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie's racy chronicle, written in the 1570s, mentioned the subject twice, using the variant form 'igramancie'. At the royal tournament of the Black Lady in 1507–8, Andrew Forman, bishop of Moray, who 'was ane Igramanciar', arranged that 'thair come ane clwdd out of the rwffe of the hall as appeirit to men and opnit and cleikkit vp the blak lady in presence of thame all that scho was no more seine'.[14] This appears to have been a conjuring trick rather than operative magic, but indicates the conceptual range within which the topic was discussed. Darker and more serious was Pitscottie's comment on a contemporary scandal. John Kello, minister of Spott, executed for murdering his wife in 1570, allegedly 'confessit befoir his deid that the temtatioun of the deuill causit him to commit that filthie cryme he useand the airt of Igrimancie and siclyk he confessit that sindrie vthiris ministeris vsit that same'.[15] A more official account, responding defensively to such rumours, stated that Kello 'tooke God and his angels to witnesse that he never had anie ingresse in magick, nor was farther curious to understand, than God had manifested in His Word'.[16] Then there was the case of Richard Graham, a necromancer with a number of elite connections, caught up in the North Berwick witchcraft panic of 1590–1.[17] There is probably more work to be done on elite uses of magic.

The general arbiter of questions of belief was the church. The church's role in witch-hunting has still to be fully explored, but the general importance of ministers and their supporting committees, the kirk sessions, seems well established.[18] When it comes to witchcraft belief, however, things are less clear. Why did ministers write so much about other aspects of systematic theology, but so little about witchcraft? Witches, after all, entered a pact with the Devil, and this was surely a crucial part of the range of religious positions that it was possible to

adopt. Scotland's theology was Calvinist, focused on the distinction between the elect and the unregenerate, and one might have expected theologians to discuss whether making the demonic pact was an exercise in free will. The criminal courts and the general public regarded witches as personally responsible for their actions, but Calvinist theologians tended to minimise human free will (though not of course to abolish it) and to emphasise awe-inspiring divine justice. If theologians perceived a tension between the eternal decrees that predestined people to salvation or damnation, and the apparent voluntarism of the demonic pact, or if they wondered about related questions like whether a member of the elect could make a pact, they do not seem to have done so in print. This becomes even more surprising when the covenanting strand in Scottish theology is considered, emphasising the general or particular agreements that God made with his people.[19] The demonic pact could be considered as a covenant – but if it was, then theologians of covenanting did not usually say so.

Ministers were not just theologians. They had pastoral responsibilities and faced the challenge of theodicy – how to explain the essential goodness of divine providence in a world filled with evil and suffering. This sometimes entailed their preaching and writing against aspects of popular witchcraft belief, in order to persuade parishioners that their misfortunes might come, not from witches, but directly from God in order to punish their sins or (as with the story of Job) to test their faith.[20] Although we know less than we might of preaching and pastoral work in Scotland, there is little direct evidence of ministers expressing such concerns.

Further research may well clarify whether these apparent silences were real. In the meantime, we may draw attention to some exceptions – to a few occasions when ministers did discuss witchcraft in such ways. The first is James Anderson, minister of Collace, who wrote a long religious poem in *c.*1578–82 which included some lines classifying various types of ungodliness. He called on the Lord to 'purge' the land

> From Idolater and Hypocrite,
> From Athist, Papist and Jesuite,
> And from the usurs of Sathans sprite,
> By Witch-craft any way.[21]

This set out a wide range of positions that it was possible that the unregenerate could adopt. They could be 'papists' – Anderson was much concerned by the Catholic threat, and 'idolaters' and 'Jesuits' were also

Catholics. 'Hypocrites' were those outwardly professing Protestantism but without real commitment to it (presumably lacking divine grace). The 'Athist' position, including not only those who disbelieved in God but also those who accepted Christian theology only partially, was also indicated. And 'Witch-craft' was mentioned. What Anderson meant by the 'usurs of Sathans sprite' is unclear; 'usurs' might mean 'usurers' but is more likely to be a variant spelling of 'users', in which case his phrase probably meant 'users of demonic power'.

Anderson's writings come quite early in the story of Scottish witch-hunting. We next move forward a century, to a published sermon of 1679 by Archibald Riddell, the former minister of Kippen who had become a covenanting field preacher. He urged sinners to repent, even 'if thou had been a witch, and had made an actual portion with the devil, and would break the bargain now with the devil, and would make a new bargain with our King Christ'.[22] This set up an equivalence between the two 'bargains', and in passing also answered the question, sometimes raised by demonologists, of whether the demonic pact was irrevocable. Finally we have a book of 1702 by James Clark, minister of the Tron Kirk, Glasgow, which stated:

> They are undenyably reproveable, who, instead of covenanting with God, do covenant with Satan, we mean here, witches, those renegado witches, of which it is storied, that they enter into an express compact with the devil, formally renouncing their baptismal covenant, and all their claim to Christ, and from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, devote themselves to him: What ever truth there may be in this, or whatever way these enchanted miscreants take in this diabolical transaction, I know not, neither will I dispute, but sure I am, it is a sad truth, that they who excamb, or niffer Christ for the devil, make a black bargain.[23]

Here we have again an explicit parallel between divine and diabolical 'covenanting'. But Clark had become aware of the difficulties attached to traditional witchcraft belief and was not prepared to commit himself to it. His work provides an illustration of why two other ministers around this time felt impelled to publish tracts defending witchcraft belief.[24] Traditional demonological orthodoxy would later be upheld by James Erskine, Lord Grange, in his learned parliamentary speech against the repeal of the English and Scottish Witchcraft Acts in 1736 – only to be greeted by a 'Titter of Laughter' in the House of Commons.[25] The learned controversy over witchcraft belief is discussed in detail by

Michael Wasser in his chapter below, and the long timespan of the controversy underlines the importance of his statement that 'the discrediting of witch beliefs was a process, not an event, and took place over an extended period of time'.[26]

James Clark wrote his cautious remarks at the height of interest in demonic possession in Scotland, following the celebrated Paisley trials of 1697. Brian Levack sets Scottish demonic possession in a wide comparative context, from France and Geneva to Russia. He points out that the late seventeenth century, when Scotland produced a sudden flurry of possession cases, was a time when most such cases came from Calvinist countries. He also points to 'English dissenters, New England puritans, and Scottish presbyterians' as those keenest to defend belief in a spirit world at this time, thus making a further contribution to the emerging literature on the demonic dimension to intellectual life in these early years of the Scientific Revolution.[27]

More thoroughgoing scepticism about Scottish witchcraft, again accompanied by laughter, had already come from England. Richard Franck, an officer in Cromwell's army occupying Scotland in the 1650s, wrote an account of a fishing tour during which he visited a region alleged to be the haunt of witches. 'Now that witches inhabit near this Lough of Pitloil, I am of opinion, provided there be any. But whether there be or be not such mortal demons, I suspend my judgment.' He recounted an 'adventure' in which a local woman's dog attacked one of Franck's but was then set upon by another of his dogs, whereupon 'the hag … was heard to express unsavory words, very diabolical, with charms and threats; besides various antick gestures and postures, both with her head and body; that at present occasioned abundance of laughter' among Franck's companions.[28] 'Antick' meant grotesque, and it is clear that Franck neither feared her anger nor took her seriously as having real powers. He thought that witches were simply uncouth hags living in remote and uncivilised places.

II

Given the difficulty of pinning down and defining 'belief' in general, to attempt a working definition of popular witchcraft belief is even harder. Nevertheless, given that we have some indication of elite ideas from printed demonological and theological material, it is relevant that we consider the wider aspects of popular witchcraft belief as perpetuated by Scottish society, both elite and non-elite. As has been mentioned, Scottish society between 1563 and 1736 was a middle-

range society, neither primitive nor entirely modern. It should also be reiterated that so-called 'popular' beliefs and practices were not the sole preserve of the non-elite members of society; everyone, at all levels, shared many of them.

Popular beliefs were, and are, an amalgamation of traditions, customs and practices that have evolved over generations. To some extent, therefore, to understand popular witchcraft belief we need to look at popular witchcraft practice. What those accused of witchcraft claimed to do, and even practices carried out by the vast majority of the population, may help us uncover what people believed.[29] In many cases the practices, or rites, rituals and ceremonies, may have come before the belief, and demonstrated the importance of community over the individual.[30] Ceremonies were developed and defined as sacred and were important communal acts which were performed to ensure the survival of the group. Over time, these ceremonies and rites may have formed the basis for religious belief and as such were reorganised and recast to promote the orthodoxy of whichever religious organisation influenced society. In the case of Europe and Scotland this was Christianity. The fundamental motive for these beliefs and practices was an attempt to understand how things worked – or didn't in many cases.

Larner was sceptical about the relevance to witchcraft beliefs of the 'functionalist' theory that beliefs could be explained by their social function. However, she was discussing the application of the theory to witch prosecution rather than to its popular practice.[31] She dismissed the theory of community tension proposed by Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane as having had no influence on witch prosecution in Scotland because demonological motifs, rather than neighbourhood accusations, featured more in Scottish trials than in English ones.[32] While straightforward community tension may not have been the driving force behind witch prosecution in Scotland, it is clear from Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller's recent work that some of Larner's interpretation can be modified. Miller argues that although the Devil did feature in Scottish witch trials it was in a more complex manifestation than that proposed by demonologists, and Martin demonstrates a wide regional variation in intensity of witch prosecution, suggesting that local factors, which may have included some examples of community or family rivalries and tension, were just as important as international demonological theories.[33] Popular witchcraft belief and practice in Scotland appear to demonstrate a combination of demonological and functional influences.

In Scotland, the issue of regional variation comes up particularly with the Highlands, that large and distinctive Gaelic-speaking region

with its own culture and traditions that were often at odds with the values of the Lowland-based Scottish state. It has been conventional to say that there was little or no witchcraft prosecution in the Highlands, but Lizanne Henderson's pioneering chapter below demonstrates that this is not the whole story.[34] Highlanders prosecuted witches less, but certainly believed in them just as much. Highland beliefs were broadly similar to Lowland ones though with rather fewer demonic elements and rather more fairy elements. The issue of the diversity of the 'elite' comes up here; Henderson's chapter is largely about folk belief but several Highland chiefs participated in it, and even Martin Martin – a graduate and pioneer ethnographer who rubbed shoulders with Fellows of the Royal Society – accepted the idea of second sight.

It was the relative absence of the local church courts that gave rise to much of the apparent Highland distinctiveness concerning witchcraft. The religious authorities were worried by powers which were deemed not to derive from God, or were antagonistic to God. Popular witchcraft beliefs in early modern Scotland, as in most other areas in Europe, were more a reflection of everyday fears and anxieties than of any desire to participate in malevolent witchcraft or demonic power. Concerns over having enough food or being fit enough to work – or not – seem ordinary when compared to the weighty matters of good versus evil, God versus the Devil, debated by the elite. Many rituals simply aimed to maximise good fortune but were regarded as superstitious by the religious authorities. Thus the allocation of a piece of non-cultivated land to the 'Guidman' (the Devil), the sprinkling of special water on the ground prior to cultivation or the passing of livestock through the embers of a fire were all attempts to ensure an adequate food supply.[35] There was no guarantee of success; any benefits could be, and were, attributed to correct observance of certain rituals or practices but failure or bad luck could always be explained by the use of incorrect actions – or alternatively by someone practising malevolent witchcraft. The use of such everyday rituals did not indicate any deliberate desire to invoke evil or demons. On the contrary, the Guidman's Croft was a peace offering to prevent demonic power from spoiling the crops. Most popular practices demonstrated a belief in apotropaic or protective magic.

For much of the population, it seems likely that beliefs reflected a combination of Christian and pragmatic survival needs. Christianity did not have a monopoly on popular beliefs but, as the dominant force, could define what was sacred and acceptable, and what was profane and thus unacceptable. As Edward J. Cowan discusses in his chapter, prac-

tices that were not deemed acceptable were superstitious and profane, and any practice not controlled by the church was magical.[36] Religion was sacred and magic was profane, despite sharing many of the same origins. The rivalry between magic and religion was not straightforward; they were part of the same spectrum of belief. According to Keith Thomas, 'the distinction between magic and religion had been blurred'.[37] The sacerdotalism of the priest or minister offering spiritual relief for suffering overlapped with the 'religious' ceremonies and motifs that were incorporated into the practices of the charmers or healers, or indeed seen in the many rituals which did not require the presence of any special person. It is clear that society was, for the most part, able to reconcile participation in all forms of ritual. For many there was no dilemma of conscience in attending an official church service, even after the Reformation, yet at the same time collecting well water or south-running water to cure illness or protect their livestock.

As a counterpart to Cowan's emphasis on the attack on popular culture, Owen Davies's chapter on cunning-folk and charmers focuses more on the cultural role of these providers of early modern community services. He brings an explicit comparative perspective to his analysis, having worked on cunning-folk in England and France. His chapter argues that Scottish cunning-folk can be better understood by moving beyond the blanket term 'charmers' that has usually been applied to them, in order to identify their diverse nature. He also addresses such pressing but neglected questions as: To what extent were charmers and cunning-folk caught up in the witch trials? Where were their powers supposed to come from? How distinctive were the charms they used? This takes us a long way from witch-hunting but sheds light on a vital aspect of popular belief.[38]

Devil-worshipping witches were important, especially for the elite; a large majority of witchcraft trials in the central court of justiciary had demonic elements.[39] However, for many demonologists, beneficial or protective practices were more threatening simply because they were more popular. The beneficial or protective practices of witchcraft most interested the majority of society, and it was from these errors of 'superstition' that the demonologists wanted to save their congregations. These practices included many witchcraft motifs: prophecy or second sight, malefice or harming, healing or charming, the presence of the Devil or some manifestations of spirits. It is difficult to disentangle the many strands of belief and decide what was elite and what was popular, except that we can get an indication of what was regarded as witchcraft or popular magic through demonological exposition and

the condemning of certain practices.[40] Witchcraft was, as Clark points out, a 'set of cultural practices' rather than a fixed set of beliefs.[41] Perhaps we will never be able to identify precise epistemological principles behind European popular witchcraft beliefs. Or perhaps, given the criticisms of those who have previously attempted such a task, we may wish to avoid taking the risk.[42] Nevertheless we can see that the concept of 'superstition' was used to categorise as profane many everyday customs and habits. These profane acts were sometimes regarded as the result of ignorance or misunderstanding – a lack of the correct religious knowledge – the implication being that religion was the only valid set of beliefs. Yet for most, popular witchcraft belief was not a conscious attempt to follow a set of beliefs which rivalled religion, but merely a wish to continue participating in aspects of their cultural mores whether or not they fully believed in, or understood, them.

Demonic witchcraft and all its attendant demonic features, such as the demonic pact, can be identified relatively easily by historians. Its presence in confessions means that we can assess, to some extent, the influence of elite ideas about witchcraft. Or rather what we can measure is its importance to the prosecuting authorities. What it cannot tell us is how much these demonic motifs were an accurate reflection of popular beliefs about witchcraft or whether they appeared because those prosecuting wanted to find them. Unlike elite demonological ideas, popular ideas about witchcraft did not treat it as a straightforward antithesis to Christian belief. It seems to have had a complex and constantly shifting set of practices, and since our interpretation of it depends heavily on the opinions of its opponents it may continue to elude exact definition. Clearly there are demonic strands reflected in the material but Joyce Miller demonstrates that Devil figures both had various manifestations that were recognised by demonological theory, and also appeared in a number of other guises – angels, ghosts, domestic spirits – that reflected wider, popular cultural meanings of the demonic.[43]

Lauren Martin's chapter is also pertinent to the question of popular attitudes to the demonic. She analyses the peak years of Scottish witchcraft prosecution from the point of view of 'witch-accusing communities', thus offering 'a change in focus from witch-hunting and witch-hunters to the processes of witchcraft belief and experience'. She suggests that there has been too much emphasis on the 'conspiratorial, often elite-based, aspects of demonic witchcraft' and urges an examination of the 'more obvious and mundane aspects of witchcraft prosecution and belief that emerged in and through local community relationships'.[44]

Before we have this kind of evidence from witchcraft trials, some of the best evidence of how the Devil was understood comes from fiction. Priscilla Bawcutt has discussed 'elrich fantasyis' in Middle Scots poetry. The word 'elrich' or 'eldrich' emerged at the beginning of the sixteenth century to mean something like 'uncanny' or 'weird'. The poems involve interaction with an otherworld, whether this is heaven, hell or fairyland.[45] One such poem, 'Rowll's Cursing', probably written about 1500, gives a detailed portrait of some demons that is only partly humorous:

The forme of thir vgly devillis	
Thay hafe lang tailis on thair heilis	
and rumpillis hingand on thair tailis	[(part of a tail) hanging
Dragoun heidis & warwolf nalis	
Wt glowrane evne as glitterand glass	[glowering eyes; glittering
Wt bowgillis & hornis maid of brass	[bogles (i.e. ghosts)
And dyverss facis repleit wt yre	
spowand vemmin & sparkis of fyre	[spewing venom
And sum wt teith and tegir tungis	
attour thair chin wt bludy dungis	[besides; 'dungis' unclear
Spottit and sprinklit vp & doun	
Reid attry lyk a scorpioun	[venomous
And sum ar smeith & sum ar ruch	[smooth; rough
And sum ar lyk ane serpentis sluch	[skin
Wt prik mule eiris sum ar lyk	[pricked-up ears
Thair eiris neiss ar lyk ane midding tyk	[ears (and) nose; dunghill dog
Wt gaipand mowth richt yaip to swelly	[gaping; open; swallow
The mair the less devill in his belly	
Of thair fowle fegoris na man can tell	[figures
Thot thay wer sevin yeiris in hell …[46]	

The mention of werewolves is interesting since no accounts have been found of werewolves in Scotland. This shows an apparent internationalism that is also part of Julian Goodare's approach to Scottish beliefs. Perhaps the most significant point about the poem's demons is that they seem basically to be animals, with horns, tails and 'dragon heidis' – unlike the later devils described by Miller, who are much more often basically humanoid. Witch-hunting may have prompted significant shifts of belief. Once people's understanding of the Devil was organised around the demonic pact, this was easier to conceive like a human relationship, especially when (as was normal for female witches) the pact was consummated by sexual intercourse. A transitional Devil

occurs early in Scottish witch-hunting, in the memoirs of Sir James Melville, who helped to interrogate the North Berwick witches in 1591. He described the Devil preaching 'cled in a blak gown with a blak hat vpon his head', quite a human thing to do. However, Melville continued, 'he cam down out of the pulpit, and caused all the company to com and kiss his ers, quhilk they said was cauld lyk yce; his body was hard lyk yrn, as they thocht that handled him; his faice was terrible, his noise lyk the bek of ane egle, gret bournyng eyn; his handis and legis wer herry, with clawes vpon his handis and feit lyk the griffon, and spak with a how voice'.[47] Melville's Devil, apparently human but with numerous and prominent animal characteristics, points us towards the Continental Devil who often appeared to the witch as human but who then revealed a cloven hoof or other animal feature.[48] Miller has several such cases in Scotland, but one of the most notable findings of her research is the diversity of descriptions of the Devil.

In Scotland, Edward J. Cowan shows that witchcraft had been of concern from before the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. He takes a particular period – the 1590s – as a case-study of where the Reformation had got to by that date. Witch-hunting, for Cowan, is part of an attack on popular culture in order to promote godliness: 'in challenging witches, Kirk and State were tackling the culture of the subordinate classes of Scotland head on'. However, his primary concern is to document that culture, using the rich records of the prosecutions to uncover a quantity of fascinating folk-belief concerning a wide variety of occupations and social activities.[49]

Thus it was that popular customs such as visiting wells and lighting bonfires came to be regarded as 'idolatrie or superstitioun thairat expres againis Godis law', punishable ultimately by excommunication.[50] But it is also clear from kirk minutes that many people did not stop their customs immediately. It has generally been accepted that the Reformed Church's clampdown on festivities and popular customs had some measure of success, but many superstitious rituals continued well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[51] Of course, like witchcraft trial material, reports of superstitious practices and questioning of individuals under suspicion can never really indicate what people believed. We know that people went to wells to seek cures for ill-health. We know that people said they believed they got help from carrying out certain rituals such as passing a certain number of times around a well, washing themselves with the water, even drinking the water, and possibly leaving a thread or some other offering at the well.[52] But what we cannot know is what people understood to be

the principles behind these rituals: in other words how they really worked. We can never really know what or how people felt, let alone really believed. Thus people may have carried out popular witchcraft practices but we will never know how much they really believed in them.

We can, of course, argue that the very fact that people continued to use these customs indicates that there was something lacking in the official religion of the time. Perhaps the Calvinist form of Protestantism that was on offer in post-Reformation Scotland did not provide enough spiritual or physical comfort, particularly in the first decades after 1560. Fears about the causes of illness and misfortune were complex in early modern society and disease narratives were expressed by the sufferer and their families, rather than outsiders such as priests, ministers or even physicians. This meant that believing that misfortune was the result of demonic intervention through the actions of witches, or of dangerous spirits themselves, allowed society the means to counteract the harm done.[53] In Scotland, the Protestant kirk removed this aspect of religious worship, but the alternatives of prayer and personal contemplation were not entirely adequate.[54]

Popular magical or witchcraft beliefs continued despite the actions and words of the authorities both theological and judicial, from the late sixteenth century. The same is true at the end of the age of witchcraft: the eighteenth century. The opinions of the authorities changed as the fear of the reality of the practice declined amongst the elite. There were many reasons for the decriminalisation of witchcraft and Michael Wasser discusses the importance of changing scientific ideas, particularly those relating to the mechanical view of world.[55] However, it would seem that popular belief in witchcraft, which had survived its criminalisation, continued throughout the age of enlightenment and decriminalisation, and beyond. Cases of witchcraft were investigated throughout Scotland during the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, although since they were no longer regarded as criminal far fewer accusations were reported.[56] These cases display many of the same motifs seen in earlier material, such as the presence of the Devil, malefice, charming and prophecy, indicating that the fundamentals had not changed much. This implies the tenacity of popular culture and its ability to survive, and evolve, despite being attacked by the authorities.

So far we have generally approached the question of belief by separating it into 'elite belief' and 'popular belief', noting that these often overlapped or were complicated by regional or other divisions. One further refinement to the idea of these two levels of belief is that they

may not have been the only ones. Julian Goodare's chapter examines a number of key themes of European witch-belief, both among the elite and among the common folk, in order to place Scotland more precisely within each theme. Seen within the picture of European diversity, Scotland emerges as a fairly typical Protestant country, though of course it has its own regional distinctiveness. In the field of popular belief, the strong fairy elements in many witchcraft cases are noteworthy. Goodare compares Scottish fairies with other potentially malevolent non-human beings elsewhere in Europe. However, he pays particular attention to deep folkloric beliefs and structures, through which people entered into contact with other worlds and other beings; this can be seen as distinct from the more familiar system of neighbourhood witchcraft, involving quarrels and misfortune. Goodare even suggests that some witchcraft beliefs and practices were rooted in psychology rather than culture – part of the shared inheritance of humanity.[57]

III

Scotland has always been an important place for those studying witchcraft beliefs. Some of the most influential pioneering antiquaries in the early nineteenth century worked on Scottish beliefs: Sir Walter Scott, Sir John Graham Dalyell and Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe.[58] Moreover, the earliest interest in the subject of witchcraft focused on the discovery of popular belief, often regarded as exotic and archaic. In those days witch-hunting was a less interesting subject – it was distressing, but easily explained by the bigotry and ignorance of past times. What excited these early scholars of the Romantic era was the profusion of folk beliefs and customs which they found in the witchcraft literature. Today, although witch-hunting has become a more complex subject, folk beliefs and customs retain their scholarly interest – and can be studied in a more systematic way.

The earliest scholars to interest themselves in the history of witchcraft were 'antiquaries' – a broad term for those interested in the past, including not just documentary history but also what would now be called archaeology, ethnology and even geology. Dalyell was a long-serving vice-president of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. George F. Black later worked for the Society in its Museum.[59] The Museum of Antiquities, an ancestor of the present Museum of Scotland, is particularly relevant to Hugh Cheape's chapter on the Museum's collection of charms and amulets.[60] His chapter offers a rare opportunity to re-integrate some of the strands of antiquarianism that have become

separated with greater specialisation. He also shows that fashions of collecting have changed and that understandings of the objects collected have changed with them. Early modern folk certainly used charms and amulets, and a few objects in the Museum have a documented provenance taking us back to those times and illustrating physically the other references in early modern sources to such objects.[61] However, these charms and amulets have been joined in the Museum's collections by many others of a more questionable nature. The result is an assembly of fascinating objects but one that as a whole tells us more about the history of antiquarianism over the last two centuries than it does about the use of real charms and amulets in the early modern period.

In the early twentieth century, Scotland was the *locus classicus* for Margaret Murray's notorious theory of a surviving pagan witch-cult. Some of Murray's most important witches were Isobel Goudie, who made a remarkable series of confessions in 1662, and the North Berwick witches of 1590–1.[62] The theory is now discredited, but the enormous popularity it used to enjoy with sections of the general public has probably contributed to the high public profile that these witches currently enjoy.[63]

By contrast, Scotland played little or no part in a much more fruitful line of scholarly enquiry: the upsurge of anthropological functionalist interpretation of witchcraft in the third quarter of the twentieth century. The most distinguished proponents of it, Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas, wrote specifically on England. Christina Larner, by contrast, was from the neighbour discipline of sociology. In a long review of Thomas she expressed herself sceptical of the idea of witchcraft accusations as a 'gauge of social tension' (if it was one, it was impossible to read), and argued that Thomas had not explained why witchcraft accusations grew in the sixteenth century. For England, and even more for Scotland, she urged the study of the growth of law and litigation, and also of changing late medieval ideas of witchcraft – the 'intellectual steps from medieval scepticism to the *Malleus Maleficarum*'.[64] She later wrote of 'the inapplicability of functional explanation to the witch-hunt as a whole'.[65] This is no place to review the whole of Larner's achievement in the study of Scottish witchcraft, but her approach continues to inform most of the research carried out today on the subject.[66]

IV

Historical research on Scottish witchcraft paused for a while after Larner's efforts but has revived dramatically in the last ten years or so.[67] One

development particularly worth noting here is the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, which went online in 2003. The Survey's two-year project created a database of nearly 4,000 records and over 600 different fields per record which can be used to search for material. Its place in the historiography of Scottish witchcraft studies is important as it reflects both continuity and change in both research needs and availability of material.

The idea of recording Scottish witchcraft material was not a product of the twenty-first or even the twentieth century. The three monumental volumes of Robert Pitcairn's *Selected Criminal Trials* (1833) demonstrated lively interest in the subject; Pitcairn's work was later continued in three Stair Society volumes entitled *Selected Justiciary Cases* (1954, 1974).[68] However, these works were not comprehensive. George F. Black compiled what was for its time a remarkably full summary of published witchcraft cases in 1938, and Larner, Lee and McLachlan took the idea a stage further in the 1970s.[69] With improvements in computer technology, Stuart Macdonald converted Larner, Lee and McLachlan's work into an electronic form which was then used to provide basic biographical and bibliographical material for the Witchcraft Survey's much more complex database.[70]

For the Survey, we recorded as many cases and names as we could find, including some that had not been included in previous surveys or transcriptions. Because of the amount of information and the time available, the Survey could not attempt a full transcription of evidence and documents, as was done in some of these earlier works, and instead summarised and noted significant features of cases. Fuller examination of cases could then be undertaken as desired by other researchers using primary and other sources. The Survey has continued the work done by earlier historians and other academics and, by attempting as full a record as possible of people accused, has taken it several stages further.

We were fortunate in being able to locate source material more quickly because of the work done previously. Nevertheless, the Survey was not simply a reproduction or repetition of previous works. It had a different methodology and a very different format.[71] Crucial to these changes was the development of more sophisticated and faster computers. Larner and her team had the use of computer technology but in the 1970s computers were slow and the programming was complicated. If they wanted some statistical analysis done by computer it took a whole day to get the answer.[72] Using the database created by the information technology staff at the University of Edinburgh, a simple query could take only a few seconds once the parameters had been set. The database

allowed us to collect and record a vast amount of material which will enable other researchers to identify particular cases and sources more quickly. The fact that it is available free via the internet is another first; its accessibility is much wider than that of a book in a reference library.

Material from the database has been used in several chapters of this book. Martin and Miller have analysed material both for their individual chapters and a joint chapter looking at some of the general findings from the project.[73] They have incorporated statistical detail into examinations of cultural beliefs about witchcraft prosecution and the Devil, as well as using it to debunk some of the popular myths held about witches and witchcraft. Davies located some of his cases for his comparison of English and Scottish charmers, or cunning folk, through the database.[74] Goodare, in his wide-ranging examination of Scottish witchcraft in its European context, cites cases from the database which illustrate malefice directed at grain, the manifestations of spirits and the appearance and actions of fairies.[75] For researchers not based in Scotland, the database is an ideal way to speed up research. Researchers with expertise in a particular place or a particular period can use it to identify further evidence from all over Scotland at any time between 1563 and 1736.

One of the strengths of the database is the extensive comparative analysis that it facilitates, particularly in the area of cultural beliefs and practices. Many of the elements or motifs that were recorded related to cultural beliefs, including non-natural beings of all shapes, sizes and names, details about meetings (what was done, who was there), details about fairies and fairy motifs, magic (particularly sympathetic magic), visions, details about riding with the dead, rituals carried out, disease and damage (including both how it was caused and how it was cured), as well as details about the Devil, devil-like figures, what they did and what the accused did. With this level of information comparative statistical analysis can be done quite simply, for example comparing fairy motifs with demonic ones. Chronological analysis can also be done, such as comparing the appearance or disappearance of fairy elements with increased appearance of demonic elements and the Devil. Analysis can be made of cases which feature malefice and damage to see what types of damage concerned the population more.

One of the notable features of the Survey's database is that it enables easier statistical analysis, yet that is not its only application because statistical analysis is of limited use in understanding how society functioned, what people did and what they thought. Witchcraft was a fundamental aspect of early modern society's culture and belief system. It

is therefore important to look at as many features and elements of witchcraft cases as possible, not simply the numbers and percentages, in order to build up as full a picture as possible of Scottish society. The Survey offers those interested in the subject the fresh opportunity to combine both statistical and cultural analysis.

V

Belief is, of course, impossible to quantify. The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft can allow us to locate instances of particular beliefs, and it is useful to be able to see how beliefs were distributed geographically and chronologically. But the nature of a belief will only be grasped once we have conducted close studies of individuals holding and expressing it (and sometimes, perhaps, not even then). The diverse chapters below contain many such studies which may add something to our understanding of the flavour of life in early modern Scotland.

We conclude this introduction with one small individual study which returns to a point we raised early on: the necessity, and the difficulty amounting almost to impossibility, of separating elite and popular belief. Elite and popular belief can be seen interacting in the 'Meditations' of Anne Murray, Lady Halkett.[76] Halkett lived in the late seventeenth century, a crucial period for the evolution of elite beliefs on witchcraft. She was a courtier's daughter and the widow of a minor laird, who lived in Dunfermline. As a devout episcopalian, she wrote profusely to herself on religion and allied subjects. She had some skill as a healer and offered her services publicly. She mainly employed herbs and ointments, backed up with prayers. She had a detailed understanding of official religious beliefs and knew that she must avoid any charms or rituals that might be superstitious. What is interesting is that she was clearly out of sympathy with witchcraft prosecutions. In 1688 she looked back on her notes for the year 1666:

> Vpon Michallmas day 7 were burnt for Witches att Toriburne And by what hath since hapned itt may bee concluded they died inocent as to that guilt for none that condemned them hath (likely) to leaue any thing behind them to preserue there memory.[77]

This moves beyond a belief in the innocence of the seven witches of nearby Torryburn to a condemnation of their prosecutors; their execution was not just a tragic mistake, but a scandal. However, Halkett's reasoning was far from the anticlerical Enlightenment critique of witch-

hunting that would dominate eighteenth-century views. To her, the guilt of the witch-hunters appeared because God had not allowed them to prosper. This pious argument also bypassed the contemporary intellectual debate over witchcraft, which, as Michael Wasser's chapter illustrates, was dominated by questions of the existence of spirits, and by extension of the 'mechanical' world-view made possible by Descartes.[78] Halkett was a member of the elite, but she had received a non-academic education which debarred her from an active part in the debate. She read religious books and might have come across one of Wasser's crucial texts, *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* by George Sinclair (1685), but her 'Meditations' do not mention it. Her idea that God punished the unjust witch-hunters could equally well have been a popular one.

Lady Halkett's tolerant approach to witchcraft later appeared in another way. In 1697, she heard a report that she herself was being called a witch in Strathearn and Perth. One of her servants 'told mee of itt Laughing, as a good sport'. She herself was not amused, but took the report as a 'tryall of my Charity faith and Patience', remembering how one of her friends had been said to be a witch some years earlier.[79] Quite possibly people talked about Halkett in 1697 because of the prominent witch-hunt in the Paisley area that year.[80] Such events were now becoming rare, however. Plenty of people would be rumoured to be witches after 1697, but not many of them would have reason to worry about being prosecuted.

Which brings us back to where we began. Witchcraft beliefs have been important at many periods in history, but it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that they were matters of life or death. This even suggests one way of quantifying belief: this set of beliefs, in this period, was held so intensely that people were prepared to kill each other. Why this was so is a question that has often been discussed; the chapters below may offer some fresh insight into it.

Notes

1 S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), 4. His further argument, apparently to the effect that witchcraft beliefs were simply about the language in which they were expressed and not about the 'external world' at all, seems to be addressed more to philosophers than to historians, and he points out that it applies to all statements about the world, with no special significance attaching to statements about witchcraft: *ibid.*, 6–8.

2 C. Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981), 11–14; C. Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion: the Politics of Popular Belief* (Oxford, 1984), 159–65.

3 P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978).

4 M. Lynch, 'Queen Mary's triumph: the baptismal celebrations at Stirling in December 1566', *SHR*, 69 (1990), 1–21, at p. 7; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, ch. 42.
5 M. Lynch, 'Court ceremony and ritual in the personal reign of James VI', in J. Goodare and M. Lynch (eds), *The Reign of James VI* (East Linton, 2000).
6 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, ch. 40; quotations at p. 607.
7 For their views on divine right see J. H. Burns, *The True Law of Kingship: Concepts of Monarchy in Early-Modern Scotland* (Oxford, 1996), ch. 7, and C. Jackson, *Restoration Scotland, 1660–90: Royalist Politics, Religion and Ideas* (Woodbridge, 2003), ch. 3. For the links between the two beliefs for James see S. Clark, 'King James's *Daemonologie*: witchcraft and kingship', in S. Anglo (ed.), *The Damned Art: Essays on the Literature of Witchcraft* (London, 1977).
8 J. Goodare, 'Witch-hunting and the Scottish state', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), 144–5.
9 M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, Conn., 2002), ch. 8; R. Mitchison, 'The social impact of the clergy of the reformed kirk of Scotland', *Scotia*, 6 (1982), 1–13.
10 B. P. Levack, 'Demonic possession in early modern Scotland', Chapter 7 below.
11 K. Fisher, 'Eldritch comic verse in older Scots', in S. Mapstone (ed.), *Older Scots Literature* (Edinburgh, 2005), 302–13.
12 J. Goodare, 'John Knox on demonology and witchcraft', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 96 (2005), 221–45, at pp. 235–6.
13 J. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft act', *Church History*, 74 (2005), 39–67, at pp. 53–4, 62–4.
14 Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, *The Historie and Cronicles of Scotland*, 3 vols., (ed.) Æ. J. G. Mackay (STS, 1899–1911), i, 244. For the tournament see L. O. Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland* (Madison, Wis., 1991), ch. 13.
15 Pitscottie, *Historie*, ii, 239.
16 Calderwood, *History*, iii, 13.
17 P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton, 2001), 153–8.
18 S. Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-Hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560–1710* (East Linton, 2002), ch. 10 and *passim*.
19 D. G. Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism, 1590–1638* (Oxford, 2000), ch. 6.
20 S. Clark, 'Protestant demonology: sin, superstition, and society (*c*.1520–*c*.1630)', in B. Ankarloo and G. Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1990).
21 James Anderson, *Ane godly treatis, callit the first and second cumming of Christ, to the toone of the Winter Night* (Edinburgh, 1614 [STC 2173:12]), stanza 93. We are grateful to Dr Jamie Reid-Baxter for this reference.
22 Archibald Riddell, *Mount Moriah, or A sermon preached at Carrick, by Mr. Riddale, August 5. 1679* (Edinburgh?, 1679 [Wing R1437]), 11. We are grateful to Professor David Mullan for this reference.
23 James Clark, *The Communicant's Best Token: or, a practical treatise of personal covenanting with God* (2nd enlarged edn, Edinburgh, 1702; previously published 1697 as *Personal Calling*), 215–16. We are grateful to Professor David Mullan for this reference. 'Excamb' and 'niffer' both meant 'exchange'.

24 *Witch-Craft Proven* (1697), by an unknown minister, and *The Tryal of Witchcraft* (1705), probably by John Bell, minister of Gladsmuir, both discussed by C. Larner, 'Two late Scottish witchcraft tracts: *Witch-Craft Proven* and *The Tryal of Witchcraft*', in Anglo (ed.), *The Damned Art*.
25 I. Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformations, c.1650–c.1750* (Oxford, 1997), 184–91.
26 M. Wasser, 'The mechanical world-view and the decline of witch beliefs in Scotland', Chapter 9 below.
27 Levack, 'Demonic possession', Chapter 7 below.
28 Richard Franck, *Northern Memoirs, Calculated for the Meridian of Scotland; to which is added, the Contemplative and Practical Angler*, (ed.) W. Scott (Edinburgh, 1821), 158–61. The Loch of Pitlail is near Lundie in the Sidlaw Hills.
29 For ritual and magic in Europe see S. Wilson, *The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-Modern Europe* (London, 2000); for Britain see R. Hutton, *Stations of the Sun: a History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996).
30 E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J. Ward Swain (New York, 1915).
31 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 21–3.
32 K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971); A. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970). These works are often cited as promoting the idea that the guilt associated with the refusal of charity led to accusations of witchcraft.
33 L. Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics re-examined', Chapter 5 below, and J. Miller, 'Men in black: appearances of the Devil in early modern Scottish witchcraft discourse', Chapter 6 below. Stuart Macdonald also examines the relative absence of the Devil in trials from Fife: 'In search of the Devil in Fife witchcraft cases, 1560–1705', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*.
34 L. Henderson, 'Witch-hunting and witch belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*', Chapter 4 below.
35 Wilson, *The Magical Universe*, chs. 1–4; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, especially chs. 22 and 30. On the Guidman's Croft see also J. Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft in its European context', Chapter 1 below.
36 E. J. Cowan, 'Witch persecution and folk belief in Scotland: the Devil's decade', Chapter 3 below.
37 Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 55–7; quotation at p. 58.
38 O. Davies, 'A comparative perspective on Scottish cunning-folk and charmers', Chapter 8 below.
39 L. Martin, 'The Devil and the domestic: witchcraft, quarrels and women's work in Scotland', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 77.
40 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, chs. 31–2.
41 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 459.
42 The best-known such attempt was by J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a Study in Comparative Religion*, 2 vols. (London, 1890; many subsequent editions).
43 Miller, 'Men in black', Chapter 6 below.
44 Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics', Chapter 5 below.
45 P. Bawcutt, 'Elrich fantasyis in Dunbar and other poets', in J. D. McClure and M. R. G. Spiller (eds), *Bryght Lanternis: Essays on the Language and Literature of Medieval and Renaissance Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1989).

46 *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, 4 vols., (ed.) W. Tod Ritchie (STS, 1928–34), ii, 282–3. The poem's date is inferred partly from its mention of 'Paip alexander', apparently the reigning pope, probably Alexander VI (1492–1503).
47 Sir James Melville of Halhill, *Memoirs of His Own Life*, (ed.) T. Thomson (Bannatyne Club, 1827), 395–6. 'Eyn' = eyes; 'how' = hollow.
48 W. Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago, Ill., 2002), 15–16.
49 Cowan, 'Witch persecution and folk belief', Chapter 3 below.
50 *Stirling Presbytery Records, 1581–1587*, (ed.) J. Kirk (SHS, 1981), 115, 146.
51 Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, *passim* but especially ch. 4, which discusses the church's attempts to prevent what it saw as profane pastimes.
52 J. Miller, 'Devices and directions: folk healing aspects of witchcraft practice in seventeenth-century Scotland', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*.
53 D. Gentilcore, 'The fear of disease and the disease of fear', in W. G. Naphy and P. Roberts (eds), *Fear in Early Modern Society* (Manchester, 1997), discusses the use of counter-magic, saintly intervention and miracles in Italy.
54 M. F. Graham, *The Uses of Reform: Godly Discipline and Popular Behavior in Scotland and Beyond, 1560–1610* (Leiden, 1996), 308.
55 Wasser, 'Mechanical world-view', Chapter 9 below.
56 E. J. Cowan and L. Henderson, 'The last of the witches? The survival of Scottish witch belief', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*. Also Henderson, 'Witch-hunting and witch belief in the *Gàid-healtachd*', Chapter 4 below, for a discussion of late Highland witchcraft belief.
57 Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft in its European context', Chapter 1 below.
58 Their principal works on the subject are W. Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (London, 1830), J. G. Dalyell, *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1834), and C. K. Sharpe, *A Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft in Scotland* (London, 1884; first published as part of another work 1818).
59 On the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, founded in 1780, see its bicentenary volume: A. S. Bell (ed.), *The Scottish Antiquarian Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1981).
60 H. Cheape, '"Charms against witchcraft": magic and mischief in museum collections', Chapter 10 below.
61 In addition to the objects in the Museum, the Lee Penny is such a charm: see Davies, 'Comparative perspective on Scottish cunning-folk and charmers', Chapter 8 below.
62 For Murray in general see R. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: a History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford, 1999), 194–201; for the use she made of Goudie see N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: the Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (2nd edn, London, 1993), 157–9.
63 'The Confession of Isobel Gowdie', a work for symphony orchestra by James MacMillan, received its premiere in 1990.
64 C. Larner, review of K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, *SHR*, 50 (1971), 168–71.
65 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 23.
66 For the influence of Larner's work see the introduction to Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*.

67 See S. Macdonald, '*Enemies of God* revisited: recent publications on Scottish witch-hunting', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 23 (2003), 65–84, and the Further Reading section at the end of the present book.
68 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*; *SJC*. Even Pitcairn had a predecessor in Hugo Arnot (ed.), *A Collection and Abridgement of Celebrated Criminal Trials in Scotland, 1536–1784* (Edinburgh, 1785). Further important witchcraft cases were published by *Spalding Misc.*, i (1841).
69 G. F. Black, *A Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland, 1510–1712* (New York, 1938); C. Larner, C. H. Lee and H. V. McLachlan, *A Source-Book of Scottish Witchcraft* (Glasgow, 1977).
70 See L. Martin and J. Miller, 'Some findings from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft', Chapter 2 below, for a more detailed account of the Survey's database.
71 For details about the database and methodologies used see the Survey's website: www.shc.ed.ac.uk/witches/ as well as Martin and Miller, 'Some findings', Chapter 2 below.
72 We are grateful to Hugh McLachlan for this information.
73 See Martin and Miller, 'Some findings', Chapter 2 below; Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics', Chapter 5 below and Miller, 'Men in black', Chapter 6 below.
74 Davies, 'Comparative perspective on Scottish cunning-folk and charmers', Chapter 8 below.
75 Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft', Chapter 1 below.
76 We are most grateful to Sara Murphy and Dr Suzanne Trill, the latter of whom is editing the 'Meditations' for Ashgate Publishing, for providing us with these extracts from them and discussing Lady Halkett's life and writings with us.
77 NLS, Meditations of Lady Halkett, MS 6497, p. 376. This passage, incidentally, provides the first direct confirmation that the seven witches of Torryburn were in fact executed; Scottish witchcraft records are often reticent on executions. All that we have known hitherto is that a commission of justiciary was issued on 8 September 1666 for the trial of Grissel Anderson, Agnes Brown, Margaret Cowie, Margaret Dobbie, Elspeth Guild, Margaret Horne and Christian May: *RPC*, 3rd ser., ii, 192–3. The evidence that they were executed on Michaelmas Day, 11 November, also provides an insight into the length of proceedings under commission of justiciary in this period.
78 Wasser, 'Mechanical world-view', Chapter 9 below.
79 NLS, Meditations of Lady Halkett, MS 6501, pp. 251–3.
80 On this hunt see Levack, 'Demonic possession', Chapter 7 below.

1
Scottish Witchcraft in its European Context

Julian Goodare

> Notwithstanding the rude and disorderly mass, presented at first sight by the aggregate of Scotish superstitions, it will be found, that, as originating partly from astronomy, partly from theology, and partly from medicine, they are susceptible of some systematic arrangement, which might be improved by farther research and observation.
>
> But the subject is too ample and diffuse for the work of an individual, or the restricted limits appropriated for it here.
>
> *Sir John Graham Dalyell, 1834.*[1]

The cautious remarks of a great Scottish antiquary form a fitting start to a comparative tour of witchcraft beliefs in Scotland and Europe. Dalyell's interpretative scheme is no longer viable, but in attempting to establish a more modern framework for understanding the subject, one should pay tribute to his pioneering intellectual endeavours. This chapter aims to place Scotland within the broader picture of European witchcraft. It will concentrate on the period of witch-hunting but will not primarily be about witch-hunting itself. Instead it will examine witchcraft and related beliefs, and what they meant to people.

I

In the broad picture of European witchcraft, with which we begin, the main point that stood out was that Europeans feared it. Peasants believed that witches could harm them, their families and their farming and other activities. Witches acted out of malice and vengefulness. Witchcraft was surreptitious, but witches could in principle be identified. When peasants suspected that a misfortune was due to

witchcraft, they would search their memories for someone with whom they had recently quarrelled (especially noting threats or curses). If the person fitted a witch stereotype, that was particularly suspicious. Witch stereotypes seem to have had a life of their own, predating the witchcraft trials and enabling accusations to broaden out beyond those held responsible for misfortune. The main stereotype included the point that witches were normally women – though this was a norm rather than an absolute rule. They were also normally old, though again they did not have to be.

The elite believed most of this too, or versions of it. However, European elites also developed a set of distinctive views about witchcraft, sometimes collectively described as demonology. In this, witchcraft could fit into the broader scheme of Christian theology, of sin and redemption, and of the cosmic history of conflict between God and the Devil between the Creation and the Last Judgement. Witches were held to be human beings who made personal pacts with the Devil, entering his service and gaining from him the power to do harm. One particular power they received was the power to fly, and they could also inflict illness and death. Witches met in secret, in gatherings often called witches' sabbaths, to worship the Devil and to plan their maleficent activities.

Although much demonology was distinct from peasant belief, the two systems fitted well together. One point of potential conflict was that peasants thought of the witches' powers as being inherent to them – sometimes learned, sometimes inherited. Intellectual demonology was clear that witches had no inherent powers; their malefices were implemented by demons. But peasants and intellectuals could still co-operate in prosecuting witches; no doubt the intellectuals assumed that they knew better than the peasants.

Scotland fits squarely in the middle of this general picture. All of the above statements about Europe are equally true for Scotland. This means that Scotland is worth studying as a case-study of European witchcraft, simply because of its typicality. When Scotland is placed in its general European context, it vanishes, becoming indistinguishable from its surroundings. Scotland simply *is* Europe.

Yet if we look more closely at the broad European picture, more details and diversity rapidly emerge. And if we look more closely at Scotland, all sorts of unusual features emerge. They may be undetectable at a general level, but they have their own importance. These European and Scottish pictures will be investigated and compared in four main areas. Firstly, the content of the everyday quarrels and accusations of

malefice will receive brief consideration. Secondly, there will be a longer section digging deeper into popular belief, examining the folkloric mentalities that formed the context of witchcraft beliefs and practices. Thirdly, there will be a glance at psychological interpretations of witchcraft, which in principle are not culture-specific. For the fourth and final section, the focus will shift from the common folk to the beliefs of the elite. Intellectual demonology has been much studied and will not be considered in detail here, but the elite's relationship to popular belief needs to be opened up. What follows cannot be more than an exploration of some aspects of a very broad subject, but it may identify some useful patterns.

II

What kinds of misfortune did neighbours blame on witchcraft? Asking the question in this way permits a distinction between neighbours' beliefs and accused witches' confessions; the latter are fascinating, but tend to contain extraneous elements derived from elite belief or from fantasy. It is also important to distinguish magical harm from the issues that led to quarrels. Sometimes a quarrel about a particular kind of work would lead to misfortune connected with the work, but not always.

We do not yet have a full statistical analysis of this theme; in due course the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft may help to make one possible. In the meantime here are some impressions and suggestions. The most important misfortunes were human illness and death, and animal illness and death. These came up time and time again. Then there was interference with brewing, butter-making, and other household tasks, usually tasks for which women were responsible. This is part of the pattern of women's work that Lauren Martin has recently discussed.[2]

Men worried that witches would interfere with their work too, particularly in lines of work involving regular dealings with women. Millers and craftsmen often complained about witches' malefice. Janet MacBirnie in Crawford in 1650 caused a slater to fall off a roof and break his neck.[3] When the parishioners of Dyce complained about the charmer Isobel Strachan alias Scudder in 1597, their complaint was attributed to 'the haill parochin, and in speciall brousteris, smythis, and mylwardis'. Strachan's speciality was actually love-magic, but when it came to malefice it was the brewsters, smiths and mill-wards who were unusually scared of her.[4] Millers were often agents of the landlord in extracting resources from his tenants.

This leads to the question of malefices directed more against landlords and the elite generally. Some of the Alloa witches, accused in 1659, 'did sitt upon my Lord of Marr his coall workes lyk corbies and dragones and stopt the workes and drowned them'.[5] This comes from a confession, not an accusation by a victim, but the elite were in a good position to obtain confessions if they suspected malefice against themselves. The North Berwick witches, accused of treasonable witchcraft in 1590, are a prominent example. A full study of malefices directed against the elite would be desirable.[6]

Surprisingly absent so far is the production of grain. Accusations by neighbours that witches had interfered with crops in the fields were not nearly as common as one might expect, given that all the common folk of Scotland depended on these crops for subsistence. If witches did attack crops, they almost always targeted particular farmers. One characteristic neighbour's complaint, voiced by farmers and artisans alike, was that a witch had 'caused their whole estate to fail'. In a farmer's case this might imply interference with standing crops, but this was rarely specified. The Crook of Devon witches were said to have 'trampit down Thomas White's rie in the beginning of harvest, 1661'; Janet Paton 'had broad soals and trampit down more nor any of the rest'. However, this came from a confession. White's own statement did not mention it, but instead complained about ale not brewing and cattle dying.[7]

What would really have frightened Scottish peasants was a suggestion that witches might modify the weather, bringing frost, hail or storms to destroy the crops of the whole community. This hardly ever seems to have happened. Storms were raised by some witches, including Helen Clark in Leith in 1645 – but to attack a fishing fleet, not crops.[8] Elspeth Gray in Dun in 1650 was accused of threatening to interfere with some grain – but at the mill, not in the fields.[9] Witches in Lorraine, by contrast, were almost always induced to confess to having plotted at the sabbath to destroy the community's crops; how often this was a specific accusation by neighbours is less clear, but witches and neighbours obviously shared the same basic beliefs.[10]

This prompts comparison with Wolfgang Behringer's argument that the weather influenced German witchcraft panics. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the period of heaviest prosecution of witches, also saw long-term climatic decline, with colder and wetter summers, and more years of harvest failure leading to famine. He points to correlations between famines and witchcraft panics, to peasant demands for prosecution of witches who had damaged the harvest,

and to demonologists and chroniclers confirming the perception that witches had brought bad weather.[11] This argument is not the whole story, even for Germany. A statistical survey has found several suggestive correlations (though nothing close enough to be statistically significant): plague, warfare (an inverse correlation), wheat prices (before 1650) and climate all display some relationship with witchcraft executions.[12] In Scotland, three of the five great witchcraft panics were in times of high grain prices, but there are alternative explanations for at least two of these panics.[13]

Why this apparent Scottish unconcern? As a pastoral country, Scotland had a higher proportion of farm animals, which had richer symbolic relationships with their owners than did grain crops, and which were frequently attacked by witches. German peasants may have been especially terrified of hail – regularly blamed on witches in Catholic countries at least – because in wine-growing regions it could destroy every single grape within minutes. Bad weather in a field of Scottish oats could do a lot of damage but would not reduce the harvest to zero. One sixteenth-century Scottish commentary on the weather, the Chronicle of Fortirgall, was written by a curate in Highland Perthshire who was effectively a peasant, farming himself. He prayed for good weather and complained about bad weather, but never suggested that bad weather might have come from God or the Devil or was linked at all with the human morality on which he otherwise commented extensively.[14] At present the Scots seem to have been distinctive for treating the weather as a purely natural phenomenon.

III

Beneath the surface of neighbourhood witchcraft, there were deeper folkloric rituals and patterns of belief. Here the obvious name to drop is that of Carlo Ginzburg. He discovered a remarkable cult in the Friuli region of northern Italy, the *benandanti*, who flew out at nights in spirit, to do battle with witches for the fertility of the fields, while their bodies remained in a trance-like state.[15] Historians have agreed that this was extraordinary, but they have not really known what to do with it. Was the *benandanti* cult unique and exotic, or would all pre-industrial peasants turn out to have had similar beliefs and even cults, if only we had the evidence? And what connections were there with more familiar witchcraft beliefs? There were at any rate similar figures in central Europe, including the Hungarian *táltos*, who engaged in spirit battles as well as folk healing and prophecy.[16]

Ginzburg himself went on to produce a major synthesis of the beliefs he thought were important, which supposedly explained the witches' sabbath as originating in an ecstatic journey to the realm of the dead. This archaic pattern of belief derived from the ancient Celts, and he traced it back even further to the Scythians of Eurasia. The cast of characters who proved this included not just the *benandanti* but also Orpheus, Oedipus, Cinderella and a seventeenth-century Livonian werewolf. Other scholars have remained puzzled at best, and none have adopted the scheme in full.[17]

Still, it can hardly be denied that Ginzburg was onto something. The specific scheme he reconstructed, the journey to the realm of the dead, may have relied on suspect and arbitrary connections across cultures and across millennia. But other scholars, more cautious, are finding material of value in this type of evidence.[18] Deep folkloric beliefs or mythic structures mattered to the way in which the common folk conceptualised witchcraft. There is no need to emulate Ginzburg's plunge into the archaic past; early modern evidence exists and calls for explanation. What it indicates is that people had relationships with other worlds and other beings that did not necessarily derive from orthodox Christianity. This is inherently probable.

And if so, it is probable for Scotland. Scottish peasants were not provincial; they had a cosmopolitan culture, fully accessible to this deep folkloric material. Orpheus was important to Ginzburg, and Scottish peasants sang Orpheus ballads – in a distinct version in which Eurydice was carried off by *fairies*, and Orpheus rescued her successfully. In Scottish literary works, by contrast, a properly classical underworld was retained and the story always ended unhappily. Robert Henryson wrote an erudite fifteenth-century Orpheus poem of this kind. He knew the popular tradition, having a 'fairy' mentioned by a servant, but anchored his work firmly within a classical context.[19]

Folklore embraces both traditional beliefs and traditional stories. In principle, the beliefs are literally true for the believers, while the stories are fiction. In practice the boundary between the two was fuzzy – though we should not patronise pre-industrial folk by suggesting that they did not recognise a boundary between truth and fiction. Medieval definitions of magic included conjuring tricks which were recognised as illusions.[20] Fiction was simply *used* in people's beliefs and ritual practices, as arguably it is today. This operated at various cultural levels. Ginzburg's werewolves were doing something very strange, and crucial to their identity. On the other hand, there was a werewolf cult in Guernsey which was basically the local youths dressing up and going on a wild pub crawl.[21]

With this in mind, let us take a tour of the non-human inhabitants of Scotland's pre-industrial universe, and consider their possible relevance to witchcraft. 'Inhabitants' were recognisably living beings, but the life might not be as we know it. The material world itself had quasi-animistic properties. Objects had ritual significance. The sun, moon, stars and planets were significant in astrology. Places were special: churches, churchyards, wells, crossroads, wild places. Even certain properties – numbers, colours, words, times – had power.[22] So the line between the human inhabitants and their surroundings was hard to draw.

The first category of non-humans comprises ex-humans. One of the purposes of Christianity itself was to organise people's relationship to their dead ancestors. Some people thought they could have a relationship with dead souls in heaven or hell, but usually the souls had to be active on earth. Ghosts are an under-researched topic in Scotland;[23] but several Scottish witches seem to have had relationships with them, usually as spirit-guides or advisers of some kind. Some may have been revenants, in which the physical body was believed to return.[24] Katherine Sands in Culross in 1675 simply confessed that there were dead people at some of her witches' meetings; exactly what she thought they were she did not explain.[25]

In confessions like this, combining ghostly and demonic material, the ghosts are probably folkloric. Demonic elements might have been imposed by the interrogators, but ghosts could not exist in orthodox Protestant theology; the soul went straight to heaven or hell after death and could not return. However, the common folk were Christians too, and some adapted orthodox theology to their own purposes. Jean Brown in Penninghame in 1706 confessed to remarkable dealings with some 'good spirits' to whom she was married. She described them not only as three young pretty men, but also as the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who had shown her a vision of Judgement Day.[26] This is a reminder that popular belief was not monolithic or unchanging over centuries; it contained room for variety and even eccentricity.[27]

Closely related to ghosts were the 'Wild Hunt' or 'Furious Horde', spirits of people who had died prematurely and were compelled to wander until their allotted time was up.[28] No single Scottish case records an explicit 'Wild Hunt' in full, but its essential components are found. Elspeth Riach in Kirkwall in 1616 had a 'blak man' as a spirit-guide: he 'callit him selff ane farie man quha wes sumtyme her kinsman callit Johne Stewart quha wes slane be McKy at the doun going of the soone, and therfor nather deid nor leiving bot wald ever

go betuix the heaven and the earth'.[29] John Stewart, in Irvine in 1618, said that all those who died suddenly went with the king of Elfland.[30] Bessie Dunlop, from Lyne, who confessed in 1576, provided the nearest thing to the complete 'Wild Hunt'. Her spirit-guide, Thom Reid, had died prematurely at the battle of Pinkie in 1547. When she was speaking to him at Restalrig Loch, 'thair come ane cumpanye of rydaris by, that maid sic ane dynn as heavin and erd had gane togidder; and incontinent, thai raid in to the loch, with mony hiddous rumbill. Bot Thom tauld, It was the gude wichtis that wer rydand in Middil-zerd.'[31] As with Elspeth Riach's kinsman, it was unclear whether Bessie Dunlop's 'gude wichtis' were ghosts or fairies; there seems to have been overlap between the two.

This brings us to the fairies. Current research can give the impression that many Scottish witches were away with the fairies. Fairies and their analogues – elves, trolls, brownies – were important members of the popular universe in pre-industrial Scotland.[32] Many Scottish witchcraft suspects, interrogated about their relationship with the Devil, knew little about the Devil and so talked about what they did know: fairies. So long as the interrogators were willing to construe the fairies as demons, they could have a co-operative, mutually-intelligible relationship.[33] The minister interrogating Margaret Alexander in Livingston in 1647 pursued a standard demonic line of questioning, but she confessed that she had renounced her baptism to the king of fairies.[34] Isobel Sinclair in Orkney in 1633 confessed to having been with the fairies; they gave her second sight to detect any 'fey body'.[35]

Fairies were important in Scotland, and in a European context they may have played similar roles to other non-human figures found elsewhere. There were the feared *strix* of classical and Germanic antiquity;[36] the storm-riding 'witches' against whom church bells were rung;[37] the 'witches' fought by the *benandanti*;[38] and the Sicilian 'ladies from outside'.[39] The folkloric child-eating witch was not necessarily human: the witch of 'Hansel and Gretel', with her feeble red eyes, or the Russian *ved'ma*, of whom Baba Yaga was one.[40] These figures all played different cultural roles from human, neighbourhood witches. Like the fairies, they were typically forest-dwellers or inhabitants of some other remote region – symbolic 'others' rather than hidden members of one's own community. They defined symbolic boundaries between the pure space of the community and the powerful but dangerous space of the unknown outside it.

The Devil was himself a kenspeckle folkloric figure, and some confessions drew on this folklore. As with fairies, folk were reluctant to name

him, and he was often called the 'Good Man'. Edinburgh presbytery's commissioners in 1586 were to 'inquyre the names of certane croftis or pertis of ground superstitiouslie reportit to be consecrat to the Dewill wnder the name of the gud mane or hynd king'.[41] The general assembly in 1594 denounced the 'horrible superstitioun used in Garioch and diverse parts of the countrey, in not labouring ane parcell of ground dedicate to the Devill, under the name of the Goodmans Craft [sc. Croft]'.[42] Frequent confessions referred to the Devil as a 'black man' (apparently meaning black-haired, or sometimes perhaps clothed in black); there is no evidence that this was imposed by the interrogators.[43] The Devil who was hauled up out of the earth with a rope by the North Berwick witches sounds folkloric.[44] There was a recognised Scottish way of renouncing one's soul to him: placing one hand on one's head and the other on the sole of one's foot, and swearing everything in between to the Devil. This was demonstrably a popular belief.[45] The common Scottish idea that the Devil renamed his witches may well have been of popular origin, though we shall find it being forced on later witches by their interrogators.

Christina Larner referred to such beliefs as the 'new popular demonic', on the grounds that they were probably learned during the process of Protestant indoctrination (reinforced by witch-hunting itself). Stuart Macdonald has disagreed, observing that elaborate folkloric material concerning the Devil is rare in Fife, and that even the witches' sabbath hardly ever appears.[46] The problem may be methodological, concerning how to evaluate partial evidence. If beliefs about the Devil are reported only from one of Fife's four presbyteries, were such beliefs absent from the other three? Robin Briggs argues that there was a 'coherent body of folklore' about the witches' sabbath in Lorraine; the more elaborate accounts were probably just those in which the interrogators pressed for more detail.[47] If this is so for Scotland, then the paucity of folkloric material in much of the Scottish evidence indicates that the interrogators did not ask for it, or did not record it, rather than that it did not exist. But the question of what Scottish peasants learned about the Devil from Protestant indoctrination remains open.

One category of non-human being seems to have been forgotten, rather than learned, in the witch-hunting period. The incubus, a male demon who visited sleeping women and had sex with them, was a recognised concept in medieval times, along with the succubus, a rarer female demon who seduced men. In the thirteenth century, two Dominican friars visited the Western Isles and found a number of

young women afflicted by 'incubi'; the friars' preaching expelled these demons, who fled into the air with wailing and lamentation.[48] Very many Scottish witches confessed to demonic sex, and a few witches' neighbours reported nocturnal visits by a witch, yet the explicit concepts of 'incubi' and 'succubi' rarely if ever appear. This is noteworthy because Continental demonologists continued to discuss them, including Martín Del Rio who was otherwise much cited by seventeenth-century Scottish lawyers.[49] There is scope for further research on demonic sex, but perhaps the stereotyped nature of the demonic pact in Scotland made the idea of incubi and succubi unnecessary.

Next we have a group of characters who were basically versions of the witches themselves, or emanations of the witches themselves. Particular care is needed here to distinguish between beliefs that the accused witches themselves held, and stories told about them by their neighbours. Of course they could be both, but we cannot assume this any more than we can assume that someone thought they were a witch just because their neighbours called them one. 'Witch' was almost always what others called you, not what you called yourself.[50]

The most obvious versions of the witch were the animal transformations. These are vouched for both in neighbours' depositions and in confessions, and are common enough to confirm that the possibility of such transformations was generally accepted in popular belief. We have already encountered the Alloa witches as 'corbies and dragones' – this was a confession. Neighbours, too, often saw a cat or some such animal at a significant moment and thought (at the time, or later) that this must be the witch. The elite regarded this as a demonic illusion, but of course they believed in demonic illusions. Werewolves were relevant here; there appear to be no folkloric werewolves in Scottish popular material, but the elite sometimes mentioned them because they were respectably classical.

Scotland seems to have lacked the witch's double found in some other places – notably the Hungarian *mora* witch who was believed to appear to victims in dreams.[51] Scottish witches could appear in neighbours' dreams without sending emanations that needed to be identified as distinct entities. Closer to Scotland we have the English witch's familiar, often a cat or toad. The familiar was not straightforwardly a double or emanation of the witch, but it was an entity for which the witch could be held responsible. There are occasional Scottish cases in which something like a familiar was mentioned, and more study of them would be useful;[52] however, the general picture is that familiars were not normal in Scotland.

Emma Wilby has argued that the English familiar was similar to the Scottish fairy in popular belief. Both encountered the witch and offered help; both made some kind of contract with the witch; both needed to be fed (the usual food of the familiar, blood, was sometimes taken by fairies too); both had ambivalent morality (familiars seem more maleficent, but this could be an artefact of interrogation).[53] This is an insightful analysis of points of similarity, but the points of difference are also marked. English familiars lived *with* their witches, whereas Scottish fairies lived elsewhere, in hills or other remote liminal spaces.[54] English familiars also acted on behalf of their human owners, being sent out almost as doubles of the witch or representatives of their malice. This was surely the crucial feature of the familiar – and the fairy did not share it. Here the familiar seems closer to the Hungarian *lidérc*, a small animal (typically a bird or reptile) that fetched money for its owner or was sent out to harm neighbours.[55] This is still suggestive of broad transnational patterns of belief. Scottish fairies were certainly close to English familiars in the way they functioned in witchcraft interrogations – both for the suspects, who were being pressed for witchcraft material, and for the interrogators.[56]

One point about the *benandanti*, *táltos* and others has always been seen as crucial: they entered a trance and their spirits went out to the other world. This worried interrogators, because theologically body and spirit were inseparable during life. Most of the Scottish evidence shows people themselves going out to the other world: as far as one can tell, body and spirit went together. This may still have originated in a trance experience, but this way of recording it fitted the orthodox theological view that the Devil could transport people bodily or give them the illusion of this. But there were also Scottish cases making the trance experience explicit. Isobel Elliott in 1678 confessed that 'she left her bodie in Pencaitland, and went in the shape of a corbie, to Laswade, to see a child she had nursed'.[57] Crows were distinctive as creatures for Scottish transformations; the Alloa 'corbies' have already been mentioned, and there were other cases including Isobel Goudie.[58] Elizabeth Bathgate's defence lawyers argued in 1634 that she and others accused of sinking a ship had not been seen 'fleing lyk crawis, ravens, or uther foulis, about the schip as use is with witches'.[59] John Fian, one of the North Berwick witches, confessed that he was 'strucken in great ecstasies and trances, lying by the space of two or three hours dead, his sprite taken, and suffered himself to be carried and transported to many mountains, as though through all the world'.[60] Alison Pierson from Boarhills in 1588 had frightening dream or trance experiences in which she visited fairyland; sometimes she did not

know where she would wake up in the morning.[61] Beatrix Leslie from Newbattle in 1661 was often carried in her sleep to the company of many brave souls.[62]

Sir George Mackenzie did not think that there was anything exotic or at least un-Scottish about animal metamorphosis or spirit-flight:

> We must then conclude, that these confessions of Witches, who affirm, that they have been transformed into beasts, is but an illusion of the fancy, wrought by the Devil upon their melancholy brains, whilst they sleep; and this we may the rather believe, because it hathe been oft seen, that some of these confessors were seen to be lying still in the room when they awak'd, and told where, and in what shapes they had travell'd many miles: Nor is this illusion impossible to be effectuated by the Devil, who can imitate nature, and corrupt the humours, since melancholly doth ordinarily perswade men, that they are Wolves (*Licanthropi*), Dogs, and other Beasts.[63]

So the difference between dreams and trances may not always have been clear, either to observers or to the subjects themselves. When Margaret Watson, in Carnwath in 1644, confessed that she and other members of her group of witches had flown on a cat, a cock, a thorn tree, a bundle of straw, and an elder tree, she did not describe her physical or mental state.[64] James VI probably had trances in mind when he wrote:

> *Philomathes*. But how can it be then, that sundrie Witches have gone to death with that confession, that they have ben transported with the *Phairie* to such a hill, which opening, they went in, and there saw a faire Queen, who being now lighter, gave them a stone that had sundrie vertues, which at sundrie times hath bene produced in judgement?
>
> *Epistemon*. I say that, even as I said before of that imaginar ravishing of the spirite foorth of the bodie. For may not the devil object [i.e. present] to their fantasie, their senses being dulled, and as it were a sleepe, such hilles & houses within them, such glistering courts and traines, and whatsoever such like wherewith he pleaseth to delude them. And in the meane time their bodies being senselesse, to convay in their hande any stone or such like thing, which he makes them to imagine to have received in such a place.

Philomathes then asked about witches claiming to foretell people's deaths (through second sight) while awake. Epistemon suspected

that some of them 'have not bene sharply inough examined' but thought that the Devil would still have the power to deceive the imagination even while the person was awake.[65] James's material thus returns us to those primordial and multivalent entities, fairies, as the beings around whom the deeper levels of Scottish folk belief were organised.

Wilby has made an important recent contribution to this subject. Following her analogy between English familiars and Scottish fairies, she has treated the two as functionally identical in a search for the 'experiential dimension' of otherworldly encounters. Indeed she has swept a lot of other material into her net, including almost any reported encounter with the Devil, demons, angels or ghosts as well as familiars and fairies. More discrimination was required here, and in her eagerness for folkloric material she tends to read confessions literally and to ignore the likelihood of leading questions and stereotyped answers. Yet she should be commended for her refusal to shirk the difficult issue of what really lies behind reports of otherworldly encounters. Her conclusion that genuine trance experiences were involved is probably correct, at least in some cases.[66]

IV

A study of the European context of Scottish witchcraft might stop at the boundaries of Europe, but it seems appropriate to discuss Europeans as humans. As well as shared cultural inheritances, early modern Scots and Europeans had a shared biological inheritance. This goes deeper than the folkloric material under discussion so far, because it was not dependent on membership of a particular culture. There were patterns of human behaviour that in principle any human might tend to follow if placed in particular situations. This is a potentially vast subject, but a few suggestions may be made.

The general assembly of the Scottish church declared in 1643 that the causes of witchcraft 'are found to be these especially, extremity of grief, malice, passion, and desire of revenge, pinching povertie, solicitation of other Witches and Charmers; for in such cases the devil assails them, offers aide, and much prevails'.[67] Most of these reasons were dully predictable, especially 'malice' – which makes it all the more striking that 'extremity of grief' headed the list. We should look more closely at the links between witchcraft and psychological trauma.

These links seem obvious for Anna Tait, in Haddington, whose case has been studied by Louise Yeoman. Tait had an awful domestic back-

ground, was 'thrie several times deprehendit putting violent hands in herself at her awne hous', and was convinced that her wickedness was due to the Devil, before she was accused of witchcraft in 1634.[68] Janet Morrison in Rothesay in 1662 heard a voice telling her to drown herself.[69] When contemporaries wrote of witches' 'melancholy', they were using a technical concept of classical medicine to explain their openness to strange visions and other experiences. But 'melancholy' could include depression, and several witches do seem to have suffered from this. Being accused of witchcraft might itself have made people downcast, to put it mildly, and some vulnerable people seem to have been pushed over the edge by it. Barbara Erskine in Alloa in 1659 'declared that when shoe was delatted [i.e. accused] for a witch the Devill came to hir and would have hir to drowne hir self' in the Water of Devon. She threw herself in, but was pulled out by William Miller.[70]

Another aspect of witchcraft and trauma has also been illuminated by Dr Yeoman: the link between demonic possession and the Calvinist conversion experience. Those seeking God's grace could suffer from demonic 'terrors', and might even believe themselves to be possessed by the Devil. This could be blamed on witches in the same way as more conventional misfortune.[71] Here we see the accusers, rather than the accused, as suffering from psychological disturbance. Other aspects of this have been examined for England, New England and Germany.[72] If the conversion experience has been little discussed outside Scotland, this is probably because the subject has been under-researched rather than because of any necessary Scottish distinctiveness.[73]

V

The elite participated in much popular belief, but also had distinctive beliefs of their own. We may begin, as Christina Larner would have done, with the demonic pact. To the higher authorities this was the crucial defining feature of a witch, and the further up one goes, the clearer this is. At the lowest level of authority, some kirk sessions were unconcerned by it.[74] Yet in many confessions the making of the demonic pact was paramount, and accounts of it were carefully shaped. There were telling similarities in 1662 between Isobel Goudie's first confession and Janet Braidheid's, made the next day. One was at Auldearn, the other at Inshoch, $1^1/_2$ miles away, but they shared the same notary and many witnesses. Did Goudie and Braidheid both independently say that the Devil's nature (i.e. penis) was as cold as spring-well water? Or that 'the Devil marked me on the shoulder,

sucked out my blood, spouted it in his hand and sprinkled it on my head'? And so on.[75] Or take the belief that the Devil renamed witches when they entered his service. Janet Barker in 1643 'confessit that the Devill gave hir no new name quhan schoe aggreit to be his servand' – obviously a response to a leading question.[76]

The witches' sabbath was important to the elite. Many confessions included references to meetings of witches, sometimes used to generate names of further suspects. The sabbath in *popular* imagination has been effectively reconstructed by Larner.[77] The most common reported events were dancing and feasting; the Devil's presence was often noted but his worship was rarely mentioned. Not all of this was of interest to the elite; interrogators might record it, but only on some aspects would they regularly press for details. The '&c's in the record of Isobel Goudie's confessions are a notorious example. Confessions were thus a compromise between the suspects' own beliefs and what the interrogators wanted to hear.

One feature of the sabbath which the Scottish elite seized on was the digging up of corpses and using bits of them (and of winding-sheets) for magical purposes. This seems first to arise in the confession of Agnes Sampson, one of the North Berwick witches.[78] King James mentioned it in *Daemonologie*.[79] The debate about whether James introduced the demonic pact to Scotland has rather neglected the question of whether he introduced the sabbath, or at least this aspect of it.[80] The king's advocate Sir Thomas Hamilton in 1611 thought that guilty witches might typically be 'tane in the actuall fact of witchecraft or incantation, or in any kirkyaird raising deid bodies and cutting af thair joyntis, or dansing in any desert kirk at midnight'.[81]

Meanwhile Scottish witches continued to confess to exhuming corpses for magical purposes.[82] These were not primarily for use in sabbaths, but the practice seems to have been related. There was a uniquely horrifying sabbath in Forfar in 1661 – the only recorded one at which babies were eaten; and they were dug up from graveyards rather than killed.[83] The witches' alleged purpose in cannibalism was to prevent them confessing – something which would concern the interrogators and which they may even have prompted. Spells to prevent confession had been mentioned in *Newes from Scotland*, the North Berwick witchcraft pamphlet, and there was comparable material in the *Malleus Maleficarum* itself.[84] The idea of nefarious use of body parts was known throughout Europe. However, in Catholic countries it was limited by a belief that exhumation was possible only for unbaptised babies: the power of baptism otherwise protected them.[85] The exhumation of corpses, though not unknown, was not one of the regular ingre-

dients of the Continental sabbath. There, the more extreme sabbaths included naked dancing, sexual orgies, and cannibalistic infanticide, none of which occurred in Scotland; but not this.[86] Exhumation of corpses was the one new offence added to English witchcraft law in 1604, possibly influenced by James's book.[87] But its prominence in Scotland seems distinctive. In the idea of exhumation of corpses as a central component of the witchcraft stereotype we seem to have a distinct Scottish tradition – clearly accepted by the elite, and possibly transmitted and encouraged by them.

James wrote *Daemonologie* against witches, but in arguing for the reality of witchcraft he began with the ritual magic of the elite. Elite magical traditions contributed to the development of some witchcraft ideas – notably the demonic pact and the idea of summoning up demons. Scotland's participation in this tradition goes back to the thirteenth century at least. A friar in *c.*1263 wrote that there had been a necromancer at the court of King William the Lion (1165–1214), and this was also the period of Michael Scot, celebrated astrologer to the Emperor Frederick II.[88] Courtly magicians were particularly prominent in the late middle ages, with competition for power at royal courts.[89] Scotland was involved in the fifteenth-century growth of Renaissance Neoplatonism – the scholarly attempt to use magic to develop a comprehensive cosmological understanding – as we saw with Robert Henryson's Orpheus poem. Whether there was a critique of Neoplatonism in Scotland is unclear but quite possible. Witchcraft beliefs were sometimes endorsed by orthodox Aristotelians concerned that Neoplatonic ideas of magic were demonic.[90]

Necromancy, another elite magical tradition, was prominent in sixteenth-century Scotland. The spectacular trial and execution in 1569 of the Lord Lyon, Sir William Stewart of Luthrie, was a leading case.[91] Elements of this magical tradition, and perhaps even Neoplatonism, may have been carried into the seventeenth century by freemasonry, which originated in Scotland in the 1590s.[92] William Schaw, architect (in every sense) of freemasonry, was closely connected with Richard Graham, the leading magician involved in the North Berwick witchcraft panic. Graham, who 'had ane familier spirit', was surely a necromancer, though he is the last for whom we have such explicit evidence at present.[93] Graham was associated with the fifth earl of Bothwell, and there has been thought-provoking discussion of the connection of Bothwell and others with Italian magicians.[94]

There was also popular respect for elite magicians, or people believed to have been such. David Riccio, the assassinated Italian confidant of

Queen Mary, acquired a posthumous magical reputation. The charmer Robert Murray in Glenesk, interrogated for witchcraft in 1588, confessed that he had 'falselie assurit that he wes Senyeor David's man'.[95] As for Michael Scot, Scottish legends concerning his prodigious magical feats date from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century.[96] Learned magic, or the idea of it, was important in Scotland.

VI

This chapter began with a series of general statements about European witchcraft. In popular belief there were maleficent, vengeful witches harming their neighbours through secret spells. There was also probably more than one stereotype of the witch; in the main such stereotype, the witch was an older woman, but there appear to have been other stereotypes including the 'warlock' (a common term for a male witch) and even the necromancer.[97] Among the elite there were the demonic pact and the witches' sabbath. Scotland, having all of this, was arguably more typical than many European countries. There were many countries where the elites did not swallow so much demonological theory – famously England, but also Italy, Spain, Portugal, and much of Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. Popular belief in neighbourhood witchcraft was more widespread but may not have been strong everywhere – in Estonia, there were very few witchcraft prosecutions and a majority of witches were men.[98] Seen within the picture of European diversity, Scotland still emerges as 'fairly typical' of Europe as a whole, but its closest affinities are with those Protestant states that prosecuted witches seriously.

Some of Scotland's most distinctive features related to the role of the state and the practice of witch-hunting. Witchcraft belief must evidently precede witch-hunting, but some witch-hunting practices fed back into the range of beliefs that Scottish people held about witches. Scotland was notable for witch-pricking and sleep deprivation as ways to detect witches and extort confessions; witch-pricking encouraged people to take the witch's mark seriously and to emphasise physical aspects of the demonic pact, while sleep deprivation foregrounded witches' confessions and provided vivid details of witchcraft belief. Scotland's centralised system of authorising trials seems to have worked in favour of witch-hunting for longer. Centralised states tended to restrain prosecutions, but Scotland experienced repeated witchcraft panics from 1590 until 1662, illustrating how difficult it was for witch-obsessed authorities to adopt procedural caution. The sustained way in which Scottish witch-hunting underpinned a programme of godly dis-

cipline was unusual – though it could be seen simply as a successful version of something to which other states also aspired.[99]

Turning to popular belief, all regions had some distinctive beliefs or practices. Genevan witches paid the Devil an annual tax. Some Swedish witches rode sheriffs to the sabbath, propping their sheriff against the wall head-down until it was time to go home.[100] English witches had their distinctive familiars. In Scotland we have fairy beliefs helping to construct the picture of the Devil. There is also the surprising fact that Scottish peasants do not seem to have feared that their community's crops would be attacked by witchcraft. Other than that, neighbourhood witchcraft in Scotland was very much mainstream.

What of the deeper folkloric beliefs? Peter Burke, one of those fascinated by the Ginzburg material, has proposed a three-tier model of witchcraft beliefs. At the top was the 'demonological' witchcraft of the elite; below, there was 'neighbourly witchcraft', and below that, 'archaic, shamanistic witchcraft'.[101] The term 'shamanistic' may be over-used, but this multi-level model does seem persuasive. Following Robin Briggs one might add a fourth level below Burke's three: biologically-determined witchcraft, inherited from our palaeolithic ancestors. Briggs suggests that human beings have an inbuilt psychological mechanism which might 'predispose us to regard other people as malevolent secret enemies'; early humans might have needed to evolve a way of detecting witches in order to cope with misfortune.[102] This is suggestive, but Ronald Hutton's recent criticisms should be taken into account. He argues that belief in maleficent witchcraft is common but not universal among traditional societies, and that broad cultural regions can be traced in which explanations for misfortune vary. Although many cultures identify witches, others ascribe misfortune to non-human entities, principally angry or evil spirits.[103]

What this survey points to, in fact, is a compromise between Briggs and Hutton. The neighbourhood witch as author of misfortune can be prosecuted: the evil spirit as author of misfortune cannot. But some of the non-human entities in early modern folk cosmology *could* be involved in witchcraft belief and prosecution. Fairies appeared in many Scottish confessions, but they were less common in neighbours' accusations. If Scottish folklore had been wholly dominated by fairies, then uncanny misfortune would have been ascribed only to them and nobody would ever have pointed the finger at a witch. Even if the elite had believed in the demonic pact and the witches' sabbath, they could not have hunted witches; the peasants would have closed ranks against their enquiries. Witch-hunts based on pact and sabbath could spread

through a chain reaction, but the initial link in the chain was always a witch denounced by neighbours, and that would have been unobtainable. Alas, what actually happened was that folklore contained a lethal combination of fairies and witches. People blamed some misfortune on fairies, but did also sometimes point the finger at witchcraft suspects. Interrogated, those suspects often turned out to possess fairy beliefs – which the elite construed as demonic. Fairies facilitated witch-hunting.

This raises a final question. Was it different before witch-hunting started? Could earlier fairies have tipped the scales in the other direction? They could have made the medieval elite sceptical about witchcraft accusations. Perceiving that peasants believed superstitious fairy nonsense, they could have dismissed witchcraft beliefs as similar delusions. This is relevant in a European context because of the Canon *Episcopi*, the medieval law against a belief that women travelled or flew out at night with Diana or Herodias. It treated this, not as witchcraft, but as a delusion.[104] It was a demonic delusion, to be sure, but the practical effect of the Canon *Episcopi* was to deflect medieval elites away from identifying or prosecuting real, human witches. Did medieval fairies do something similar in Scotland? The thirteenth-century 'Miracles of St Margaret' recorded at least two instances of misfortune inflicted by fairy-like beings, who could have been alternatives to witches.[105] Perhaps one day we will have answers to this and other questions concerning the *longue durée* of folk belief. Beliefs about witchcraft were extraordinarily durable yet constantly varying, and questions seem to come as fast as answers.

Notes

1 J. G. Dalyell, *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1834), p. vi.
2 L. Martin, 'The Devil and the domestic: witchcraft, quarrels and women's work in Scotland', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002).
3 SSW.
4 *Spalding Misc.*, i, 177.
5 British Library, Egerton MS 2879, fo. 4v.
6 L. Yeoman, 'Hunting the rich witch in Scotland: high-status witchcraft suspects and their persecutors, 1590–1650', in Goodare (ed.), *Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, discusses the malefices believed to have been experienced by several active witch-hunters. A further study broadens this out and identifies a pattern of malefices against lairds' sons: J. Goodare, 'Men and the witch-hunt in Scotland', in A. Rowlands (ed.), *Witchcraft and Masculinities in the Early Modern World* (forthcoming).
7 'Trials for witchcraft in Crook of Devon, Kinross-shire, 1662', (ed.) R. Burns Begg, *PSAS*, 22 (1887–8), 211–41, at pp. 224, 231–2. For some

attacks on particular farmers see E. J. Cowan, 'Witch persecution and folk belief in Lowland Scotland: the Devil's decade', Chapter 3 below.

8 SSW. See also Katherine Oswald in Niddrie, 1629, where raising a storm was mentioned but no specific damage was cited: *SJC*, i, 131. Dalyell's long section on 'Controlling the elements' contained a wide variety of material, but nothing on storms destroying crops: Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 237–70.

9 SSW. For further cases see J. M. McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in North-East Scotland* (London, 1929), 186–7. For attacks on grain in kilns, by Katherine Oswald and Alexander Hamilton, see *SJC*, i, 137, 145.

10 R. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: the Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (2nd edn, London, 2002), 34.

11 W. Behringer, 'Weather, hunger and fear: the origins of the European witch persecution in climate, society and mentality', *German History*, 13 (1995), 1–27.

12 G. F. Jensen, 'Time and social history: problems of atemporality in historical analysis with illustrations from research on early modern witch hunts', *Historical Methods*, 30 (1997), 46–57.

13 J. Goodare, 'Women and the witch-hunt in Scotland', *Social History*, 23 (1998), 288–308, at pp. 292–3. For more on the panics see L. Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics re-examined', Chapter 5 below.

14 'The Chronicle of Fortirgall', in *The Black Book of Taymouth*, (ed.) C. Innes (Bannatyne Club, 1855).

15 C. Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (London, 1983).

16 É. Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead: a Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age* (Budapest, 1999), 134–49; G. Klaniczay, 'Shamanistic elements in central European witchcraft', in M. Hoppál (ed.), *Shamanism in Eurasia* (Göttingen, 1984).

17 C. Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. R. Rosenthal (Harmondsworth, 1991). For a leading review see K. Thomas in the *Observer*, 20 Jan. 1991; for a more recent assessment see Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 30–1, 48.

18 W. Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoeckhlin and the Phantoms of the Night*, trans. H. C. E. Midelfort (Charlottesville, Va., 1998); J.-C. Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: the Living and the Dead in Medieval Society* (Chicago, Ill., 1998); Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*.

19 M. Stewart, 'King Orphius', *Scottish Studies*, 17 (1973), 1–16; J. MacQueen, 'Neoplatonism and Orphism in fifteenth-century Scotland', *Scottish Studies*, 20 (1976), 69–89.

20 R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (London, 1989), 90–4.

21 D. Ogier, 'Night revels and werewolfery in Calvinist Guernsey', *Folklore*, 109 (1998), 53–62. On combining belief and disbelief, see D. Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: a History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (Harmondsworth, 2000), 86.

22 J. Miller, 'Devices and directions: folk healing aspects of witchcraft practice in seventeenth-century Scotland', in Goodare (ed.), *Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*; M. Puhvel, 'The mystery of the cross-roads', *Folklore*, 87 (1976), 167–77.

23 Some comparative indications can be gathered from G. Bennett, 'Ghost and witch in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Folklore*, 97 (1986), 3–14, and J. Bath and J. Newton, '"Sensible proof of spirits": ghost belief during the later seventeenth century', *Folklore*, 117 (2006), 1–14.
24 N. Caciola, 'Wraiths, revenants and ritual in medieval culture', *Past and Present*, 152 (Aug. 1996), 3–45.
25 S. Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-Hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560–1710* (East Linton, 2002), 111.
26 SSW.
27 Cf. C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (London, 1980).
28 Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, ch. 3; C. Zika, *Exorcizing Our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2003), ch. 9.
29 'Acts and statutes of the lawting, sheriff and justice courts within Orkney and Shetland, 1602–1644', *Maitland Miscellany*, ii (1840), 187–91; cf. D. Purkiss, 'Sounds of silence: fairies and incest in Scottish witchcraft stories', in S. Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (London, 2001).
30 W. Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (London, 1884), 134. This was a different John Stewart from the spirit-guide of Elspeth Riach.
31 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, II, 55–7; cf. L. Henderson and E. J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: a History* (East Linton, 2001), 59–60. Janet Morrison in Rothesay in 1662 'met with the devil quhen he was goeing by with a great number of men that she asked at him quhat were these that went by who answered they are my company and quhen she speired [i.e. asked] where they were going he answered that they were going to seek a prey': *HP*, iii, 23.
32 The essential work here is Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*.
33 Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 182–3; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, ch. 4; Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 87–8.
34 SSW.
35 SSW.
36 N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: the Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (2nd edn, London, 1993), 192–6.
37 S. Wilson, *The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-Modern Europe* (London, 2000), 72–3. For a suggestion that some identifiable witches might have been involved in storms see Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 35.
38 These were thought of both as real people, and, inconsistently, as wandering souls of the dead. The inquisitors, at any rate, seem not to have thought that they could be identified and punished. Ginzburg, *Night Battles*, 7–8, 60.
39 G. Henningsen, '"The Ladies from Outside": an archaic pattern of the witches' sabbath', in B. Ankarloo and G. Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1991).
40 On the *ved'ma* see W. F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: an Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia* (Stroud, 1999), 78–82.
41 NAS, Edinburgh presbytery records, CH2/121/1, fo. 9v. The last word, 'king', is uncertain, but the rest is clear. Margo Todd's transcription of

'gude mane' as 'Good May' is unacceptable, as is her related suggestion that this passage was about fairies: M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, Conn., 2002), 219–20.

42 *Booke of the Universall Kirk: Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland*, 3 vols., (ed.) T. Thomson (Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, 1839–45), iii, 834. See also McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs*, 134–41.

43 J. Miller, 'Men in black: appearances of the Devil in early modern Scottish witchcraft discourse', Chapter 6 below.

44 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 138–9, 148.

45 It usually appeared in confessions, doubtless often extorted by leading questions, but as early as 1597 it appeared in a neighbour's deposition: *Spalding Misc.*, i, 107.

46 C. Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981), 144–5; Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 178–80.

47 Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 32.

48 A. Ross, 'Incubi in the Isles in the thirteenth century', *Innes Review*, 13 (1962), 108–9.

49 Martín Del Rio, *Investigations into Magic*, (ed.) P. G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester, 2000), 89–91, 175–6.

50 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 135. Occasionally a 'witch' was *commissioned* to assist in a crime, as with Janet Irvine, the 'notorious witche' in the Erskine of Dun poisoning case of 1613–14: Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, I, 260–4, 266–9. The 'witches' commissioned by John Campbell of Ardkinglass to assist him after the assassination of John Campbell of Calder were similar, though they were not asked to carry out the actual killing: L. Henderson, 'Witch-hunting and witch belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*', Chapter 4 below.

51 Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*, 44–6.

52 E.g. Katherine Skair, Brechin, 1650: SSW.

53 E. Wilby, 'The witch's familiar and the fairy in early modern England and Scotland', *Folklore*, 111 (2000), 283–305.

54 Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 39–45.

55 Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*, 48–9.

56 There may even be a parallel between Wilby's analysis and the *benandanti*. She points out that fairies liked to have drinking water available, and if deprived of it would cause mischief. The witches fought by the *benandanti* were believed to do the same: Ginzburg, *Night Battles*, 2.

57 Quoted in Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 590.

58 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, II, 608; McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs*, 162–3.

59 Quoted in Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 241. Crow transformations were rare elsewhere, though there was much other folklore about them: S. Thompson (ed.), *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols. (2nd edn, Copenhagen, 1955–8), E732.2, G211.4.1.

60 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 226.

61 P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton, 2001), 102–5.

62 SSW.

63 Sir George Mackenzie, *Pleadings in some Remarkable Cases before the Supreme Courts of Scotland, since the year 1661* (Edinburgh, 1673), 194–5.

Dr Willem de Blécourt has kindly pointed out to me that this passage derives from Johan Wier.

64 *RPC*, 2nd ser., viii, 150.

65 James VI, *Daemonologie*, in James VI & I, *Minor Prose Works*, (ed.) J. Craigie (Scottish Text Society, 1982), 51–2; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 419 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, ch. 5). On second sight, see M. Hunter, 'The discovery of second sight in late 17th-century Scotland', *History Today*, 51:6 (June 2001), 48–53.

66 E. Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Brighton, 2005).

67 *Records of the Kirk of Scotland … from the year 1638 downwards*, (ed.) A. Peterkin (Edinburgh, 1838), 354.

68 'Witchcraft cases from the register of commissions of the privy council of Scotland, 1630–1642', (ed.) L. A. Yeoman, *SHS Miscellany*, xiii (2004), 233–6, 253–4, 260–5.

69 *HP*, iii, 21.

70 British Library, Egerton MS 2879, fo. 4r.–v.

71 L. A. Yeoman, 'The Devil as doctor: witchcraft, Wodrow and the wider world', *Scottish Archives*, 1 (1995), 93–105. For more on Scottish possession cases, most of which occurred very late, see B. P. Levack, 'Demonic possession in early modern Scotland', Chapter 7 below.

72 D. Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London, 1996), chs. 4–5; D. Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY, 1995), ch. 2; J. P. Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford, 1982), part 2; L. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1994), ch. 9.

73 E. Reis, 'Witches, sinners, and the underside of covenant theology', *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 129 (1993), 103–18, repr. in B. P. Levack (ed.), *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology*, 6 vols. (London, 2001), i, 271–86.

74 Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 180–1.

75 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, II, 602–16; 616–18.

76 *SJC*, iii, 611.

77 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 151–6. The term 'sabbath' does not occur in the Scottish sources but is historiographically convenient.

78 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 147.

79 James VI, *Daemonologie*, in *Minor Prose Works*, 41; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 392 (*Daemonologie*, Book 2, ch. 5).

80 It is unlikely to have come from Denmark. See P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, 'The fear of the king is death: James VI and the witches of East Lothian', in W. G. Naphy and P. Roberts (eds), *Fear in Early Modern Society* (Manchester, 1997), 212–13; T. Riis, *Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot: Scottish-Danish Relations, c.1450–1707*, 2 vols. (Odense, 1988), i, 266–9.

81 *RPC*, xiv, 621. He aimed to discourage witchcraft prosecution by banning arrests of suspects not caught doing these things, but this remains a credible account of what his colleagues thought witches might do. See M. Wasser, 'The privy council and the witches: the curtailment of witch-

craft prosecutions in Scotland, 1597–1628', *Scottish Historical Review*, 82 (2003), 20–46, at pp. 35–6.

82 Janet Wishart (Aberdeen, 1597 – taking members from the corpse of a man on the gallows, testified by a neighbour): *Spalding Misc.*, i, 90, 94–5. Patrick Lowrie (Dundonald, 1605): Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, ii, II, 478. Margaret Watson (Carnwath, 1644): *RPC*, 2nd ser., viii, 150.

83 'The confessions of the Forfar witches, 1661', (ed.) J. Anderson, *PSAS*, 22 (1887–8), 241–62, at p. 254; Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 157.

84 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 318; Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. M. Summers (London, 1928), III.15 (a spell using the ashes of an unbaptised baby).

85 W. Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago, Ill., 2002), 263. While this specific belief is not found in Scotland, at least two witches – Janet Morrison in Rothesay, and Isobel Goudie – did confess to having exhumed unchristened children: *HP*, iii, 26; Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, II, 603.

86 Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 25–50. There was one highly unusual case in Lorraine when a witch confessed to having disinterred the corpse of a child she had killed: *ibid.*, 33. For a 1477 case from Savoy mentioning exhumation see H. C. Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft*, 3 vols., (ed.) A. C. Howland (New York, 1957), i, 240.

87 But of 503 Essex cases, only one involved exhumation: A. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970), 15, 25.

88 Ross, 'Incubi in the Isles', 109; L. Thorndike, *Michael Scot* (London, 1965), ch. 12. Scot was learned in magic but may not have practised it.

89 E. Peters, *The Magician, the Witch and the Law* (Hassocks, 1978), 112–25.

90 Cf. H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Harmondsworth, 1969), 58–63; and, more cautiously, S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), chs. 14–15. Scottish philosophers were largely concerned with questions of logic, in which they were all fundamentally dependent on Aristotle: A. Broadie, 'Philosophy in Renaissance Scotland: loss and gain', in J. MacQueen (ed.), *Humanism in Renaissance Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1990).

91 Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy*, 57–60. For necromancy as a particular concern of the 1563 witchcraft act see J. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft act', *Church History*, 74 (2005), 39–67, at pp. 62–4.

92 D. Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590–1710* (Cambridge, 1988), ch. 5.

93 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 177–8; Sir James Melville of Halhill, *Memoirs of his Own Life*, (ed.) T. Thomson (Bannatyne Club, 1827), 396.

94 E. J. Cowan, 'The darker vision of the Scottish Renaissance: the Devil and Francis Stewart', in I. B. Cowan and D. Shaw (eds), *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1983), 138–9.

95 NLS, MS Acc. 9769. I am grateful to Dr Louise Yeoman for this reference.

96 J. Wood Brown, *An Enquiry into the Life and Legend of Michael Scot* (Edinburgh, 1897), 215–22.

97 Goodare, 'Men and the witch-hunt in Scotland'.
98 B. P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (3rd edn, London, 2006), ch. 7.
99 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 107–12; Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, ch. 8; J. Goodare, 'Witch-hunting and the Scottish state', in Goodare (ed.), *Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*.
100 E. W. Monter, 'Witchcraft in Geneva, 1537–1662', *Journal of Modern History*, 43 (1971), 179–204, at pp. 195–6; B. Ankarloo, 'Sweden: the mass burnings (1668–1676)', in Ankarloo and Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 314.
101 P. Burke, 'The comparative approach to European witchcraft', in Ankarloo and Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 441.
102 Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 340–2.
103 R. Hutton, 'The global context of the Scottish witch-hunt', in Goodare (ed.), *Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 20; cf. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 340, 355.
104 Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 166–75; Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 126–34.
105 R. Bartlett (ed.), *The Miracles of Saint Æbbe of Coldingham and Saint Margaret of Scotland* (Oxford, 2003), pp. l–liv, 82–5, 120–3.

2

Some Findings from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft

Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller

The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, completed in 2003, is a new resource that allows researchers to combine qualitative and quantitative themes.[1] The project created a database with 634 active fields, documenting cultural, economic, social and trial information about people accused of witchcraft in Scotland between 1563 and 1736.[2] The researchers conducted an exhaustive survey of witchcraft-related documents and collated information about witchcraft suspects that was already known. The data can be viewed and studied either through online web interfaces (with searching, graphing and mapping capabilities) or by downloading the full database.[3] This chapter describes the database, provides a summary of the project's main findings and aims to correct many commonly held misconceptions about Scottish witchcraft that are not supported by the evidence collected for the database.

I

The Survey was fortunate that two previous projects, by George F. Black and by Christina Larner, Christopher Hyde Lee and Hugh V. McLachlan, had identified a large number of documentary sources containing witchcraft material.[4] Black assembled a wide range of information from printed primary sources. Larner, Lee and McLachlan surveyed legal sources that were produced centrally and held in the National Archives of Scotland, including the books of adjournal, circuit court books and printed privy council and parliamentary records. They also looked at a selection of justiciary court process papers, unsorted legal paperwork and finally a range of other sources, which mainly included printed local records, local histories or personal accounts. They did not use manuscript church records.

While the Survey increased the amount of searchable details from Larner *et al.*'s ten fields to over 600 fields, the inclusion of different types of sources had to be considered carefully. All the primary legal material, including more of the unsorted process papers, as well as all the central material, was resurveyed. It was felt, however, that it would be less useful to resurvey all the printed primary and secondary sources, as these are relatively easy for other researchers to locate. Only a selection of this material was examined, notably the records of the privy council, acts of parliament, Pitcairn's *Trials*, and several club and society publications including those by the Spalding Club and Stair Society.[5] Most importantly, since Larner's team had not surveyed church material in any systematic way, a full survey of all extant presbytery records, and a sample of kirk session material, was conducted.[6] The Survey's definition of an accused witch was 'a person denounced for witchcraft, for whom we have evidence indicating that action (ecclesiastical, civil or both) was pursued'.[7]

The research team carried out as extensive a survey as possible within the time available and this is reflected in the wealth of information recorded on the database. That said, many documents did not survive and those that have survived do not necessarily tell us all that we would like to know. Most of the missing documentation relates to local aspects of witchcraft accusation and prosecution; thus surviving documents are heavily skewed towards centrally produced and kept records. The information contained in the surviving documentation ranges from simply a record of the name of a suspect and date of an accusation to an extremely rich and detailed dossier from many different types of sources with extensive locally and centrally produced documents. Central sources (particularly the privy council minutes) show that trials were authorised, but local trial documents themselves, or other indications that a local trial actually took place, seldom survive.

The lack of consistent documentation for witchcraft accusation and prosecution creates difficulties in using the database (and the underlying source materials) to draw conclusions about early modern witchcraft. In order to ameliorate some of these problems we built three searching tools into the database that allow users to create subsets of cases.[8] First, we gave each witchcraft case a primary and secondary characterisation.[9] Cases with little detail were given the primary characterisation of 'Not Enough Information'. By excluding these, a subset of well-documented cases can be created and analysed. Of course, researchers using the database will need to determine whether this well-documented subset is indicative of the total population of cases.

We believe that in many ways it is not. The well-documented cases tend to be those tried in the court of justiciary in Edinburgh or the circuit courts, whereas most witchcraft suspects were tried in the locality with a commission of justiciary from the central government. That is one reason why we created a second tool for database users to create additional subsets of suspects based on trial process venue: central or local trial. Finally, suspects can be grouped by a specific source, including church and government sources.

The result provides a wealth of detail about both the accused and their families, their neighbours and communities, their work and lives and the cultural beliefs and practices that provided not only the material for accusations but also underpinned the contemporary *mentalité* or worldview. The belief system of early modern society encompassed theories about religion and the supernatural, which included such figures as the Devil, fairies and other spirits but also angels and ghosts.[10] Many of these figures, not just the Devil, were identified as being malevolent.[11] Witchcraft was used to explain misfortune, and it allowed people a means to overcome it.

II

Understanding the data recorded in the Survey requires some structural explanation of the database. The Survey database was developed to record both quantitative and qualitative information, and was primarily structured around the accused witchcraft suspect, including personal and family biographical material. The next level of information recorded for each accused person, the case material, included details about people involved in the investigation process, the trial process and trial, beings and meetings, folk culture, disease and damage and any other charges. The people involved in investigation and prosecution included lawyers, ministers, judges, clerks, bailies and other town officials, kirk elders, local lairds or landowners, neighbours and witch prickers. The trial process was divided into pre-trial actions, including investigative actions or commissions; the trial itself, either local or central; and post-trial events or outcomes. Alternatively, an individual might have been mentioned by another person but did not appear in any investigation or trial themselves. In this case it was recorded that the accused had been mentioned as a witch in someone else's trial; for some individuals this might be the only reference to them that exists.

The case material included a section entitled 'Beings and Meetings'. This allowed the Survey to record cultural information about the

appearance of non-natural or demonic beings: if they were identifiably male or female, for instance, or if they took the form of an animal or insect. Features of demonic pacts were also recorded: if the accused had made a pact with the Devil, renounced their baptism, been given a new name or received the Devil's mark. Information about location of meetings or sabbaths, who attended, what was done, partaking of food and drink, or collective malefice was also recorded.

The section on folk culture allowed the project to record information about fairyland, the use of sympathetic magic, physical and verbal rituals, white magic, calendar customs, religious motifs and shape changing. A reference to the good neighbours, or a woman in a green kirtle, was recorded as a fairy motif. Any mention of second sight or prophecy, finding lost goods or love magic was included as white magic. The use of ritual objects such as thread, water, stones or herbs was noted, as were saints' days or other calendar festivals such as Beltane (1 May), Halloween or Pasche (Easter). Religious motifs such as the Trinity or Christian prayers, crosses or holy wells were also recorded.

As disease and damage were usually perceived as the intended outcomes of demonic witchcraft it was logical to include a section where this could be recorded. This meant that the Survey was able to note outcomes such as human illness or death, animal illness or death, infertility, impotence, transferring or laying on and taking off of disease, any harm, and poisoning. Damage or harm to property such as loss of milk or dairy products, failure of crops, failure of brewing or loss of ships was noted. The project also recorded how many of the accused might have been involved in curing or healing disease. Any mention of healing humans and animals was noted, as were references to midwifery. In this section it was also noted if the accused had given any reason for their malice, including revenge, debt, failed business interaction, social slight or refusal of alms. Any information about charges other than witchcraft that were laid against the accused was recorded.

The Survey also collected detailed information about the legal processes through which suspected witches were accused and tried. A breakdown of trial types will be presented here, as the full scope of legal information contained in the database is beyond the scope of this chapter.[12] This is followed by a discussion of Survey findings on the numbers of accused witches and the timing, scope and distribution of accusations.

The Survey identified four trial process types: central, local, circuit court (also referred to as mixed central/local), and suspects mentioned in the trial process of another accused witch. The Survey was able to

assign multiple trial processes to those individual witchcraft suspects who were processed, or tried, more than once. The most common trial process type was local. The Survey found 1,936 local trial processes. In the majority of these cases the only surviving evidence that a trial might have taken place was when local authorities applied for and received a commission of justiciary to try witchcraft suspects in the local area. New documents surveyed by the Survey found that the next most common trial process type was the circuit court, where 293 witchcraft suspects appeared. In general, the best-documented cases are the 178 central trial processes; most of the minutes of these trials have survived. The Survey also included the 803 witchcraft suspects mentioned in the trial of another accused witch. Some of these suspects also had their own trial processes. All accusations and trials had both local and central aspects; suspects were identified and evidence was collected in the localities and trials normally required central permission.

III

One of the most frequently asked questions about witchcraft practice and prosecution is: how many people were accused or executed? Because the recorded evidence is patchy and incomplete, we can provide only a qualified answer. There have been various attempts to quantify the number of people accused and executed in Scotland. Larner and her team identified what they classed as 'cases': any mention of a trial for witchcraft.[13] This meant that some cases involved individual people but others referred to multiples. Larner recorded 3,069 'cases' but, although many people were listed in more than one source, they were not collated, which meant that there were several hundred duplicates. In *Enemies of God*, Larner wrote that they had identified 2,208 named and anonymous people, a figure that was somewhat lower than other estimates.[14] Older accounts had given various figures: 4,500 up to 30,000. Sometimes these numbers are still repeated and quoted (often as figures for executions), but they are outdated. Some of these older estimates were based on figures for one year or one area that were then extrapolated and applied throughout the country and total time period. Few local areas experienced the same pattern of accusation and prosecution in the 173 years between the passing of the Witchcraft Act in 1563 and its repealing in 1736, so this method of estimating is flawed.

The numerical totals that we recorded on the database should be accurate as far as they go, but they are unlikely to be complete.[15] The

Survey identified 3,837 people who were accused of witchcraft in Scotland. 3,212 of those were named people. The figure of 625 unnamed people is a minimum estimate, as many references to suspects often just noted several people or some women. It was impossible to measure, with any degree of certainty, how many people 'several' (or 'many') meant. If two people were tried this was usually stated quite clearly, so 'several' was taken to mean more than this but it was decided to err on the side of caution and take it as indicating just three. It is very possible that on some occasions the number of unnamed accused was a lot higher than this.

Not all witchcraft suspects were executed (a point that is often obscured in popular accounts), and the Scottish sources make execution rates particularly hard to determine. Larner suggested a figure of 1,337 executions, with an error of 300 either way, out of the 2,208 accused that she identified. She felt, however, that this was an overestimation.[16] Larner based her figures on commissions that were issued for trying and burning and took these to indicate definite executions. Our figures for known executions are even lower than this as we did not assume that an execution took place unless we found an actual death sentence. We recorded a sentence of any kind in only 307 cases. From this we know that 206 people were to be executed, 52 acquitted or released, 27 banished, 11 declared fugitive, 6 excommunicated and 2 put to the horn (outlawed). One person was to be kept in prison but their eventual outcome is unknown. One person was to be branded and another to be publicly humiliated, although this may refer to the same thing. In cases with a known outcome, 67 per cent, or two thirds, were executed.

If this percentage is extrapolated to the total number of known accused witchcraft suspects then it would seem that between 2,152 and 2,570 people might have been executed in Scotland. However, this is not a reliable figure. The figure of 67 per cent is based on only 307 known outcomes, which is less than 10 per cent of the 3,212 named people and less than 8 per cent if we include the unnamed people as well. There are at least two ways that these 307 sentences may not be typical. First, the majority of cases with known outcomes were recorded by the central justiciary court rather than by locally convened courts. The justiciary court acquitted a higher percentage of accused than the local courts; Larner and her team estimated its acquittal rate to be at least 50 per cent higher.[17] Since more trials were held locally this might mean that the total number of those executed might well be higher. On the other hand, the accused that the Survey recorded

includes those who were being investigated by church authorities. Some of them may have gone on to have a trial and subsequent execution. On the other hand, others may have had charges against them dropped, so the number of executions may be lower. Much more detailed statistical analysis of the Survey data will be necessary in order to help settle some of these thorny questions; even then, some uncertainties will probably remain.

IV

The timing and geographical distribution of witchcraft accusations is another much-discussed aspect of witchcraft prosecution. Here the Survey can be very illuminating because detailed information about the residence of accused witches and all known dates of procedures and actions associated with the prosecution of each suspect were gathered. This information is analysed elsewhere in this volume, but a general overview of the Survey's findings will be provided here.[18]

Witchcraft was a statutory crime in Scotland from 1563 to 1736. The majority of suspects were accused between 1589 and 1663, with a few notable exceptions before and after: 1568, 1577, 1678–9, 1697–1700. Some years saw a much larger number of suspects than others, particularly 1591, 1597, 1628–30, 1643–4, 1649–50, 1658–9 and 1661–2. Using data from the Survey, Figure 2.1, 'Accused Witches in Scotland, 1561–1736', shows the last known date associated with an accused witch.[19]

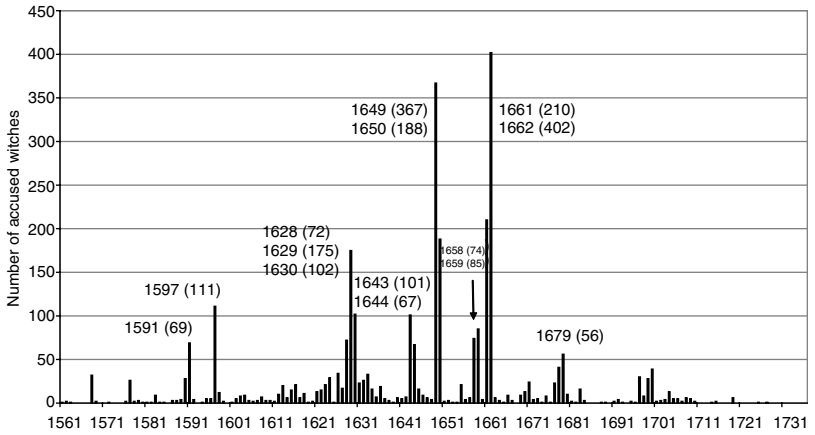

Figure 2.1 Accused Witches in Scotland, 1561–1736

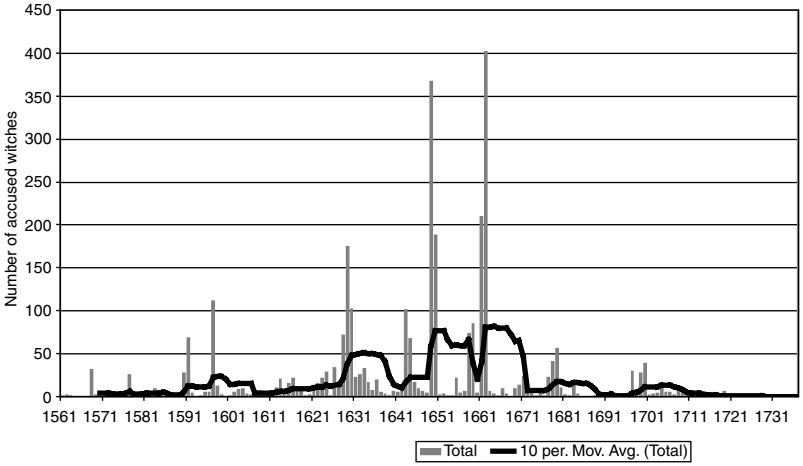

Figure 2.2 Accused Witches, Ten-year Trends, 1561–1736

Most cases did not unfold in only one year. Many took ten to 40 years between first accusation and final action. Figure 2.2, 'Accused Witches, Ten-year Trends, 1561–1736', shows what witchcraft accusation and prosecution activity might look like over time when the overall case length is more adequately represented. In Figure 2.1, the yearly accusations look sharp and decisive. But for many suspects and their communities witchcraft accusations and prosecution emerged slowly over time. The overall timing of witchcraft does not look different with the ten-year moving average; rather witchcraft prosecution activity looks more gradual over the period of most intensive witchcraft prosecution in Scotland.

Suspects were accused from every region and almost every county in Scotland, but available evidence suggests that witchcraft suspects lived in only approximately one-third of Scottish parishes.[20] Each county had its own timing of accusations per year that differed from the overall number of accusations per year. Over one-third of known witchcraft accusations were in the counties of the Lothians – Edinburgh, Haddington and Linlithgow. Because the Lothians contributed such a large proportion of suspects, it is not surprising that the timing of accusations per year from the counties of the Lothians region more closely matched the overall timing of accusations per year displayed in Figure 2.1 than any other county in Scotland.[21]

V

What kinds of people were accused of witchcraft in Scotland? Who were they and what were they like? The dominant image of a witch in the early modern period was similar to the modern stereotype: an old, poor, widowed woman. But was this image reflected in the actual range of witchcraft suspects? The idea that they were female is generally supported by Survey data. Women make up 85 per cent of all people accused of witchcraft in Scotland. This is the Survey's most reliable figure because gender was determined for all but 49 people (1.5%). However, the other enduring aspects of witch-stereotypes held then and now, such as age, socio-economic status and marital status, are not so well supported by data collected by the Survey. Since this data is not nearly as conclusive as the information on gender, it requires discussion and analysis.

Table 2.1 shows the ages of accused witches for whom an age was known or could reasonably be estimated. Age was estimated for the 'case date', the date of the last known legal proceeding.

Thus 40 per cent of witchcraft suspects were aged 40 or under, 54 per cent were between the ages of 41 and 60, and only 7 per cent were 61 or above (bearing in mind that the Survey recorded the age of a suspect in only 5 per cent of cases). The most common age of an accused witch was 50.[22] The average age of witchcraft suspects, however, was only 43. Table 2.1 shows that 81 per cent of witchcraft suspects were under the age of 51. The data suggests that the majority of witchcraft suspects were between their late thirties and very early fifties. This finding can reasonably be extrapolated to suspects where age is not known, particularly the missing documentation in local trial processes.[23]

Table 2.1 Age of Witchcraft Suspects (When Known)

Age	**Num.**	**%**
20 or under	11	7%
21 to 30	19	11%
31 to 40	36	22%
41 to 50	68	41%
51 to 60	21	13%
61 to 70	6	4%
71 or over	5	3%
Total	166	

Should someone in their forties or fifties be considered old in the early modern period? One way to think about age is in reference to average life expectancy. The average life expectancy at birth in early modern Scotland was around 31 years, suggesting that an age of 43 or 50 was pretty old by early modern standards.[24] Life expectancy data, however, includes a very high infant mortality rate and is not necessarily indicative of adult survival rates. If a person survived to the age of 30 they could be expected to survive at least to 56, suggesting that 40 or 50 was not unusually old. It is likely, however, that although chronologically the women were not as old as previously thought, physically the ageing process started sooner than it does today in terms of menopause. Fertility ceased around age 40, with visible changes associated with the menopause occurring by or around the age of 50.[25] The Survey data, therefore, suggests that witchcraft suspects were generally middle-aged or slightly older, but not unusually old.

The age of an accused witch at one moment in her trial process may be too static a category anyway. Our findings suggest that a witchcraft accusation often took decades to emerge, solidify in the minds of accusers and reach a trial. Therefore, the age of a witchcraft suspect at trial is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the age span during which a woman could be suspected of witchcraft: they could be a lot younger when their reputation first developed. More analysis might tell us if older women were more prone to being brought to trial, perhaps because their witchcraft reputations were more solidified or because they were more vulnerable socially and culturally.

The Survey data suggests that, contrary to stereotypes about witchcraft suspects and evidence from elsewhere in Europe,[26] most were married at the time of accusation and trial. This makes sense given the roughly middle-aged profile of most witchcraft suspects. Marital status is known only for 23 per cent of accused witches; a large majority of these were married (78%), some were widowed (20%) and very few were single (2%).

Can the proportion of married to widowed suspects reasonably be extrapolated to estimate the marital status of witchcraft suspects without documentation, particularly those who had local trials? The proportion of married to widowed suspects was similar across the trial process venues.[27] This could, however, be a reflection of a systematic bias where married women were likely to be identified with their husbands, whereas single or widowed women would be recorded without mention of their marital status.[28] It is therefore possible that the majority of suspects with an unknown marital status were single or widowed.

For most suspects, particularly those tried locally, unreported marital status is undoubtedly due to poor documentation. The fact that some cases recorded that a suspect was unmarried or widowed mitigates to some extent the notion that suspects with an unknown marital status were more likely to be widows or single.[29] But because of the possibility of a systematic bias in reporting, conclusions about marital status must remain uncertain.

Another stereotype is that witchcraft suspects were in general poorer or more economically marginal than their neighbours. How true is this? Witchcraft suspects were generally drawn neither from elite ranks of society nor from the very poor. Rather, they tended to be wives (or sometimes widows) of farmers, craftsmen or other middling people.[30] Table 2.2 shows a breakdown of socio-economic status.

The Survey was able to ascertain socio-economic status for only 11 per cent of all witchcraft suspects. Examining the socio-economic status of suspects within each trial process type suggests how the data might be extrapolated to estimate overall socio-economic trends within the entire population of witchcraft suspects. Middling and lower status suspects, that is those able to make a living within their communities, predominated in all trial process types, particularly local ones.[31] The numbers of elite and very poor suspects, however, differed across trial types. Central trial processes had a much higher proportion of elite witchcraft suspects (18%) than other trial process types[32] and local trial processes had a higher proportion of very poor suspects (12%).[33] An elite suspect would be more likely and able to demand a trial before the highest court in the land; a very poor person would be forced to stand trial wherever local elites demanded. As the majority of missing documents are from local trial processes it is likely that the overall socio-economic status of witchcraft suspects would more closely reflect

Table 2.2 Socio-Economic Status of Witchcraft Suspects (When Known)

Socio-economic Status	**Number**	**%**
Lairds/Baron	5	1%
Nobility/Chiefs	4	1%
Upper	16	4%
Middling	231	64%
Lower	72	20%
Landless	16	4%
Very Poor	18	5%
Total	362	

trends in local trials: 4 per cent elite, 84 per cent middling or lower status, and 12 per cent very poor and marginal. The Survey's data, therefore, do not support the widely-held idea that witchcraft suspects were poor, widowed, marginal women. Rather, while not conclusive, they suggest that witchcraft suspects were generally middle-aged, married women who were enmeshed in the economic and social fibre of their communities.

VI

Like many periods and events in history, witchcraft prosecution and belief has thrown up many myths and folk legends. Some names such as Kate MacNiven and Maggie Wall have local legends attached to them. In the case of the former this was associated with a ring that was believed to bring good fortune to the Graham family[34] and the name of the latter, despite being erased repeatedly, appears on a stone near Dunning in Perthshire commemorating her execution for witchcraft in 1657. According to the documentary sources that the Survey and previous surveys checked, neither of these two women appears to have been formally accused or tried for witchcraft. The fact that their stories were not recorded in written documents does not necessarily mean that they did not exist; it could mean that they were not documented or the documentation has been lost. Stories about witches and witchcraft feature in many local oral, or folk, narratives and they may have their origins in fact.

On the other hand, there are other myths that have built up over the years that are inaccurate but nevertheless have been perpetuated for a variety of reasons. These include theories that all of the people accused of witchcraft were really midwives and healers, that they met in groups of thirteen, or that they flew on broomsticks. It has also been claimed that they believed they were practising witchcraft because of drug-induced hallucinations. Another myth is that the swimming test was used in order to prove the guilt or innocence of an accused person: if they sank they were innocent, but if they swam they were guilty.

These myths have not generally been supported by documentary evidence. The correlation between witchcraft and midwifery or healing has been convincingly dismantled.[35] Only nine Scottish individuals in the Survey had their occupation recorded as midwife, and accusations involving midwifery were recorded in only three of these cases. Midwifery was part of the accusations made against a further seven women not formally identified as midwives, but the figures suggest

that midwives were not specifically targeted because of their midwifery skills.[36] Midwives and midwifery, mentioned in just over 0.5 per cent of cases in Scotland, did not, therefore, play a major role in witchcraft accusations.

Witches were described as healing humans and animals more often than as being midwives. Healing was part of the accusations made against 141 people or just over 4 per cent of the total accused but, as mentioned earlier, most cases present very little detail. When the subset of 328 detailed cases is examined, healing was part of the accusations made against 80 suspects. In 40, healing was the primary element in accusations made against them, accounting for 12 per cent. This figure is not reliable because a lot of information may not have been recorded in the documentation and because it is based on a small proportion of all the cases; nevertheless it does suggest that, although healing and medicine were important, they were not necessarily regarded as unequivocal features of witchcraft practice. This is perhaps surprising, because beliefs about causation and healing of illness and injury were so closely related. Belief in magic underpinned society's explanations both about how they became ill and how they could be cured, and those who had the power to heal were believed to have had the power to harm. It is therefore quite possible that many of the other people accused of witchcraft did have healing skills but this aspect of their practice or knowledge was not regarded as significant at the time of their accusation; it was their practice of malefice that was more important. What is clear is that people were not accused of witchcraft simply because of their knowledge of healing. Some of those who were investigated for healing using magic were accused of the lesser offence of charming – magical healing – and were not tried for witchcraft.[37]

Another common myth is that witches met in groups or covens of thirteen. This theory was perpetuated by the work of Margaret Murray.[38] The documentary evidence surveyed by the project did not confirm this. Much of Murray's thesis was based on the case of Isobel Goudie from Auldearn, who was accused in 1662. A great deal of Goudie's confession is unusual in its content. Some other confessions and accounts do mention meeting in groups, but these ranged in size from two or three to over 100, and in one case 2,300.[39] Some large groups who were prosecuted were not always included or described in confessions.[40]

One feature of witches' meetings, related to elite interpretations of witchcraft, is that witches worshipped the Devil and engaged in acts of communal sex and malefice. Demonic involvement was mentioned

in a total of 528 records. Although there may have been a range of reasons for the accusations, key features such as renunciation of baptism, having the Devil's mark and making a covenant with the Devil were mentioned in confessions. Demonic pact, however, was deemed the primary characterisation of only 49 cases. This accounts for 15 per cent of the cases that the project was able to characterise and, although it was the second most frequent reason, it did not dominate as much as might have been expected.

Demonic possession was another aspect of demonic involvement and interestingly, it was recorded as the primary characterisation for 55 cases, or 17 per cent, the highest number. All of these demonic possession cases, however, are from two well-documented groups of cases in western Scotland at the end of the seventeenth century just as witchcraft prosecutions were on the wane. The total number of cases that featured demonic pact, demonic possession or both is 567.[41] These statistics indicate that the Devil and his relationship with the accused was important to witchcraft prosecution, but it does not necessarily mean that the accused worshipped the Devil. It simply demonstrates that it was described in confessions. Many of these confessions were made as a result of torture and mental pressure, and the content and detail may well not have been literally true.

As for flight, there is very little evidence that Scottish witches were believed to fly on broomsticks. Continental witch beliefs did include flying – on sticks, broomsticks and the backs of animals, or simply under their own power.[42] Isobel Goudie described putting a piece of straw between her legs and riding it like a horse but hardly anyone else mentioned this practice.[43] Some of the accused mentioned metamorphosis and the ability to appear in the form of an animal. Others mentioned flying to meetings at night. Although Alison Pierson claimed that she was transported in a whirlwind, the means of transport to most meetings was not mentioned.[44] The evidence suggests that although there was some reference to witches' flight it was not a key feature of witchcraft belief in Scotland.

In many modern accounts of witch trials, not least film versions, the swimming test is a key feature of proof of guilt. There are many local legends relating to witches' pools, particularly the witches' lake at St Andrews. An account from 1597 described accused witches having their thumbs and toes tied together and then being thrown into the water.[45] The panic of 1597 is the only time when there is evidence of the swimming test being used in Scotland.[46] James VI mentioned the use of water to detect witches in *Daemonologie*:

> fleeting on the water for, as in a secret murder, if the dead carcass be at any time thereafter handled by the murderer, it will gush out of blood … So it appears that God hath appointed, for a supernatural sign of the monstrous impiety of the witches, that the water shall refuse to receive them.[47]

The ordeal of swimming those suspected of practising witchcraft seems to have been used elsewhere in Europe by 1600. Nevertheless it was criticised by academics and was prohibited by the *parlement* of Paris in 1601, so overall its use may have been limited.[48] Apart from the 1597 account, and James VI's opinion, there is no other evidence for its use in Scotland. In contrast, the 'bierricht' test whereby the accused was made to touch the corpse, mentioned by James VI, was used on a number of occasions in Scotland and elsewhere.[49] In this test, if the body of a presumed victim bled when an accused witch touched it, it was held that the victim had been murdered by the suspect.

Another image from recent popular culture is that witches partook of drugs and experienced drug-induced hallucinations, voluntary or otherwise. Drugs have been used to explain both the confessions of the accused and also the symptoms experienced by demonic possession. The theory relates to the symptoms of ergot poisoning, or ergotism, which is caused by ingesting rye that has been contaminated with the ergot fungus. The condition, which is also known as St Anthony's fire, produces burning pains, itching skin and convulsions and can eventually result in gangrene. Rye was a rare crop in Scotland but large quantities were imported during food shortages in the 1590s.[50] The use of affected rye may have contributed to the accusations and trials in 1597, particularly as it has been shown that rye was imported to Aberdeen in 1596. It has been argued, however, that there are no obvious cases of ergotism in the evidence from the Aberdeen trials.[51] Another problem with this thesis is that there were accusations of witchcraft from the 1590s to the 1690s, but there does not appear to be any evidence to suggest that ergot was a factor in any other year or years.

VII

Was the experience of witchcraft and witchcraft trials in Scotland uniquely Scottish or the same as the rest of Europe? The answer to this question would, of course, be yes to both parts, but a qualified yes.[52]

Scotland was very much part of European culture and experienced many of the same problems and issues. At the same time it was independent and, because it had its own legal and ecclesiastical systems, developed its own interpretation of witchcraft and its prosecution.

This chapter is by no means an exhaustive discussion of all that the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft can tell us about witchcraft belief. The material compiled by the Survey provides such a range of information about witchcraft belief, practice and prosecution, and its wider context, that we were only able to address a select number here. There are many aspects of witchcraft that are still under-researched and the database provides an efficient starting point and means of identifying potential topics and sources for more detailed analysis.

Folk culture and regional variation have been examined by Edward J. Cowan, Lizanne Henderson and Joyce Miller in this book, but further research has still to be done on other elements of folk culture and belief.[53] Very little has been written, for example, about shape shifting, familiars or ghosts in Scotland. Henderson usefully examines witch belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*, but there is still work to be done comparing the folk beliefs and experience of witchcraft in rural and urban communities. The language of witchcraft – the curses, the insults, the accusations, the confessions – offers a range of potential research topics about witchcraft and culture. For example, references to landscape and place names of Scotland may provide us with more evidence and understanding about witch belief and its relationship with folk legend. What places and locations featured in witchcraft discourse? How significant were specific wells, rivers, hills or meadows? This information may provide us with new ideas about the relationship between society and the land.

This book is about witchcraft belief and practice, but the evidence from witchcraft trials and prosecutions has much wider application. It can provide information about many aspects of everyday life in early modern Scotland, from religious beliefs, the legal system, linguistics and the use of specific terminology, science and philosophical ideas to neighbourhood tensions. At the same time while there has been a degree of reluctance thus far to consider that some of the accused may indeed have been guilty of attempting to cause harm, analysis of accusations of malefice, and in particular those cases that involved murder or attempted murder, may provide useful insights into attitudes towards conflict and revenge in early modern society. Witchcraft belief is a perfect metaphor through which to study society's beliefs and practices.

Notes

1 The Survey was a two-year research project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and housed in the Department of Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh. The project team consisted of Joyce Miller and Lauren Martin as researchers and Julian Goodare and Louise Yeoman as director and co-director.
2 The database has over 1,000 fields and 97 tables. Thirty-seven tables (with 634 fields) contain active data; 49 are reference tables and 11 are systems tables.
3 Full details of how to do this can be found on the project website: www.shc.ed.ac.uk/witches. Researchers can run their own queries on the downloaded data using Microsoft Access.
4 G. F. Black, *A Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland, 1510–1727* (New York, 1938) and C. Larner, C. H. Lee and H. V. McLachlan, *A Source-Book of Scottish Witchcraft* (Glasgow, 1977). The Survey team is also grateful to the early work done by Dr Stuart Macdonald, who revised Larner *et al.*'s information and created an electronic version of it. This enabled the team to generate a basic framework containing core biographical and bibliographic data, which was then incorporated into our database.
5 For example: *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, 12 vols., (eds) T. Thomson and C. Innes (Edinburgh, 1814–75), iii, vi (I), vi (II), vii*; Records of the Proceedings of the Justiciary Court, Edinburgh, 1661–1678*, 2 vols., (ed.) W. G. Scott-Moncreiff (SHS, 1905), i; 'Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff and Justice Courts within Orkney and Zetland, 1602–1644', *Maitland Miscellany*, ii (1840); *Spalding Misc.*, i, iv, v; *Spottiswoode Miscellany*, ii, (ed.) J. Maidment (1845); Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*; *SJC*.
6 Further information about methodology and sources can be found on the website.
7 Download from www.shc.ed.ac.uk/witches, 'Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, Database Documentation and Description', 2.
8 Instructions on how to use the database and these searching capabilities can be found on the website.
9 The primary characterisation was based on the subjective judgement of the researcher as to the central element of the case when it was possible to make such a determination. The secondary characterisation was used as a checklist of elements present in the case. Each case could have only one primary characterisation, but as many secondary characterisations as were deemed applicable. The lists for primary and secondary characterisation are the same, with 17 options including 'consulting', 'demonic', 'fairies', 'folk healing', 'neighbourhood dispute' and 'political motives'.
10 For more on these see J. Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft in its European context', Chapter 1 above.
11 For more details see J. Miller, 'Men in black: appearances of the Devil in early modern Scottish witchcraft discourse', Chapter 6 below.
12 For a discussion of Survey data regarding legal processes see L. Martin, 'The Devil and the Domestic: Witchcraft, Marriage and Women's Work in Early Modern Scotland' (New School University PhD thesis, 2004), ch. 3.
13 The Survey used the term 'case' in a different way from Larner and other previous researchers. The Survey data is organised around the individual

person accused of witchcraft and the term 'case' is used to denote the procedure and accusation details of legal process (whether church or state sponsored) brought against the individual suspect. A few 'persons' had more than one 'case'.

14 C. Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981), 63.

15 Any database will contain errors and omissions. The Survey team would welcome information about these, which will be incorporated into future updates.

16 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 63.

17 Larner *et al.*, *Source-Book*, 237.

18 L. Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics re-examined', Chapter 5 below.

19 For consistency, the case date as displayed on the website for each accused witch is the last known date. This may represent different stages in the accusation and prosecution process; for some the date is an execution, for others it is the initial accusation and an execution may not have occurred. Further, the range of dates for many cases spanned years or even decades. See Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics re-examined', for more detailed discussion of source data behind this graph.

20 Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics re-examined'.

21 For more on regional variation of Scottish witchcraft accusations see Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics re-examined'. Accusations per year in each county can be viewed in graph and map forms online at www.shc.ed.ac.uk/witches.

22 Witchcraft suspects with a known or estimated age of 50 made up 22 per cent of those with known age. If age was not specifically recorded, it could sometimes be estimated by the Survey researchers using length of reputation, family information (e.g. the existence of adult children) or other indicators.

23 In a preliminary analysis, the overall figures for age seem roughly representative across trial process types. For suspects with a known age tried in central trial processes the mean age was 45, for local trial processes it was 43, for circuit court trial processes it was 38 and for those mentioned in other people's trials it was 46. This suggests that our age figures are fairly representative of suspects in general because the known ages for local trial processes (the majority of unknowns) are roughly the same as the other trial process types. The average age has been corrected for the three suspects tried more than once in each trial type.

24 I. D. Whyte, *Scotland Before the Industrial Revolution: an Economic and Social History, c.1050–c.1750* (London, 1995), 117.

25 L. Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven, Conn., 2004), 160–4; cf. R. A. Houston, *The Population History of Britain and Ireland, 1550–1750* (Cambridge, 1992), 41.

26 B. P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (3rd edn, London, 2006), 155–7.

27 The percentages of married suspects within the subset of suspects for whom marital status is known for each trial process type are as follows: central trial process, 70 per cent married; local trial process, 79 per cent married; circuit court trial process, 65 per cent married; those mentioned in a trial, 82 per cent married. Marital status was known in 47 per cent of central trial processes, 20 per cent of local trial processes, 37 per cent of circuit court

trial processes, and 31 per cent of suspects mentioned in a trial. Some suspects have been counted in more than one trial type (for example a suspect who was both tried and mentioned in someone else's trial). However, the findings have been adjusted to account for the ten suspects who appeared twice within one trial type.

28 J. Goodare, 'Women and the witch-hunt in Scotland', *Social History*, 23 (1998), 288–308, at p. 290.

29 In a subset of well-documented cases, out of suspects with a known marital status (40%), the proportion of widows, at 22 per cent, is roughly the same as the total percentage of widows for all the suspects with a known marital status.

30 Women were usually categorised with reference to their husband's occupation or status, but some women's occupations were described in their own right: L. Martin, 'Witchcraft and family: what can witchcraft documents tell us about early modern Scottish family life?', *Scottish Tradition*, 27 (2002), 7–22.

31 The category of Middling was assigned to people who had secure access to some land or were secure craftsmen. The category includes portioners, tenant farmers, bailies or factors, burgesses, lesser craftsmen (such as bakers, skinners, weavers, cordiners and fleshers), and ministers. The category of Lower was assigned to people who had some access to land and at least some kind of employment. They were often subtenants, semiskilled artisans, colliers, gardeners, fishermen, workmen or sailors. In a broad sense, both categories represent people who were able to make a living and generally participated in their communities. The combined categories break down by trial type as follows: central trial process, 75 per cent; local trial process, 84 per cent; mixed trial process, 82 per cent; mentioned in a trial, 89 per cent.

32 The category Elite includes the nobility, chiefs, lairds, barons, high status craftsmen, and wealthy tenants. The breakdown of Elite witchcraft suspects across trial types is as follows: local trial process, 4 per cent; circuit court trial process, 14 per cent; mentioned in a trial, 8 per cent.

33 The category Very Poor includes people without any access to any land or steady work, often described as vagrants or vagabonds and cottars, servants in small households, grassmen, shepherds, and people who did other types of odd jobs. These were people without strong ties to their communities who could be expected to be more mobile. The breakdown of Very Poor witchcraft suspects across trial process types is as follows: central process, 4 per cent; local process, 12 per cent; circuit court process, 4 per cent; mentioned in a trial, 4 per cent.

34 A. Hanham, '"The Scottish Hecate": a wild witch chase', *Scottish Studies*, 13 (1969), 59–64 mentions that she gave the Grahams a blue bead rather than a ring. It is possible that the stone she spat out was then turned into a ring, hence the local legend. MacNiven may also be a version of 'Nicneven', a name for several witches; interestingly the Gaelic MacNaoimhín (MacNiven) means son (or Nic – daughter) of the holy one.

35 D. Harley, 'Historians as demonologists: the myth of the midwife-witch', *Social History of Medicine*, 3 (1990), 1–26.

36 Numbers for the rest of Europe also seem to be much lower than was previously estimated or claimed. See Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 147–8.

37 J. Miller, 'Devices and directions: folk healing aspects of witchcraft practice in seventeenth-century Scotland', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002); J. Miller, 'Cantrips and Carlins: Magic, Medicine and Society in the Presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling, 1603–1688' (University of Stirling PhD thesis, 2000); O. Davies, 'A comparative perspective on Scottish cunning-folk and charmers', Chapter 8 below.
38 M. Murray, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford, 1921).
39 Edinburgh University Library, Patrick Anderson, Chronicles of Scotland, 2 volumes, Laing MSS, III.203, vol. ii, fo. 266v. He described a convention of 2,300 men and women, held in May 1597. There is no corroborative evidence that confirms this figure so it may not be reliable and was not included in the Survey's statistics.
40 For example, in the 1590–1 group of suspects commonly referred to as the Witches of North Berwick, confessions described groups of hundreds of suspects involved in magical attempts to kill King James VI but only 12 suspects are known to have been tried for witchcraft and treason. See for example Agnes Sampson's confession: NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/2, fos. 201r.-7r.
41 The figures break down as follows: 78 cases mentioned demonic possession, 528 cases mentioned direct demonic involvement, 39 cases mentioned both categories (the devil and demonic possession). For more details see B. P. Levack, 'Demonic possession in early modern Scotland', Chapter 7 below.
42 Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 44–9.
43 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, 602–15. Similar flight was mentioned by the two Margaret Watsons in Carnwath, 1644: SSW.
44 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, ii, I, 161–4; NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/2, fos. 104v.–5v.
45 Anderson, Chronicles of Scotland, vol. ii, fo. 266v.
46 Cf. J. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 58–60, 68–9.
47 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 424 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, ch. VI). Goodare also makes the point that this passage was probably written in 1597.
48 S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), 590.
49 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 590–1.
50 I. Whyte, 'Ergotism and witchcraft in Scotland', *Area*, 26 (1994), 89–90; K. Duncan, 'Was ergotism responsible for the Scottish witch hunts?', *Area*, 25 (1993), 30–6; W. F. Boyd, 'Four and twenty blackbirds: more on ergotism, rye and witchcraft in Scotland', *Area*, 27 (1995), 77.
51 Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597', 53.
52 Cf. Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft in its European context'.
53 E. J. Cowan, 'Witch persecution and folk belief in Lowland Scotland: the Devil's decade', Chapter 3 below, L. Henderson, 'Witch hunting and witch belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*', Chapter 4 below, and J. Miller, 'Men in black: appearances of the Devil in early modern Scottish witchcraft discourse', Chapter 6 below.

3

Witch Persecution and Folk Belief in Lowland Scotland: The Devil's Decade

Edward J. Cowan

The Witchcraft Act of 1563, in citing the 'abominabill superstitioun' employed by certain of lieges of the realm through using witchcraft, sorcery and necromancy, and the 'credence gevin thairto in tymes bygane aganis the Law of God', effectively identified diablerie and folk belief with the medieval Church.[1] The Reformers, however, operated within a well-established ecclesiastical tradition, for the authorities' suspicion of folk belief and popular culture was of very long standing. The Kirk had been concerned about witches since at least the thirteenth century. The formulaic sentence of excommunication from that period, to be pronounced four times a year, included 'witches and all who countenance and protect and support them in their evil doings as well as those who are parties with them in their misdeeds'. The sixteenth-century version mentioned 'al wichis and trowaris [i.e. believers] in thaim'. The Statutes of the Scottish Church prescribed excommunication for all fortune tellers, witches male and female, incendiaries, violators of churches, and other such offenders. The fourteenth-century St Andrews statutes had a similarly wide remit including 'all sorcerers and those believing in them'.[2] After 1560, since there was widespread opinion, not to mention fear, that superstition sustained the Catholic faith, all such superstition had to be eradicated. In researching fairy belief extensive use was made of the evidence of the witch trials.[3] The question which this chapter attempts to explore is whether those same sources can be exploited to recover aspects of folk belief in sixteenth-century Scotland. Indeed, might the witch-hunts be seen as a kind of encapsulating metaphor for the attack on folk culture in general?

I

In order to pursue these issues, the chapter will concentrate on the witch-hunts of the 1590s. The pamphlet *Newes from Scotland* (1591) focuses upon the remarkable affair at North Berwick, one of the most sensational events in a truly extraordinary and incident-filled reign.[4] The tract would have been all that there was to read on the subject in the 1590s, though we know little about how people actually received their information at that time; word of mouth was presumably the main medium, transmitted through the market place or the pulpit. The latter must have been a means of circulating some knowledge, as ministers doubtless offered up fulsome prayers of thanksgiving for the deliverance of their king, though others perhaps took the opportunity for congregational seminars on the subject of witchcraft.

The familiar story tells how Geillis Duncan, having recently acquired an ability for healing, confessed, under torture, to witchcraft. One of her accomplices, Agnes Sampson, 'the eldest witch of all', described the assembly at North Berwick kirk on Halloween 1590. They sailed down the Forth in riddles and sieves, refreshing themselves with flagons of wine, 'making merrie and drinking by the waye'. On landing, they all sang while dancing a reel, Duncan providing hellish music on her Jew's Trump (jew's harp) – a tune called *Gillatrypes*, which rapidly entered the Scottish charts of the early 1590s. It resurfaced four years later in Elgin when three women 'confessit thame to be in ane dance callit gillatrype singing a foull hieland sang'.[5] Could there be a connection between the name of the girl, Geillis, and that of the song, tune or dance?

The Devil presented his buttocks for the kiss of obeisance from the congregation. He inveighed against James VI, 'the greatest enemy he hath in the world' and, after swearing oaths, they all went home. James's initial doubts were dispelled by Sampson, who, to prove she was no liar, repeated the very words he had exchanged with his wife, Anne, on their honeymoon night. She was the principal witch appointed to arrange the king's death using toad venom, foul linen and charmed cats. Her reward, like her fellow witches, was to be carnally used by the Devil, 'albeit to their little pleasure, in respect of his colde nature'.[6]

John Fian or Cunningham, schoolmaster at Prestonpans, was reportedly the Devil's registrar or secretary, who kept the attendance book and minutes of the meetings. He confessed to bewitching a rival in love. The lady of their affections had a brother who was one of Fian's pupils. The dominie resorted to spells to win the girl's love, promising

to teach the boy 'without strypes', if he would obtain for him three 'haires of his sister's privities'. The boy's suspicious mother interrogated him by means of a sound thrashing; for children corporal punishment was clearly an ever-present reality. Since the mother, conveniently enough, was herself a witch she knew what to do, securing three hairs from the udder of a cow, which Fian, in turn, used for his charm. The cow then manifested its lust by leaping upon him, and following him everywhere to the wonder of all. Following savage torture his fate was sealed. At the time *Newes* appeared, some of the witches still awaited trial. The tract ended with a short homily on the greatness and goodness of God, and James VI.[7]

If the foregoing represents the tabloid version, the court report was furnished by James himself though probably ghosted by another. In the form of a Socratic dialogue, *Daemonologie* explains such topics as the scriptural authority of witchcraft and how it differs from necromancy. It soon emerges that such matters are of interest to learned and unlearned alike, with pejorative language for the latter, as in reference to 'suche kinde of charms as commonlie dafte wives uses'.[8] This is one theme that is pursued throughout; another is that rituals used to conjure the Devil can be compared to a priest saying mass.[9] Satan appears to the vulgar as a dog, cat or ape, or else the sound of his voice signifies his presence; from him folk seek curses, to inflict on their enemies, and other favours, usually personal or domestic. There is some detail on what devils, 'God's hangmen', get up to, and some discussion of the nature of magic. Many witches are melancholics but most of them are 'altogether given over to the pleasures of the flesh, continual haunting of companie, and all kindis of merriness, both lawfull and unlawfull, which are thinges directly contrary to the symptoms of melancholia'. They are loath to confess without torture. They practise the inversion of Christianity. They fly through the air and confess to distant journeyings when others observe them fast asleep. The alleged shape-shifting of witches is compared to 'the little transubstantiate god in the Papists' Mass'.[10]

Women are especially susceptible to witchcraft due to their frailty. There is a lengthy section on spells and conjuring, used to generate love or hate, or inflict illness; detail is included on the use that can be made of wax 'pictours', images of intended victims which, when melted, cause sickness and death.[11] Those of infirm or weak faith are most likely to be corrupted. There were more ghosts and spirits seen in the time of papistry when the Devil walked more familiarly amongst our grossly-erring fathers, a point later reinforced.[12]

The third part discusses spirits, werewolves, incubi and succubi, monsters and nightmares. The reason devilish abuse is most common in the wild parts of the world such as Lapland, Finland, Orkney and Shetland, is because 'where the devil findes greatest ignorance and barbaritie; there assayles he grossliest, as I gave you the reason wherefore there was more witches of woman kinde nor men'.[13] Fairy belief was allegedly much more widespread under the medieval Church, as was prophecy. In this section the author does not pull his monarchical punches. All of the Devil's wiles are in evidence when he 'counterfeits God among the Ethnicks'.[14]

In conclusion, echoing the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the two discussants agree that God will never allow the innocent to be accused of witchcraft. The other implicit notion is that 'certain abominations are committed by the lowest orders, from which the highest orders are precluded on account of the nobility of their natures'.[15] These are two of the most pernicious statements in the entire literature of the witch-hunt. Of course some members of the Scottish nobility were to be accused during the witch craze but this was regarded as a truly aberrational circumstance. Just as *Newes* moves into folklore with the charming of the cow, so *Demonologie* ends in the World of Fairy among the Ethnics. In other words folklore and folk belief, which harbour so much of what is now deemed superstition, have become the legitimate targets of those intent upon the eradication of witchcraft. The Church before the Reformation had been hostile to popular culture; the post-Reformation attack sought to destroy all surviving support for that same Church, while concurrently reinforcing authority. Folk culture preserved the pernicious beliefs and practices of a previous age so sustaining Catholic belief. It is thus diagnostic that the diabolical convention at North Berwick commenced with music, song, merriness, the drinking of wine, and a reel.

II

It is surely significant that the Aberdeenshire trials of 1596–7 also allegedly began with a dance, or rather two dances, at Halloween, one in downtown Aberdeen and the other near Lumphanan. As has been incautiously suggested the Aberdeen event has the look of a breach of the peace,[16] when a number of so-called sorcerers and witches allegedly congregated at the Fish Cross, the Devil being present to organise the music. Otherwise the detail is as fascinating as it is intriguing. Thomas Leyis was the foremost and led the ring of dance; he 'dang [i.e. hit]

Katherine Mitchell because she spillit [i.e. spoiled] the dance, and ran nocht sa fast as the rest' (97–8).[17] When Isobel Cockie thought that the Devil 'played not so melodiouslie' as she wished, she snatched the instrument out of his mouth, banged him on the cheeks with it, and played it herself to the assembled company (115). Some of the dancers supposedly appeared as hares or cats, and 'sum in other similarities' (117). There is also mention of guising. On the same night another group of witches was accused of dancing at a grey stone at the foot of the Hill of Craiglich in company with their master, the Devil, 'he playing melodiousliue upone ane instrument, albeit invisible', and, having ordered each present to kiss his arse, he had carnal dealings with all in the likeness of a beast (102, 114, 149, 151, 152).

These cases have recently been discussed.[18] The intention in what follows is to extract material on folk belief and popular culture from the records that survive and thus, hopefully, recover something of the mental world of the victims – the accused – as well as of their tormentors. The concern is not with whether or not the events, as described, actually happened, for the evidence, such as it is, presents a phantom history, a tragic and fatal conspiracy of mutual deceit between accusers, victims and opinion at large, but rather with gathering something of the harvest nurtured by the deep roots of tradition.

While the North Berwick case may be deemed to have had some influence on the type of lore in circulation about other outbreaks, specifically those in Aberdeenshire in 1596–7, it should also be noted that cases from the latter county had distracted the authorities during the summer of 1590, well before Fian's trial in December. On 17 August Jonett Clark of Blalach, also known as Spaldarg, and Jonett Grant of Colquhatstane, alias Gradoch, were condemned for various crimes which included theft and the murder and slaughter of people and animals. Their accomplice, the wet-nurse Bessie Roy, was acquitted.[19] It is of considerable interest that several people later accused in Aberdeen in 1596–7 were specifically associated with those executed in 1590. In some cases they came from the same parish, notably Lumphanan, supposedly a dynamo of the Aberdeen hunt. Thus Margaret Bane's dittay refers to Jonet Spaldarg, her sister, and the mother of all witches, 'maist expert in devilische socerie and inchantmentis'; since the age of fifteen Bane had been art and part of all kinds of witchcraft committed by Spaldarg, and was privy to all her devil-lore, rivalling her in knowledge.

Similarly tarnished, through association, was Isobel Richie who was also alleged to have been schooled by Spaldarg, to contrive the murder

of Thomas Forbes of Cloak, Lumphanan. From Spaldarg, 'who was burnt in Edinburgh', she received a magic belt, much coveted for all who wore it would belong to the Devil; she employed it for witchcraft and sorcery, resulting in several other deaths. Another acquisition was a witching stick. She also associated with Jonet Grant, 'witch in Cromar', executed with Spaldarg, who was consulted by the gudewife of Cloak, seeking a remedy for her bewitched daughter Elspet. Richie had been sent to ask Grant whether Elspet would have sons, six of whom she later bore, but since diablerie was involved they all died at birth. From her mentor, Spaldarg, Richie received an earthenware container known as a 'pig', 'full of devylische confectionis of sorcerie', which were to be used to benefit the forementioned Elspet. But the witch had been forbidden by the Devil to examine the pig's contents and when she took it to Cloak she was worried that the witchcraft might afflict her; instead its victim was Thomas Forbes who died of a fever. Another accused witch, Margaret Bane, testified that Forbes had appeared to her and her sister as a headless man, seemingly a good reason for inflicting their enchantments upon him (158). So she too was associated with the two Jonets executed in Edinburgh in 1590. Indeed Richie had taken Bane to Cloak on many occasions to be consulted by Forbes' wife and daughter on matters diabolical. Their activities, however, had resulted in the deaths of several neighbours as well as her husband and brother (140–2). What is remarkable in this case is that despite all the rumour, innuendo and accusation, Forbes's widow and daughter received an exemption, stating that they had consulted the midwife Bane in good faith.[20] Such were the potential dangers of innocently retaining wise women or specialists. The shadow of Spaldarg thus loomed large over the north east for a number of years. Her exploits were far from forgotten.

The authorities took care to ensure a predominant representation from the parishes of the accused on their assizes even though all cases were tried in Aberdeen, thus involving considerable inconvenience of travel and time. When these men – and they were all male – are factored in, a reasonable picture can be obtained of the ramifications of witch activity and the possibilities for the transmission of knowledge about witchlore, throughout a fairly extensive area.[21]

III

However there are very few echoes of distant Aberdeenshire in the dittay of John Fian, which details how the North Berwick

adventure purportedly commenced in a series of 'ecstasies and trances',[22] a journey of the imagination to the boundless realms of the hitherto unimagined, a perverted and inverted descent to the depths of human depravity, for which he suffered the horrific physicality of his subsequent torture and execution. Much more familiar to those aware of the Aberdeenshire cases would have been some of the accusations levelled at Agnes Sampson. Almost all of the first 32 items in her dittay were concerned with sickness, or an ability to foretell death, or both. The Devil was dropped into articles 12 and 13, and resided in several from 33 onwards.[23] Also, the method of incrimination, moving from communal folk activities for the benefit of the commonalty at large, to the implication of devilry and bewitchment, was almost identical in the Haddingtonshire and Aberdeenshire cases.

It is noticeable that almost 40 years after the Reformation, at which time all such holidays and saints days as had been invented by 'the Papists' were supposedly outlawed,[24] most cases are tied to, or dated within range of, a festive day, such as Halloween, Fastern's E'en (Shrove Tuesday), Whitsunday, Michaelmas, and Andresmas (St Andrews Day). Ruid Day is observed in September in Dumfries where the Rood Fair is still held, but in the north-east it is dated to 3 May. There is also reference to the first Monday of the raith, which is the First Quarter of the Year, on which day Margaret Og was seen by her minister casting water from Boglicht Burn over her head and sweeping dew off the Green of Boglicht, 'which may be accountit plane witchcraft and devilry and is one of the chief ceremonies thereof' (143). Neither observance – water-casting nor dew-sweeping – had ever actually been regarded as witch-like, at least not until now when these centuries-old water charms and rituals were suddenly rendered diabolical.

The records preserve some of the witches' aliases, such as Suppok, Shuddack, Scudder and Spaldarg. They were often consulted on matters concerning the beginning of the life cycle with reference to pregnancy and childbirth. Thomas Leyis was charged with having informed his concubine that unbeknown to herself she was pregnant, specifying the precise time at which the child was conceived. He also knew that the child was female, and exactly when it would be born, a diabolical revelation, most unusually at this period, attributed to a male (98). Margaret Clerach told a man that none of his children would live when he refused to marry her (190). Margaret Bane, summoned as a midwife, knew that she was not required because the child had already been safely born (159). She is one of nine individuals in the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft who are known to have been midwives. She was

further accused of causing the death of a four-year-old boy by touch (166), but she had one peculiar ability of which many expectant mothers might have yearned to avail themselves. She was able, by witchcraft and sorcery, to inflict, through transference, 'the hale panes, dolouris, and tormentis' of childbirth upon the woman's spouse. One man became so furious and demented that he completely lost his wits and died. There is no suggestion here that this was a form of the *couvades* whereby men willingly and sympathetically shared the pain of childbirth in an attempt to relieve their wives. In another of her cases the pains were visited upon a man who was not the mother's husband and who, 'during all the tyme of traweling [i.e. travailing], was exceedinglie and mervelouslie trublit, in ane furie and madness as it wer and could nocht be haldin', but once the child was born the pains left him (157–8).

Wet-nurses were clearly a source of anxiety.[25] In his *Scotorum Historiae* of 1527 Hector Boece had warmly commended the practice of mothers breast-feeding their own children. Like his friend, the great Renaissance scholar, Erasmus, he believed that such nourishment was as important as the nurture of the womb,[26] but wet-nurses remained very much in demand. Bessie Roy was accused of having abstracted and transferred to herself the breast-milk of a poor woman whom she distinguished as a rival for her services. When her victim threatened to expose her heinous deed, Roy contrived to restore the supply. She clearly specialised in birth and child-rearing.[27]

When a man's mistress found him cheating on her, she persuaded Isobel Cockie to bewitch him into madness and fury, followed by fever (113). Helen Fraser was accused of arranging a marriage, through bewitchment, against the wishes of the groom's parents. The bride commissioned a spell against her disapproving mother-in-law who lost the strength in the left side of her body before she languished and died (107); in a similar fashion she disposed of a neighbour. Fraser was further accused of causing the death of an ox, just by sitting near the cattle-pen. Another utterly pernicious act was to persuade 'Muckle Christane', the hen-wife of Foveran, to put one hand on the crown of her head, and the other on the sole of her foot, while bequeathing all in between to the Devil, who, in return, pledged that she would want for nothing. Such terminology was to become standard in testimonials describing the self-surrender of witches to the Devil. When Christane's hens started to die Fraser advised her to pass the healthy birds through 'the link of the cruik', the chain which suspended the cooking pot over the fireplace. She was to kill the last of the birds with a fiery stick to

prevent further problems with failing fowls. The folk of Newburgh, in the parish of Foveran, greatly feared Fraser. She was accused of causing a cow to give blood instead of milk. One of her spells killed her employer. She was also accused of bewitching a man to transfer his affections from his wife to his harlot, subsequently arranging for the secret birth of their child (108–9).

Isobel Strachan, or Scudder, learned her skills from an elf man (177). She was known as a common marriage-maker who would sew a penny in a piece of cloth which was then hung around the neck of her client who would arrange for the object of their affections to touch it – something of a euphemism since one recommendation was actually to strike the hapless dupe with the necklace; results, apparently, were guaranteed (179–80). When one woman rejected the talisman by throwing it in the fire, her house almost burned down. Scudder caused George Barclay to marry a poor hussy, which amazed many since he was so goodly and rich, the son of honest parents, and she an ugly harlot of base degree who had now contrived his impoverishment (178). Because a woman withheld payment of a chicken, she killed her husband, and she despatched another man who 'dang' (hit) her. She caused the death of a new-born by turning it over three times in childbed.

Helen Gray allegedly used her witchcraft to give a man a permanent erection; 'his wand lay nevir doune' until he died (126)! One mother rendered her own son-in-law impotent (136). In 1590 Spaldarg was accused of having given a secret 'member' to John Coutts, of removing that of John Watt, and also of 'giving and taking of power from sundry men's members' (206). Jonet Wishart bade her terrified female companion to hold on to the feet of a corpse on the gallows while she 'cuttit aff a pairt of all his memberis', after midnight (94). The *Malleus Maleficarum* made much of witches' skills in emasculation, but male genitalia were popularly believed to possess certain magical and curative properties. It is fairly obvious why witches put the wind up patriarchal Scotland. In a remarkable charge against Scudder we can almost detect the outrage of her accusers who stated that a spell laid upon a wife-beating husband was so efficacious that never again did he strike her or find any fault with her, 'even though she was a waster' (177).

Bessie Thom seems to have been something of a specialist in disposing of husbands – her own, and that of Elspet Jack, who gave her man a 'slaik', a smearing substance of some kind, supplied by Thom, which led to disease and death; she also offered to remove Isobel Irving's spouse for forty shillings and a hunk of beef (166).

Margaret Riach confessed to three in a bed, testifying that the Devil sometimes joined her and her lover, 'and he was upon them baith', queer goings-on in Kincardine O'Neil (192)!

Everyone has to eat. Much witch activity was concerned with food, especially milk products such as cheese or butter, when the 'milknes' was conjured out of them, or cows gave blood instead of milk (101, 107, 111, 121, 129). One alleged witch retorted that her accuser must be a witch herself because she was able to produce a suspiciously largely number of new 'cabakis', or cheeses just before Lent, a period of abstinence and self-denial dictated as much by the natural scarcity of the season as by possible religious considerations (111). A witch who fell out with a tavern-keeper spoiled her ale, jeopardising her livelihood. A woman fell ill immediately after consuming some roast shoulder of lamb and languished for nine months before dying (142–3, 152–3). One witch offered a woman a 'dische of develische pottage', which would undoubtedly have killed her had she not refused it, strengthened as she was by the spirit of God (128). Food poisoning must have been common with poor storage and preservation techniques, as was starvation when animals or harvests failed. Famine struck on several occasions throughout the sixteenth century, notably in 1571–3 and 1585–7, as well as during 1594–8,[28] thus neatly coinciding with the Aberdeenshire witch cases.

The blasting of crops was greatly feared. Isobel Cockie, for example, caused Alexander Anderson's bumper crop of barley to rot in the field, while his neighbours enjoyed successful harvests (114). There is evidence also of rival tenants attempting to blight one another's land. James Og passed through Alexander Cobain's corn, scattering nine stones from his own rig, in turn taking nine handfuls of earth from Cobain's holding and casting them on his own ground; on another occasion he administered nine strokes with a white wand so that nothing but weeds grew. He also tried water charms and carrying corn three times, widdershins (against the direction of the sun), around the kiln (190–1). Thus humble men attempted to answer the ageless riddle of husbandry, while revealing the social tensions that could be caused by joint tenancies. Why was it that some rigs, on the same farm, were more productive than others?

Many accusations concerned millers and the equipment they employed. Thus John Elrick, servant at the Mill of Ludquharn, leaving at 11 one winter's night to go home, met Agnes Webster, or a devil in her likeness, sitting at a stone, 'gaping and glowering at him while spewing fire-brands out of her mouth', whereby he took a great sick-

ness and could not go home that night (129). Marjory Mutch had a dispute with a man about space when both were grinding their meal. He cast some material from the hopper at her, making her determined that he would receive a shot in his side in return which, through devilment, came to pass when he acquired a sore under his armpit like a black iron pot which daily grew bigger and bigger, accompanied by a violent fever, until he died (131) – a convincing description, as it happens, of the symptoms of bubonic plague. Similar afflictions affected a woman at the same mill with whom Mutch quarrelled over a sieve (133). Isobel Barron, before sunrise on Ruid Day, was seen with a large quantity of stones in her lap, throwing some in front of her into the burn and others behind her into the same burn. She also took three sips of water from the burn in a dish and then spewed it out again, so, by witchcraft, preventing the water from feeding into the mill-lade (168). Christian Reid told Walter Miller that he and his mill were bewitched but if he would pay her she would provide a remedy, at least for the mill, because she could do little for him personally. Miller pronounced that he was not so concerned about his own health as he was about the mill. Since his surname was Miller his family had presumably followed the craft for some generations and he was thus mindful that they should continue to do so in the future. Reid consulted a witch who urged her to scatter some sand upon the mill-stones and wheels in the name of God and Christsonday so that the mill would operate in the old manner. And so due to the wrecking of the machinery, meal was ground in the old, less efficient way, presumably by hand (173–5). When a miller refused Scudder oatmeal, she broke the mill-wheels by witchcraft; on another occasion she wrecked the dam at the Mill of Fintry (180).

Millers were often regarded as a necessary evil, as men whose families prospered while others starved, and who would cheat their clients at any opportunity. Thus while some of the disputes mentioned above probably arose as neighbourly disagreements about quite small-scale operations, witch attacks on larger mills may actually have enjoyed some community support as a way of striking back at the miller. A good deal of superstition surrounded the craft which millers may have been quite happy to foster – the notion for example that their premises were protected by the fairies – but in times of panic such conceits could render the millers vulnerable.[29]

People at all periods worry about their health and the 1590s were no exception. Out of pure malice Jonet Wishart, fresh from consulting with the Devil, worked her cantrips on Alexander Thomson, mariner,

'as swift as an arrow could be shot from a bow', whereat he succumbed to a wicked fever. His wife however threatened to expose Wishart who, for reasons of self-preservation, supplied curative drugs. When another man for some reason put a linen towel round her neck, suspecting no evil, she, convinced he was intending to strangle her, witched death upon him and his wife, leaving his children to beg (85–6). Caught thieving by some schoolboys she arranged to have them drowned. This woman, who was eventually executed, would be worthy of a study in her own right. She inflicted illness and death on a string of people who crossed her in some way or another (84–97).

Helen Fraser agreed to heal John Ramsay 'bot willit him to keip secreit quhatsoevir sche spak or did because the warld wes evill, and spak na gude of sic medicinaris' as herself. He was ordered to rise at dawn to consume bedewed sorrel and another dish made of kale. He was then to sit under the hen roost and expose his chest as hens flew by, to loosen his blocked 'heart-pipes' or arteries. Fraser uttered a devilish spell over his head. Following her instructions he recovered – and then the rotten ingrate informed on her (165). On another occasion Fraser was summoned by Janet Ingram, who was locally reputed a witch, and who had become ill, she believed, through witchcraft. Fraser pronounced that the invalid would soon be well enough but her sickness worsened, turning into a 'horrible fury and madness', which caused incessant blaspheming and a crazed determination literally to climb the walls. Having suffered for two days she died, whereupon Fraser with two or three of the deceased's daughters carried the body halfway to the churchyard. When intercepted by Ingram's husband and some neighbours, Fraser fled (106). If this curious episode can be interpreted, as was perhaps the intention of whoever recorded the evidence, as the sorority looking after its own, Fraser and her cohorts had no business usurping the prerogative of the widower.

Midwife Margaret Bane bewitched fever and death upon James Ross for beating up her son, just as she damned another man and a bairn (160). There are many examples of people who were seized with great fevers which burned them up for a time, and at other periods left them shivering with cold. The experience of the bewitched Margaret Dortie is notable for the graphic description of her symptoms, perhaps suggesting something novel, a disease that was unfamiliar. She was overcome with extreme trembling and shaking as if the whole house had been running about with her inside it, before she was overcome with a heavy sickness which rendered her bedfast for eight weeks. For one half of the day from the middle upwards she burned as if in a fiery furnace,

roasting with an extreme thirst that no drink, however large, could satisfy; from the middle down she was as cold as ice, so that nothing could warm her, with such a gnawing in her womb, legs and thighs, as if dogs were tearing the flesh from her bones or men stabbing her with knives. And so she continued until her dying day (94). Another had similar symptoms as well as continual flux and vomiting, with a great swelling. Potential healers were baffled (133). Most commonly the victims were described, almost formulaically, as roasting in the body for one half of the day, as if in an oven, suffering an extreme burning and insatiable drouth, the other half of the day shivering in an extraordinary cold sweat; death almost always resulted (157).

Agues must have been common but we soon learn to recognise the symptoms as those created by witches who have fashioned 'pictours' (111, 112, 128, 131, 134, 136, 158). Some of the bewitched sought witches to un-witch them. Most were gripped by thirst and excessive sweating which sometimes drove them demented. One man in his madness climbed as high as a steeple (113); in this and other cases perhaps levitation is implied, though whether imagined by witnesses, tormentors or the victim himself is not stated. Transference was often involved, as when a man's deadly illness was transposed to a cat which subsequently died (120). Witches could blast people as well as crops; spells often resulted in the crippling, laming or paralysis of victims (133).

There was an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1597–9. Some of the Aberdeenshire cases, however, may refer to the earlier epidemic of 1584–8,[30] since there is a lack of precision about when the witches' alleged afflictions actually took place. A common form of words is 'some nine years or sensyne' (thereabouts) and some of the descriptions suggest panic in the face of unprecedented ravages. The symptoms mentioned certainly recall those of plague, as does the information that sometimes the victims died after five days. Other types of illness were also involved though it is intriguing that those afflicted, or their loved ones, were less willing to attribute their misfortunes to the will of God than they were to the interference of the Devil.

IV

Andrew Man, self-proclaimed consort of the Fairy Queen, was a wandering healer who cured folk from Angus to Moray (117–25). He may be deemed a distant soul-mate of Menocchio the miller, or Paulo

Gasparutto of the *benandanti*,[31] in the sense that he too had an idiosyncratic idea of the cosmos. As a boy he was visited by the Devil in the shape of a woman, whom he came to know as the Queen of Elphen. She promised Man that he would 'know all things', would have healing powers, and would be well looked after, but that, obscurely, he would seek his meat, or food, before he died, as Thomas Rymour did. Later he supposedly had carnal dealings with the devilish spirit, fathering several children upon her. She caused one of his cows to die on a small hill named Elphillock, but promised him only good thereafter. He allegedly confessed that he could raise his master, the Devil, by uttering the expression 'Benedicte', and could dismiss him by tucking a dog under his left armpit, placing his right hand in the animal's mouth and enunciating the word 'Maikpeblis'. He knew Satan by the name of Christsonday, believing him to be an angel, clad in white clothes, and God's godson, even though the latter had a 'thraw', or quarrel, with God, and was the lover of the elfin queen. Christsonday had marked the third finger of Man's right hand, presumably in proprietal fashion. Man reported that the Fairy Queen had control of the whole craft but that Christsonday was the 'gudeman' who held all power under God. Furthermore he had seen dead men in the company of these two supranaturals, among them Thomas Rymour and James IV. Christsonday had appeared in the form of a horse ('staig') while the queen and her attendants rode on white steeds, when she convened to receive the obscene kiss. The accused attested that elves or fairies adopted the shape and clothing of ordinary men, though they were mere shadows, but more vigorous than mortals, and could indulge in playing and dancing whenever they pleased. The queen could choose to be old or young, could appoint anyone she liked as king, and could make love with whomsoever she wished. Although Man apparently met the elves in a fine chamber he would find himself in a moss, or bog, the next morning, their candles and swords turned into grass and straws; he had no fear of these creatures since he had known them all his days.

Man had the ability to cure epilepsy, as well as 'bairn-bed' – presumably complications arising from childbirth – and all other types of sickness afflicting either folk or beast, excepting death itself, by baptising them. He would strike animals on the face while holding a fowl in his hand, saying 'If you will live, live, and if you will die, die'. He charmed enclosures, or fields, to ensure that the animals pastured in them did not suffer from 'lunsaucht' or lung-disease, though his admonition that there should be no digging or ploughing in such fields is reminis-

cent of the 'gudeman's croft', the widespread practice of leaving a part of the farm unworked to appease the Devil.[32] He would prescribe black wool and salt as a cure for all diseases, or to ensure that a man would prosper and never suffer bloodletting. He cured animals such as oxen by bleeding them but when dogs lapped the discarded blood they immediately died. He successfully treated a man's 'deidlie sicknes' by passing him nine times forward through a loop of dry yarn, then moving a cat nine times backwards through the same loop, while chanting spells, so that his illness was transferred to the unfortunate feline, which promptly died. He relieved a woman's 'furiositie and madnes' through spells. At will he could take away a cow's milk. He could blast crops by stripping the straw off a few stalks and throwing it into the rest of the field, repeating the curse nine times: 'The dirt to thee and the crop to me'. To ensure healthy crops he recommended harrowing before the corn started to sprout, and keeping the crows away because the Devil sometimes appeared in their likeness. He would recite a prayer or spell, which he had from memory, nine times, to ensure a successful harvest.

Man could scrutinise a man's hand and predict who his wife would be. He allegedly testified that 'at the Day of Judgement, the fyre will burne the watter and the earth, and mak all plain, and that Christsonday wilbe cassin in the fyre because he deceives wardlingis [i.e. worldly] men: And this yeir to cum salbe a deir yeir, and that thair salbe [twice] seven gude yeris thereafter', which 'plane witchcraft and devilrie' he purportedly received from Christsonday. Most sensational of all was his revelation that on Judgement Day Christsonday would act as notary 'to accuse everie man, and ilk man will have his awin dittay, writtin in his awin buik to accuse himself', and also that the godly would be separated from the wicked.

Animals figure prominently. Evil spirits appeared as a magpie and a jackdaw. Dipping the plough irons in water through which a salmon had swum prevented the oxen from bolting (121). Witches caused the deaths of an ox, and the horse belonging to the master of the English School at Kintore, as well as nine score sheep, cattle and other beasts (112). Simply by touching one ox, Isobel Cockie, without saying a word, caused the whole team to tremble and shake as soon as they were yoked, until, unable to stand, they had to be released, whereupon some died; when she crossed the path of other draught animals they became uncontrollable, tangling one another up (113). A man's oxen were bewitched to the point of running mad, breaking the plough, two of them remaining wild ever after. The witch responsible, who was

acquitted, apparently specialised in returning domestic animals to the wild and thus ruining their owners (131–3). Witches adopted the likenesses of cats and dogs, and once a stallion, while the Devil also appeared as a cat, a horse, a flichtering hen and a lamb, 'bleating on' his witch. He also took the form of a cripple (164) and of an aged man 'beirdit, with a white gown and a thrummit hat', which is a woolly hat made out of weavers' ends, or thrums (127).[33]

Hares sucked cow's milk (117). Isobel Robbie was commonly seen in the form of a hare (191). Such metamorphosis was widely believed throughout much of Scotland long after this date. Margaret Bane, the midwife of ill repute, was summoned to treat a calf that would not suck. She insisted on acting alone and in private; the gudeman and his wife heard her intone a devilish cry, in a terrible voice, making the whole building tremble. Calf and cow were instantly reconciled but the gudewife, terrified out of her wits, took to her sickbed with a disease that proved fatal (158). Agnes Frain was a cattle specialist, using hairs from her cow's tail to increase her milk yields while blighting those of her neighbours. She treated sick calves with tender loving care, minor operations, and magic, as in carrying the calf three times round the cow; on one occasion she had a cow foster a horse. While the bull was serving the cow, a knife was thrown three times over its back; Margaret Og who performed this ritual also used her own headlace or ribbon, cut into nine pieces and buried under the byre door, to bewitch cattle to death (143–4).

One woman, when clipping her sheep, turned the shears three times in the animals' mouths; she fatally bewitched some sheep by throwing burn-water in their faces (192). A witch destroyed a man's pet lamb, apparently because it consumed too much milk (129). Another blasted her sister's sheep to death, along with those of a neighbour, when they invaded her bleachfield. For good measure she also used three feathers plucked from one of her sister's geese to conjure a spell resulting in the deaths of 60 others. When she moved house she killed her cockerel and took him to her new place for unspecified nefarious purposes. When her cows were calving she would knot red thread into their tails, a well-known apotropaic. Bewitched animals might die instantly, or within five or six weeks, and even in one case, four years after the initial enchantment (146)!

The main business of witches was of course spells, charms and conjurations; most of them, despite their alarming, exotic and potentially fatal consequences, firmly rooted in the mundane. Helen Fraser conjured a spell for the salmon-fishers of Newburgh, consisting of four

pieces of salmon and a penny, which was to be deposited under the stem-post of a coble, or fishing boat. So equipped, one man caught 12 fish at the first attempt (106–7), though Fraser also allegedly caused three deaths, including those of a mother and baby (108). The daughter of the Reader of Kintore picked up a tangle of multi-coloured threads in the midden. Fearing witchcraft she threw it in the fire which gave 'sic ane gryt crack that they believed the house sould hef fallen down and smoorit [i.e. smothered] them'. Immediately thereafter she took to her bed and 20 days later she was dead (120). Isobel Cockie was forced to un-witch a man when his son threatened to burn her (114). On another occasion she relieved a millwright, a victim of the Evil Eye, who was consumed with fever, but she 'wald not grant that it was witchcraft'. The cure consisted of three draughts of a herbal drink mixed with butter and saffron, as well as an elaborate ritual involving the knotting of green threads upon which the witch blew. When the patient inquired why she did so she replied that no one knew the answer. She then passed the thread around the man's body, under his oxters, and threw it in the fire, while leaving another thread around his waist for 24 hours; when it broke, he had his wife burn it. The same wife fetched water from a south-running stream, washed him with it, and returned it to the burn. For this service the witch was paid 20 shillings in silver, half a firlot of meal, plus a meal-chest for her daughter if he recovered (115).

One witch was accused, among other things, of visiting a standing stone, and of taking fire, in a time of great snow, from a cold frosty dyke and carrying it to her house (129). Another, at Halloween, was seen to remove a burning coal from her house to bury it in her yard (190). Margaret Bane took a burning peat out of William Ross's house to her own abode and shortly thereafter William died (159). When Jonat Leask in the parish of Ellon moved from Deepheather, which is still on the map, to a new dwelling at the Ford of Fortrie, she was accused of having taken a burning coal from her old house to the new, even though fire was available in houses one and a half miles closer to her new abode, 'which may be esteemed and is special points of witchcraft', an assertion which did not convince her assize (135).

When arrested one accused possessed a witch's bag or purse containing coloured threads and twisted wire allegedly used for necromantic purposes (148–9). Such materials, together with pieces of cloth and bits of nails, were often buried to produce magic. A man died when he handled a paper containing sorcerous writing, though he could not read (150). Helen Rogie of Lumphanan possessed a mould made of soft

lead for making 'pictours'. She was found by a neighbour beside cairns which she had erected for devil-worship, casting earth and stones over her shoulder; he was bewitched to death for the intrusion (145–7).

One sorceress could allegedly raise and lay the wind according to Satan's teachings, rendering gales so fierce and vehement none could hold their feet upon the ground. Another was told that she was indicted 'for practising thy witchcraft in laying on the wind, and making of it to becumin calme and lowdin [i.e. lulled], a speciall point techit thee by thy maister Satan'. She supposedly took a beetle, hung it up on a string or thread, 'and quhispering theron thy develisch orisons be a certaine space, throw the quhilk thy develisch witchcraft, sa usit be thee, the wind that blew loud, the quhilk na man, for the gretness and vehemencie therof, cud hauld his feit upoun the ground, becam calme and low. And this thow can nocht deny' (151). The latter chilling sentence generally meant that the victim had already confessed and thus was doomed. These blusterous accusations sound more like the attributes of legendary witches, or those at North Berwick, as do some of the claims in the list of accusations against Marion Grant. She knew the Devil as Christsonday, carnally as well as socially, and had often danced with him and with 'Our Ladye, a fine woman', clad in a white petticoat. Grant allegedly claimed that she could charm a sword to ensure that its owner would never be wounded. The swordsman needed to hold the naked blade in his right hand kissing the guard, and then to make three crosses on the road with the weapon, in the name of Father, Son, Holy Ghost and Christsonday, a ceremony learned from the last-named, who also advised of a protective spell involving a cross made of rowan, or mountain ash, placed on a person's right shoulder, before he turned round three times invoking the same foursome. The dreaded Scudder gathered a number of 'deid folks baines' from the kirkyard at Dyce, washing them lightly in water which she used on the sick William Symmer. She then ordered William's mother-in-law to cast the bones into the River Don, whereupon 'the water rumbled as if all the hills had fallen therein' (180).[34] Such accounts seem to fit well with the attributed locations of witches' conventions, in kirkyards, or at crossroads, mounds, hills, cairns and waters (133). Witches were believed to haunt the timeless landscape of Auld Scotia while the God of the reformers cleansed the causeways of Scotland's cities and towns.

There were spells involving property which sometimes resulted in illness; others were concerned with rents and the prospering or otherwise of the tenant. One spell manifested itself as dancing stones in a

tub of water (191). Two men were bewitched to bankruptcy (126, 132). References to houses shaking in the midst of great din (148–9) are not uncommon in witch testimonials, which may suggest that some people felt far from secure in their dwellings; some of the buildings, constructed of flimsy materials, may have proved vulnerable to the elements. Such anxieties would fit with other evidence, for one of the truly terrifying aspects of witches was that they supposedly invaded a person's domestic space, in her or his own home, at the fireside or in bed; nowhere was immune from their incursions. On the other hand, earthquakes were not unknown; one such was felt from Perth to Cromarty and Kintail on 23 July 1597.[35]

Witch-hunting in the 1590s was not confined to Haddington and Aberdeen. There is some trace of a witch infestation in Berwickshire affecting such places as Duns, Eyemouth and Coldingham. A witch executed in Liddesdale was associated in some way with a 'superstitious well'. Such wells, which attracted pilgrimages from folk in search of cures, were condemned by the Kirk.[36] The Border witches allegedly admitted responsibility for a blight affecting livestock.[37] A witch at Fala, south of Dalkeith, had a dispute with a neighbour over an acre of land. She was acquitted of having secured the services of a notorious witch in Lauderdale, to visit sickness and death upon her rival. Christian Stewart of Perth, on the other hand, was convicted of having bewitched Patrick Stewart with a black cloth.[38]

The case which prompted the recall of commissions for witch trials in 1597 was that of Margaret Atkin, the 'Great Witch of Balwearie', who allegedly reported a convention in Atholl attended by a ludicrous 2,300 witches. Some of the latter were reportedly tried by swimming – 'by binding of their two thumbs and their great toes together, for, being casten in the water, they floated ay aboon', a statement doubly suspect because it is one of the very few references to this practice being used in Scotland. By looking into the eyes of suspects Atkin could tell a witch by a secret mark, but when the experiment was replicated she failed to identify them and eventually confessed to fraud.[39]

The last significant case of the 1590s resulted in the conviction of three women for witchcraft at Edinburgh in November 1597. As in the Aberdeen examples most of the charges were health-related, but with some interesting embellishments. Thomas Guthrie, a baker in Haddington, requested the assistance of Christian Livingstone, fearing he was bewitched, as indeed she showed by unearthing on his premises a little black bag, containing some wheat seeds, worsted threads of different colours, hairs and fingernails. Guthrie's wife was told to burn

this witch's poke, which Livingstone was accused of having earlier deposited herself. She confided that her daughter had been taken away by the fairies who communicated the information that Guthrie's wife would give birth to a son, as she did. Livingstone and one of her co-accused were consulted by Robert Baillie, mason in Haddington, about curing the bewitchment of his wife; however, a special drink of wort and butter, and bathing in a mixture of woodbine and rose petals, were to no avail. Cures for other people involved a bannock baked with cock's blood and flour, shirts soaked in a well or south running water, invocations of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the firing of water – that is, putting a red-hot iron bar into it – and burning straw at each corner of the bed.

A cure for wedonypha (puerperal fever) was to pass the patient three times through a garland of green woodbine which was then cut into nine pieces and thrown in the fire, a remedy which Bessie Aitken had learned from an Italian stranger named Mr John Damiet, 'ane notorious knawin enchanter and sorcerer'.[40] Epileptics had to hang a special stone around their necks for five nights. Livingstone allegedly claimed that she could heal leprosy, 'which the most expert men in medicine are not able to do', by applying a salve made from mercury. When she gave one leper a drink containing the same element, however, he survived a mere 12 hours. One woman was treated for a pain in her loins by bathing with a mixture of red nettles and a herb called Stinking Alexander, thereafter being anointed with the latter mixed with butter; for good measure she was also passed nine times through a woodbine garland, on three separate occasions, 12 hours apart. Another patient, taken from her sickbed and held upright by her two sisters, was washed, in the name of St Giles, with sea-water collected in nine measures or 'sups' from the shore at Cramond. Yet another, allegedly injured by one of two midwives, was treated with a burning coal and a salve of nettles and woodbine, followed by a garlanding and an application of sheep dung. The recommended cure for one man was anointing with the juice and dripping of five kittens roasted in the stomach of a green goose.[41] Throughout the entire trial record the Devil is not so much as mentioned. Bessie Aitken avoided execution because she was pregnant and, having been confined after giving birth, she received a royal pardon, commuting her sentence to banishment on 15 August 1598, one partially happy outcome to this lethal affair. Otherwise the demonisation of folk culture proceeded apace.

Helen Fraser of Foveran confessed that she was a common abuser of the people and that to sustain herself and her bairns she 'pretended

knowledge quhilk scho had not, and undertook to do things quhilk scho could nocht'; she was reported by all 'of whatever estate or sex, to be a common and abominable witch' (105, 109). The condemned were generally led out between the hills, bound to a stake, strangled, and their bodies burned. By no means all were executed. Those appointed to the assize demanded proof of some kind before they would condemn, and not all decisions were unanimous. A couple of witches damned themselves because they attempted to bribe their tormentors (161). Suppok claimed that she knew nothing about witchcraft apart from what she had learned from a neighbour (114). Yet Margaret Bane, Jonet Leask and Jonet Davidson were said to have been active as witches for 30 years and Isobel Cockie for 40 (160, 176, 115); Andrew Man allegedly met the elfin queen for the first time some 60 years before his trial (119). This must imply that the communities in which they subsisted were complicit. Alexander Hardie later repented having defended Helen Fraser in the presence of her assize, knowing 'evidentlie hir to be giltie of death'; appropriately, in the circumstances, he died as a result of her witchcraft (108). In terms of the Witchcraft Act of 1563, those who sought cures for themselves or their animals, who desired that the goodness be returned to the cow's milk, or who had made requests for spells, were as guilty as the witches themselves. Admittedly no such clients are known to have been executed, but, in challenging witches, Kirk and State were tackling the culture of the subordinate classes of Scotland head on.

V

There is ample evidence that the assault continued throughout the seventeenth century and beyond.[42] One might think here in terms of class conflict, of Thorstein Veblen's ideas on how the aristocracy and upper middle classes during this period cultivated new sports and pastimes, often requiring special equipment, in order to distinguish themselves and their pursuits from the vulgar pastimes of the lower orders, or of Norbert Elias's theories on the cultivation of manners, something of an obsession with Scottish writers up to, and including, the Enlightenment.[43] The witch-hunt has been deemed symptomatic of a Protestant obsession with creating the godly society,[44] a goal which remained as elusive as an interview with God himself. Pious and holy folk believed they were living in the 'Last Days' when the house had to be tidied for the most celebrated and distinguished visitor in History, who would also end that History, Jesus Christ himself. Cleansing the

great mansion of Scottish society involved the trashing of human detritus such as witches, real or imagined. But in secular terms the gulf between elite and popular was widening in terms of wealth, education, language, living conditions, occupation, recreation and outlook; the vulgar and the ethnic were increasingly despised.

It is difficult to judge whether women experienced further subordination in this equation. Were Scottish men in the aftermath of Mary of Guise and Mary Queen of Scots, and their female cousins in England and the Continent, fearful of some sort of gender revolt? Were women as tradition-bearers somehow regarded as the harbingers of superstition? In the Witchcraft Survey 85 per cent of the cases were female, over half of whom were over 40 years of age. Is this evidence of genderism and ageism? Were women condemned as witches because some of them (the victims included) dared to raise their heads above the patriarchal parapet? The speculation will continue.[45]

The witch-hunt may be indeed seen as a metaphor for the attack on Scottish folk belief and popular culture, but if such was its purpose we can see it failing at a comparatively early stage in the scare. The witchfinders could not oppose an entire society, which may be why the witch-hunt in Scotland seems to consist of localised outbreaks rather than national panics.[46] It was not only the witches who pretended knowledge which they had not and undertook to do things they could not. The same could be said for their tormentors.

Notes

1 J. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft act', *Church History*, 74 (2005), 39–67.
2 *Statutes of the Scottish Church, 1225–1559*, (ed.) D. Patrick (SHS, 1907), 4, 6, 26, 75.
3 L. Henderson and E. J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: a History* (East Linton, 2001).
4 E. J. Cowan, 'The darker vision of the Scottish Renaissance: the Devil and Francis Stewart', in I. B. Cowan and D. Shaw (eds), *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1983); Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*; P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, 'The fear of the king is death: James VI and the witches of East Lothian', in W. G. Naphy and P. Roberts (eds), *Fear in Early Modern Society* (Manchester, 1997); J. Wormald, 'The witches, the Devil and the king', in T. Brotherstone and D. Ditchburn (eds), *Freedom and Authority: Scotland, c.1050–c.1650* (East Linton, 2000); L. Yeoman, 'Hunting the rich witch in Scotland: high-status witchcraft suspects and their persecutors, 1590–1650', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002).
5 *The Records of Elgin, 1234–1800*, 2 vols., (ed.) W. Cramond (New Spalding Club, 1903–8), ii, 40.

6 *Newes From Scotland declaring the Damnable Life and death of Doctor Fian, a notable Sorcerer who was burned at Edenvborough in Ianuary last (1591)*, (ed.) G. B. Harrison (London, 1924), 7–18.
7 *Newes*, 18–29.
8 King James, *Daemonologie (1597)*, (ed.) G. B. Harrison (London, 1924), 11; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 366 (*Daemonologie*, Book 1, ch. 4).
9 *Daemonologie*, (ed.) Harrison, 18; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 371 (*Daemonologie*, Book 1, ch. 5).
10 *Daemonologie*, (ed.) Harrison, 19–23, 30, 33–40; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 372–6, 381, 384–9 (*Daemonologie*, Book 1, ch. 6; Book 2, chs. 1–4).
11 *Daemonologie*, (ed.) Harrison, 44; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 392–3 (*Daemonologie*, Book 1, ch. 6; Book 2, ch. 5).
12 *Daemonologie*, (ed.) Harrison, 54, 65; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 401, 411 (*Daemonologie*, Book 2, ch. 7; Book 3, ch. 2).
13 *Daemonologie*, (ed.) Harrison, 69; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 414 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, ch. 3).
14 *Daemonologie*, (ed.) Harrison, 70–5; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 415–19 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, chs. 4–5).
15 Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. M. Summers (London, 1928; repr. London, 1996), pt. I, q. iv; *Daemonologie*, (ed.) Harrison, 77–81; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 421–5 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, ch. 6).
16 P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, 'Witchcraft and the Kirk in Aberdeenshire, 1596–97', *Northern Scotland*, 18 (1998), 1–14, at p. 4. The suggestion has been rebutted by Julian Goodare, 'The Aberdeenshire witchcraft panic of 1597', *Northern Scotland*, 21 (2001), 17–37, at pp. 27–8.
17 All pagination in parenthesis refers to 'Trials for Witchcraft', *Spalding Misc.*, i, 82–193.
18 Maxwell-Stuart, 'Witchcraft and the Kirk'; Goodare, 'Aberdeenshire witchcraft panic'; J. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597', in Goodare (ed.), *Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*.
19 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, III, 206–9. Pitcairn transcribed Spaldarg as the Aberdeenshire surname, Spalding, 206.
20 Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft panic', 64.
21 Cf. Goodare, 'Aberdeenshire witchcraft panic'.
22 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, III, 209–13.
23 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, III, 230–41.
24 *The First Book of Discipline*, (ed.) J. K. Cameron (Edinburgh, 1972), 88–9.
25 E. J. Cowan, 'Sex and violence in the Scottish ballads', in E. J. Cowan (ed.), *The Ballad in Scottish History* (East Linton, 2000), 110–12.
26 E. J. Cowan, 'The discovery of the Gàidhealtachd in sixteenth century Scotland', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 60 (2000), 259–84, at p. 266.
27 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, III, 207–8.
28 M. Flinn *et al.*, *Scottish Population History from the 17th century to the 1930s* (Cambridge, 1977), 109.
29 E. Gauldie, *The Scottish Country Miller: a History of Water-Powered Meal Milling in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1981), 187–8.

30 Flinn, *Scottish Population History*, 109.
31 C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (Harmondsworth, 1982); C. Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (Baltimore, Md., 1983), index.
32 Cf. J. Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft in its European context', Chapter 1 above.
33 For more on the Devil's appearance see J. Miller, 'Men in black: appearances of the Devil in early modern Scottish witchcraft discourse', Chapter 6 below.
34 For more on exhumation of corpses see Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft in its European context'.
35 R. Chambers, *Domestic Annals of Scotland from the Reformation to the Revolution*, 3 vols. (3rd edn, Edinburgh, 1874), i, 292.
36 Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 97–8.
37 Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, i, 258.
38 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, III, 397–400.
39 Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, ii, 291–2. For a full account of this case see Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft panic', 58–60.
40 The possible Italian connection is intriguing. Due to the earl of Bothwell's implication in the North Berwick affair such matters were in the air in the 1590s: Cowan, 'Darker vision', 136–40. The Italian stranger may have been a folk, or garbled elite, version, or both, of John Damian, abbot of Tongland, alchemist in the reign of James IV. David Riccio was cited as allegedly having had magical knowledge in a case of 1588: NLS, confession of Robert Murray, MS Acc. 9769, fo. 2v. (I am grateful to Dr Louise Yeoman for this reference). For the survival of the fraught relationship between accused witches and book learning see E. J. Cowan and L. Henderson, 'The last of the witches? The survival of Scottish witch belief', in Goodare (ed.), *Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 213.
41 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, ii, I, 25–9.
42 M. G. Graham, *The Uses of Reform: 'Godly Discipline' and Popular Behavior in Scotland and Beyond, 1560–1610* (Leiden, 1996); M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, Conn., 2002); Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 106–41, 171–89.
43 T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1899; repr. New York, 1994); N. Elias, *The History of Manners*, trans. E. Jephcott (New York, 1978; first pub. 1939).
44 S. Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-Hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560–1710* (East Linton, 2002), 2–3, 174–7, 196–8.
45 Cf. J. Goodare, 'Women and the witch-hunt in Scotland', *Social History*, 23 (1998), 288–308.
46 Cf. L. Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics re-examined', Chapter 5 below.

4

Witch-Hunting and Witch Belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*

Lizanne Henderson

In 1727, an old woman from Loth in Sutherland was brought before a blazing fire in Dornoch. The woman, traditionally known as Janet Horne, warmed herself, thinking the fire had been lit to take the chill from her bones and not, as was actually intended, to burn her to death. Or so the story goes. This case is well known as the last example of the barbarous practice of burning witches in Scotland. It is also infamous for some of its more unusual characteristics – such as the alleged witch 'having ridden upon her own daughter', whom she had 'transformed into a pony', and of course, the memorable image of the poor, deluded soul warming herself while the instruments of her death were being prepared. Impressive materials, though the most familiar parts of the story did not appear in print until at least 92 years after the event![1] Ironically, although Gaelic-speaking Scotland has been noted for the relative absence of formal witch persecutions, it has become memorable as the part of Scotland that punished witches later than anywhere else.

Another irony is that one of the *earliest* Scottish witch-hunts took place in Easter Ross, in 1577–8, when the sheriff of Cromarty authorised the arrest of six men and 26 women on assorted charges of witchcraft. Among them was Kenneth Ower, or Coinneach Odhar, identified by the late Rev. William Matheson as none other than the Brahan Seer of tradition. He was (and is) one of the best-known prophets in Scottish history, and was most likely executed as a witch, 'principal or leader of the art of magic', in 1578, at Chanonry (Fortrose) on the Black Isle. As Matheson demonstrated, Coinneach the seer operated in a purely Gaelic context in which he was associated with Lewis and Easter Ross. Also charged were Marjory Millar, daughter of Robert Millar, smith in Assynt, as were Thomas McKain Moir McAllane

McHenrik, also known as Cassindonisch (*Cas an donais*, Devil's foot) and Christian Ross; the two last named suffered execution in 1577.[2] Another was William McGillivray who was accused of having passed to Lady Foulis, at Easter 1577, a small box 'of witchcraft', possibly containing spells or ointments.[3] Several other Gaelic speakers among those arrested survived to face further charges of witchcraft in the well-known trial of Katherine Ross, Lady Munro of Foulis, in 1590. One was Marion, or Marjory, Neane McAllester, known as Losgoloukart (*Losgagh-luchairt*, which apparently means 'Burn the Castle', though precisely why is unknown). In the course of the trial Lady Foulis and others were accused of making 'pictours' – figures or likenesses of individuals, known in Gaelic as *corp creadha* – in butter or clay; these were then 'elfshot', in other words so-called elf arrowheads, or flints, were thrown at them. It was further alleged that she had consulted the elf folk.[4] Lady Foulis and her stepson, Hector, were both acquitted by what look like packed assizes. Indeed Hector was chief prosecutor of his stepmother before he was himself accused of witchcraft.[5] The case depicts a weird fairy tale of internal family rivalries, but it undoubtedly involved several Gaels who paid the supreme penalty.

I

The areas of Scotland most affected by witch-hunting were the Lowland and predominantly Scots-speaking parts of the country. The Highland and Gaelic-speaking regions appear to have been largely, but not entirely, exempt from large-scale witch panics.[6] One explanation for this has been that the Gaels must have been more tolerant towards witches, though this does not sufficiently allow for the poor survival of evidence. A more convincing argument concerns the role of the Church. It is well known that kirk sessions played a crucial part in the prosecution of Lowland witches; sessions may have been less powerful and slower to take hold in the Highlands.[7]

The terrain of the Highlands may have made it difficult for witch panics to spread out of control, keeping accusations local and specific. The sheer size of some parishes could have acted as an obstacle, at least from the authorities' point of view. There were potential financial barriers to consider since suspects were generally transported to administrative centres to be held before and during trials. Applying for a commission to deal with local cases was also expensive.[8]

What is the *Gàidhealtachd* exactly? This is an interesting question with regard to defining what is meant by Highland witch belief and

witch-hunting. The term is a linguistic rather than a geographical one. Areas that we might not regard as part of the *Gàidhealtachd* today – for instance, Perthshire, Stirlingshire, the Angus glens, Dunbartonshire, the Kintyre peninsula, and Arran – were definitely regarded as such in the period of the witch-hunts.[9] In effect, this broadens the scope of enquiry. Likewise, the adoption of a cultural, rather than a regional, definition allows for the incorporation of evidence of Highland witch belief turning up in non-Highland contexts.

II

The Highlands and Islands have often been regarded as having more tradition, more folklore and more 'superstition' than the rest of the country. However, the most severe punishment of witches took place in the allegedly more 'civilised' and supposedly less 'superstitious' part of Scotland. The level of witch belief certainly seems to have been shared equally between the Gaelic-speaking and Scots-speaking parts of the country. It has been argued that although witches were equally common in the Highlands as in the Lowlands, when the position of the 'witch in the community' is examined, 'we see the considerable difference in attitudes towards the function of witchcraft in the lowland south'. In the Highlands, 'where the people were closer to nature and perhaps, understood, or at least tolerated, witches with a charitable or quasi-Christian kindness, there were few instances of the merciless hunts for witches which were so characteristic of almost the whole of the rest of Europe'.[10] In the mid-1970s, Alfred Truckell asserted that on the witch-hunting map of Scotland the Gaelic Highlands and North-West constituted a blank. There were no executions

> in the Gaelic-speaking areas proper – only a few on the borders of Gaelic territory … and the evidence is almost all primitive magic, cursing, laying on or taking off of illness: hardly any shape-changing, no sabbats, no child-murder or cannibalism: evidence given by simple town or country folk in fact, and not by educated ministers in touch with international writings on the subject – whereas these figure largely in the East and Centre of Scotland.[11]

It could, of course, be said that there is little evidence of child-murder and cannibalism in Lowland Scotland either. Christina Larner's excellent *Enemies of God* focused on the main regions of witch-hunting activity (the north, south-eastern, and south-western districts) and as

such is almost useless when it comes to Highland witch-hunting. As Larner stated, 'some areas saw very little witch-hunting. In the Highlands, especially those parts outside the Kirk sessions system and within the dominion of the clans there was no witch-hunting, or none that reached the records'. Furthermore, 'Gaelic-speaking areas in general provided very few cases although Tain in Ross-shire was an exception to this'. She pointed out that Tain had cases ranging from 1590 to 1699, and that during the great hunt of 1661–2 several cases emerged in Strathglass in which the landlord was unscrupulously using witchcraft accusations as a way of evicting unwanted tenants. 'On the whole, though', Larner observed that, 'Gaelic patronymic names … are rare in lists of suspects'. There were, she asserted, 'no demonic witches in the Highlands and Islands during the period of the hunt'.[12] She noted that in the Highlands 'witches, like the fairies, were often anonymous'. While I would concur with Larner about the anonymity of the fairies, I do not fully agree with her about the namelessness of Highland witches; I have come to know at least some of them by name. She also stated that if the witches were known individuals they were 'credited with possessing the evil eye which is regarded as distinct from witchcraft and can cause unintended harm'.[13]

The association of witches with the evil eye is an interesting one, and does raise questions of the regionality of certain beliefs. However, this particular association was by no means peculiar to the Highlands.[14] As for its distinctiveness from witchcraft, MacLagan's study of the *Evil Eye in the Western Highlands* (1902) asserted that 'there is no witchcraft necessary to the Evil Eye, but that the processes for its cure undoubtedly are witchcraft'. He also commented that 'it is specially difficult to distinguish between the Evil Eye and witchcraft in the case of loss of the due produce of cattle – butter, cream, &c.'[15] The power of the evil eye was discussed briefly by the physician Martin Martin from Skye, himself a Gael, who travelled throughout the Islands in 1695. He was informed that misfortunes or even death could result from this ill-fated glance, children and cattle being most at risk. Martin could name some of those believed to have 'this unhappy faculty, tho at the same time void of any ill design'.[16] The idea that the evil eye is not, in itself, witchcraft is reinforced by J. G. Campbell's comments that the condition is brought on by a 'discontented and unhappy mind, full of envy (*farmad*), covetousness (*sanntachadh*), and such like mean feelings'. Cures for the evil eye (*eòlas a chronachaidh*) could be obtained from a neighbourhood 'wise woman', but could only be carried out on Thursday or Sunday.[17] When a woman admired a child,

she would often say, *Gu'm beannaich an Sealbh thu; cha ghabh mo shuil ort* ('God bless you, my eye shall not punish you').[18] However, other commentators, such as J. M. McPherson who concentrated mainly, but not exclusively, on the North-East, have stressed the connection between the witch and the power of her gaze; 'the evil eye was one of the witch's weapons in most frequent use' and possession of this 'gift' was 'due to the devil's instruction'.[19]

III

Christina Larner concluded that the 'impersonal and apolitical witch-beliefs of the Highlands caused less human suffering than the witch-beliefs of central and lowland Scotland'.[20] It would be pointless to dispute the substance of this statement, for there is no doubt that the persecution of witches in the Lowlands was, in general, more ferocious and more politically charged than it was in the *Gàidhealtachd*. However, this would be of little comfort to those Gaels who found themselves the victims of an accusation. For this reason alone, it is necessary to take a closer look at the impact witch-hunting had on the Highlands. For example, were there really as few cases as has been generally accepted? The total number of legal accusations and executions in the area listed in the Larner, Lee and McLachlan *Source-Book of Scottish Witchcraft* (1977) was 89, but revised figures are much higher. The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft (2003) lists at least 6 per cent of all cases – somewhere around 230 individual cases in the Highlands and Islands, most of those occuring in Bute, Argyll, Nairn, Inverness, Rossshire, Sutherland, and the northern, but mainly non-Gaelic county of Caithness. These may not represent a high percentage, but it is certainly not insignificant if the numbers given for other regions are considered, such as the estimated 2 per cent for the Central region, 5 per cent for Caithness, Orkney and Shetland, 6 per cent for Tayside, 7 per cent for Grampian including Aberdeen, and 9 per cent for the Borders. The worst affected areas were Fife, with an estimated 12 per cent, Strathclyde with 14 per cent, and a staggering 32 per cent from the Lothians.[21] The earliest reliable Scottish population data come from Webster's census of 1755; this gave a total of 1,265,380 persons in Scotland, of which the four principal Highland counties of Argyll, Ross and Cromarty, Inverness, and Sutherland had 194,707, a figure which represents 15.4 per cent of the national total.[22] This is likely to reflect a *minimum* of Gaelic speakers, since it does not include Gaels in the frontier regions mentioned above, such as Dumbarton and Perthshire.

IV

There are several questions that we could ask about the Highland-Lowland divide. Was there really a different conception of who and what witches were, and what powers they possessed? One somewhat self-regarding view suggests that in the Highlands, though people shared a belief in witches, it was of a different nature to that found in the rest of Scotland, or indeed of Europe. The 'evidence on the Highland witches is that while they have many similar points of contact, conduct and attitude with their sisters in the Scottish south, there is, comparatively, very little of the repulsive element in their character'. The gentler witch of the north did not, in this commentator's charitable view, embrace the demonic aspect, making no mention of the 'incubus, the succubus, nor of midnight meetings, Sabbats, dancing with the Devil' and other such common abominations. Nor did Highland witches ride on broomsticks or raise the dead.[23] This was allegedly due to the region's comparative inaccessibility and 'because of the different nature of the fundamental and elemental beliefs of the Highlanders who saw in nature the natural phenomenon rather than the miraculous'. In other words, it was the 'proximity of the Highland lifestyle to nature' that created a notion of the witch as 'more a figure of legend, mythology and folktale, rather than a reality to be feared, hated and persecuted'.[24] While the comparatively low demonic content in Highland witchcraft cases may be noteworthy, the witch figure was not just a character from legends and fairy tales.

Comparisons between the motifs and general characteristics found in witch trial testimonials from various regions differ mainly in the level of such activities as entering into a demonic pact, attendance at the witches' sabbat, night-flying, and intercourse with the Devil. Many Highland cases did not concern themselves with demonic interference but rather with the mundane problems of everyday life, particularly disputes between neighbours, or interference with dairy and other agricultural produce. The Devil was not entirely absent from Highland witchcraft cases, as we shall see from the Bute trials in 1662, but rarely played a significant role judging from the trial evidence. However, witch belief in many Lowland cases, when examined at village level, does not suggest that the Devil's presence was a pre-requisite of witchcraft. The involvement of the Devil was overwhelmingly a learned intervention. From this point of view, Highland witch beliefs, as manifested in trial records, are not particularly unique or different from, say, evidence from the south-west of Scotland, another area

largely unconcerned with the more colourful demonic aspects of witchcraft.[25] The figure of the Devil has, of course, been much more conspicuous within Highland folk tale and tradition in general, known in Gaelic by a variety of different names such as *An donas* 'the bad one', *Am fear nach abair mi* 'the one whom I will not mention', and *Dòmhnall Dubh* 'Black Donald'.[26]

Is there evidence to suggest that Gaelic society was more tolerant of witches? There appear to be no official records of witch trials in Skye and the Outer Hebrides. However, the researches of John MacInnes, based on a vast body of fascinating information drawing upon oral tradition, indicate that unofficial persecution, punishment, and even execution by the community sometimes occurred. One very interesting point that he makes is that there is no native Gaelic word for 'witch'; the Gaelic word for a (female) witch, *Banabhuidseach*, entered the language at a late stage, perhaps in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. The term now embraces healers and wise women as well as witches. The possible implications for the introduction to the Highlands and Islands of an essentially non-Gaelic word or concept should be considered. Does it mean that 'at some stage a new kind of "witch" came into Gaelic society, bringing new practices' or was it 'only that a new term came into the language, leaving belief and practice unaltered'?[27] If it was the former, then a new awareness of the importance of witchcraft, or more specifically of witch-hunting, was evolving within early modern Highland culture.

One reason given for the low number of witchcraft trials in neighbouring Ireland was the near absence of literature on the subject. Unlike England, which had something of a 'literary war' on both sides of the debate regarding the reality of witchcraft, Ireland produced only one pamphlet in 1699. The argument is that 'the absence of this form of literature in Ireland seriously hindered the advance of the belief in (and consequent practice of) witchcraft'.[28] Furthermore, judicial torture was not used in the few trials for witchcraft that did take place, and execution by burning at the stake was not used to any extent.[29] Ronald Hutton suggests that 'Gaelic Ireland affords a classic case of a society which did not fear the witch-figure because it ascribed misfortune to other sources', namely the fairies. 'If Gaelic Scotland', he argues, 'had the same system of belief, together with all its other cultural similarities, then the absence of witch trials there is explained',[30] a suggestion which is not really tenable because the belief in fairies, which was equally strong in non-Gaelic areas of Scotland, clearly did not lessen the amount of witch persecution. Indeed the opposite could be maintained, namely

that the demonisation of fairy belief intensified witch-hunting.[31] Another commentator has argued that witch-hunting was rare in Ireland because Catholics did not want to denounce witch suspects to Protestant courts. While an interesting theory, it would not be convincing in a Scottish context – for example, the Seton involvement in the North Berwick case.[32]

V

Some parallels with the Easter Ross cases of 1577–8 and 1590 appear in the imperfectly reported account of the Argyll witches who became implicated in a murderous conspiracy which threatened to tear apart the great Clan Campbell in the early 1590s.[33] John Campbell of Ardkinglass, among others, was suspected of the assassination of his rival John Campbell of Calder in 1592 and was therefore out of favour with the earl of Argyll. He approached Margaret Campbell, widow of John Og Campbell of Cabrachan, one of the conspirators, to ask whether, through witchcraft, she could arrange his reconciliation with his chief.[34] Margaret cunningly responded that witches could do nothing for him unless they were fully informed of the facts. Ardkinglass then not only admitted his guilt but also named all his accomplices in the conspiracy. Much of what is known of the plot against John Campbell of Calder originated with Margaret Campbell who gave her deposition in Gaelic, rendered into Scots by three translators including the bishop of Argyll and the dean of Lismore. She confessed without any kind of torture, interrogators or compulsion, in the process supplying fascinating insights into Highland witch belief.

Ardkinglass, apparently aware that 'all witchcraft is to be practiced in the begining of every quharter', and realising that the harvest quarter was approaching, was keen for Margaret to start work. She promised him that she would have something to report before Lammas (1 August).[35] After returning home to Lismore, Margaret set about asking her contacts what fate would befall Ardkinglass and his men. Firstly, there was 'Nichaicherne', witch in Morvern, who foresaw that the conspirators would be held in Edinburgh but would return home safely. However, one of their number, MacCoul (Duncan Macdougall of Dunollie), though escaping punishment for a long time, 'at the last wald pay for it'.[36] Then there was Euphrick Nikceoll, who 'tuik upon hir to convert my Lord's angir and to mak him to favour Ardkinglass',[37] and Dougald Macaurie, who, though he enchanted Ardkinglass's men, 'that nae wapin suld offend thame', failed to enchant Ardkinglass

himself. There was also a Lismore woman, 'Mary voir Nicvolvoire vic Coil vic Neil, quha is not ane witch but sche will see things to cum be sum second sicht'.[38]

Margaret Campbell confessed that her late husband, John Og, the conspirator, had several times consulted witches and that she had been present when these witches had promised him that they would restore him to Argyll's favour. She named Katherene NicClaartie and Nichachlerich in 'Blargoir'. From Lismore, Euphrick Ninicol Roy counselled John Og to leave the country in haste for she saw 'an evil hour come on him', and Christian Nichean vic Couil vic Gillespie took it upon herself 'to do gude to John Oig'.

By September 1593, Ardkinglass had become unimpressed by Margaret Campbell's efforts. He told her that he had found a far better enchanter than any of her contacts: a minister, Patrick MacQueen.[39] Ardkinglass asked Margaret if the witches she employed had invoked God or Jesus in their spells, to which she replied 'that the witches namit God in thair words'. He then informed her that MacQueen did not cite God in his practices, and that his witchcraft and enchantments were being hindered by these witches and their naming of God. He therefore commanded her to 'discharge all the witches' immediately. MacQueen's apparent inability to counter the influence of the God-invoking witches seems to contradict Ardkinglass's alleged claim that he was so skilled in his craft that he could make up and build a castle between sundown and sunrise! A confused passage in the deposition seems to suggest that MacQueen foretold that Ardkinglass and Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy would be arrested but would subsequently escape through his own intervention. It appears that the minister also claimed that if he were captured he would escape by invoking seven devils who attended him. As proof of his powers he confided to Ardkinglass that the countess of Argyll's first child would be a girl and the second a boy. He darkly predicted that Argyll would lose a battle in which the heir to the comital family would fall – an obscure passage which has been interpreted as a reference to the Battle of Glenlivet (October 1594) when Archibald Campbell of Lochnell was killed. A further claim attributed to MacQueen was that if he was permitted to practice his craft for seven years unchallenged, he would make Argyll repent his actions, driving him from place to place and allowing him no rest until

> he brocht him to the end of his lyfe quhilk suld be in the Lawlands and upon the cassay [i.e. causeway] of Edinbrught and furder that

> geif [i.e. if] he wes sufferit to perseveir in his doing he suld mak the haill name of Campbell in Argyll to fall, the housis of Ardkinglass and Glenurqhye alone excepted, and that in the end the haill suld be pairtit betwixt theye twa and that theye suld differ amang themselfes extreamly for the haill leivings of the Campbells and that the sword suld end the matter amang thame.[40]

The witches of Margaret Campbell's acquaintance were mostly women who had the gift of second sight, a feature which seems to be consistent with Highland witch beliefs in general. Perhaps an unexpected feature is that while the witches invoked the power of God to enhance their skills, the minister, who was also second sighted, did not.

VI

It would seem that wherever the Kirk spread its tentacles, witch persecution followed. In the Highlands, however, the situation was different from the rest of Scotland. The combination of kirk sessions, presbyteries and synods, although it operated like a well-oiled machine in the greater Edinburgh area, stalled as it approached the Highlands and Islands. The first meeting of the synod of Argyll at Inveraray did not take place until 1639 and it was responsible not only for Argyll, but also for Arran and Bute, the western mainland of Inverness as far north as Glenelg, and the Inner and Outer Hebrides.[41] Church business was a geographical nightmare, as many ministers could not make it to the meetings. In 1643, the synod decided that the ministers of Skye had to attend the meetings only every two years, in consideration of the long distance, the difficulties of both sea and land travel, and the time spent away from their flocks. The large size of parishes was also an issue. In 1642 it was decided that Arran and Islay would require two ministers each.[42] Despite the difficulties, the synod referred a man charged with sorcery to the presbytery of Inveraray, sent another to a civil judge for using a divinatory charm known as 'turning the riddle', and demolished a healing well at Loch Long that was being used 'superstitiously' to cure diseases.[43] In 1649 the synod appointed several brethren 'to take tryall of all witches, sorcerers, charmers, palmisters, juglurs, second sighted divyners, soothsayers, nicromancers, consulters with spirits and such lyke'.[44] At the peak of its ascendancy, presbyterianism's grip was reaching for the innards of Argyll and the Isles.

Four suspects were rounded up by the provost of Tain in 1628, of whom Agnes Nein Donald in Bruach and Marion Nein Gillimichaell in

the parish of Edirtayne had 'long been suspected of witchcraft'. The women absconded, 'thinking heereby to eshew thair deserved punishment'.[45] Another Ross-shire case, in 1629, generated a list of suspects for trial, including such women as Katharine Nein Rob Aunchtie, Marie Nein Eane Eir alias McIntoshe, Katharine Memphersoun alias Naunnchie, and Gradoche Neinechat, 'who have been long suspected of witchcraft'.[46]

The year 1662 was a particularly bad year for witch-hunting across Scotland, and the Highlands were no exception. In May of that year, a commission was granted to Sir George MacKenzie of Tarbat to investigate Agnes Nein Donald Oig, Jonet Nein Donald Vic William Vic More, and Mary Nein Jon Vic Gilchrist at Scatwell in Ross-shire.[47] At Nairn in June, Agnes Nic Ean Vane and Agnes McGillivorich confessed to witchcraft.[48] Another commission was granted in June 1662 to Hew Fraser of Belladrum and others to try several witches, all with Gaelic names, in Conveth parish, Inverness-shire.[49] In July, these prosecutions were extended and a further list of suspects (including some of those already accused) was pooled from tenants living on the Chisholm lands of Strathglass in what appears to have been a cruel scheme on behalf of the Chisholms to regain their lands – an early, and demonic, example of 'clearance'. The suspects, who were part of a Maclean colony who had occupied the lands for some two or 300 years, were 'illegally and cruelly treated' by Alexander Chisholm of Commer 'having conceavit ane inveterat hatred against the suplicants because he could not gett them removed from their lands and possessions in the legall way'. A petition by Sir Rory Mclean of Dowart against Chisholm was sadly too little, too late, for the women were 'barbrouslie tortured … by waking, hanging them up by the thombes, burning the soles of their feet at the fyre, drawing of others at horse taills and binding of them with widdies about the neck and feet and carrying them so alongst on horseback to prison, wherby and by other tortur one of them hath become distracted, another by their cruelty is departed this lyfe, and all of them have confest whatever they were pleasit to demand of them'.[50] Several of the unfortunate victims allegedly died in prison and were never 'brought to confession'.[51]

The possible overlap between Highland and Lowland witch beliefs is seen in the chance survival of what appears to be a series of precognitions relating to a particularly large witchcraft panic in Bute in 1662. At least twenty people were accused and, possibly, four or maybe five were executed on the orders of a commission granted by the privy council. There is a considerable amount of material so the following

remarks will be highly selective.[52] Many of the suspects confessed to entering into a covenant with the Devil, who appeared to them in various guises such as a 'little brown dog', a cat, a handsome young man, a 'black rough fierce man', and as a 'gross copperfaced man'; he baptised them and gave them a new name. Many spoke of large gatherings with the Devil and other witches, often around Halloween. At these 'covens', some of the witches told of a 'young lasse', called Mcillmartin, who had black hair, a broad face, and a merry disposition, who was 'maiden' at the meetings.[53] (This is reminiscent of the trial of Isobel Goudie in Auldearn, also in 1662, who spoke of 'the maiden' as the Devil's favourite.[54]) The witches were blamed for different calamities including the death of children and horses by 'shooting'[55] them, causing a cow to produce blood instead of milk, inflicting an illness on a man that simulated the pains of childbirth, and creating a storm at sea by casting a pebble into the water. One woman, who was breastfeeding, claimed that she had dreamed that one of the witches took a violent bite out her breast; when she awoke her milk was gone and her breast was blue where she had been nipped.[56] Another woman, while dreaming, saw a suspected witch and when she awoke her child was gravely ill. The mother implored the witch to heal her child but the witch said that the child had been twice shot and nothing could be done.[57]

One of the more disturbing confessions was made by Margaret NcWilliam, who had lost her horse and cows and was in great poverty when the Devil came to her and said, 'be not afraid for you shall get rings enough'. However, what he wanted in return was NcWilliam's seven-year-old son. She duly shot him with a fairy stone given her by the Devil and the boy died instantly, 'which grieved her most of anything that ever she did'. We will never know if NcWilliam actually murdered her own child or, in her grief, simply blamed herself for his untimely death. She was singled out in the records as one who 'since the memory of any alive' that knew her, 'went under the name of a witch'. She had been accused of witchcraft, and imprisoned, in 1631, 1645, 1649, and here once again in 1662. On this occasion her luck ran out for she was executed.[58]

Some of the other women accused could cure certain illnesses with rituals, charms and herbs. Some of the rituals involved transference of the disease onto an animal, such as a cat. One woman had Gaelic charms against the evil eye, as well as to heal children of the 'Glaick' (bewitchment), which she could do, she said, 'without suffering either a dog or catt'.[59] Another woman could cure the fairy blast.[60]

The proximity of Bute to the mainland, especially the counties of Renfrew and Ayrshire, perhaps allowed easier access to Lowland ideas. Some of the evidence from Bute could just as easily have been recorded in East Lothian, such as the high demonic content, the pact made with the Devil, witches meeting in covens, or 'pocks of witchcraft' – pouches containing spells and charms. Can we detect a Gaelic element in the confessions? Perhaps the stress on charming, the use of fairy and Gaelic spells, the importance of dreams, and the evil eye can be attributed to local belief, though much of this type of material can be found in the Lowlands as well. What is perhaps of greater significance is that many of the charms and spells were specifically stated to have been in Irish, that is, Gaelic. Jonat Mcneill allegedly used a deadly Gaelic charm against Jonat Man's son, but Man did not understand the language, which made the securing of a counter-spell problematic.[61] Gaelic was used to charm a calf, when applying ointment to sprains and bruises in humans, and to protect people from accidents or the evil eye. One such formula began '*Obi er bhrachaadh* etc';[62] another was quoted as '*er brid na bachil duin* etc'.[63]

An unusual case occurred in 1665. When Robert Douglas of Auchintulloch, Loch Lomond, was accused of the accidental slaughter of Walter Lindsay at the Boat of Bonhill, a ferry-crossing in the Vale of Leven, some highlanders alleged that he was 'in a distraction bewitched'. The synod of Glasgow was merciful, accepting the witnesses' evidence that Douglas was 'not in his naturall witts the tyme of the unhappie slauchter' and it was well-known that, for several weeks beforehand, he was 'bewitched'.[64]

In 1669, More Roy, More Nain Duy McIvers and Margaret Nein Vayne were held at Castle Tioram in Inverness-shire on suspicion of witchcraft.[65] In the justiciary court records for Argyll is the trial of a native of the Appin region, Donald McIlmichall, in Inveraray in 1677. He was described as 'a common vagabond', and stood accused of stealing horses and cattle. He was further charged with 'that horrid cryme of corresponding with the devill and consulting him anent stollen goods and getting informatione for discoverie thereof'.[66] He saw fairies inside a hill, probably at Dalnasheen (the field of the fairy hill), and on the island of Lismore. His case is of interest for several reasons. He was a Gael, he was male, and he met with the fairies. It was the latter reason that would ensure a more serious charge of 'consulting with evill spirits' which led to his execution for witchcraft.[67] The imposition of 'learned' (and possibly Lowland) ideas upon local folkloric beliefs about witchcraft, specifically the way fairies were demonised, is evident

in this trial. Fairies showed up in other cases, such as that of Jean Campbell, investigated for charming by the Rothesay kirk session in 1660 which reported that she 'gangs with the faryes'.[68] In this instance, we can speculate that Campbell learned her charming skills from the elves.

VII

Travellers' accounts are an important source of information, and one of the best comes from Martin Martin. Although he was not particularly interested in fairies or witches, he did draw a subtle, and perhaps unconscious, distinction between charming and witchcraft. He reported that it was 'a receiv'd opinion in these islands' and 'in the neighbouring part of the main land, that women by a charm … are able to convey the increase of their neighbours cows milk to their own use'. The charmed milk did not produce 'the ordinary quantity of butter; and the curds made of that milk are so tough, that it cannot be made so firm as other cheese'.

There is much of interest in this account. The crime is one specifically committed by women. And, these women are implicitly called 'charmers' as opposed to 'witches', a distinction not necessarily made with regard to this crime elsewhere in Scotland. The act of taking away breast-milk from nurses, however, was clearly recognised as an act of witchcraft, and not charming. Martin was present when an allegation of this type was made. He had seen four women who had presented themselves as candidates for wet-nursing. After only three days of suckling the baby, the milk of the one who was chosen dried up. Another nurse was put in her place, but meanwhile, the first nurse's milk returned to her, the effect, some thought, 'of witchcraft by some of her neighbours'. If stealing milk was the preserve of women, interfering with the production of ale was apparently a male domain. Martin was told of charmers who had the 'art of taking away the increase of malt' which resulted in an ale that lacked 'life or good taste'.[69]

Witches were apparently still rampant in Martin's day. In 1698, the presbytery of Tain heard complaints from their brethren in Sutherland that 'the practice of witchcraft was common among their people, and they therefore desire to know the Presbytery's advice'. It was decided that in the parishes of Sutherland and Ross,

> where there is ground to believe that spells, charms, or any other practice of witchcraft are practised, the ministers of these parishes

> shall preach on that subject and set forth the sin of witchcraft, and all the practices relating thereto, and to take action against all such who are charged therewith according to the rules of the Church.[70]

On the Black Isle, a warrant to examine the cases of three women in Fortrose was granted in 1699.[71] Between 1699 and 1700, a commission was granted in Ross-shire to try 12 people for the 'diabolical crimes and charms of witchcraft'.[72] In 176, the privy council imposed the 'extreme penalty' upon two men for 'witchcraft and malefice' and they were executed in Inverness.[73] The synod of Ross in 1737 legislated against using counter-charms, such as scoring the suspected witch's forehead.[74] Three men appeared before the presbytery of Tain in 1750 for a series of attacks on women; they had dragged them from their beds and 'cast them on the hard and cold floor, without allowing them any time to put on any of their clothes, except their shirts, using most horrid cursing and imprecations, calling them witches and devils'. One of the men then 'scored and cut their foreheads with an iron tool to the effusion of blood'.[75] All three men were rebuked before the congregations at Rosskeen and Alness for their 'grievous scandal'. One of the attackers, who blamed his consumption or tuberculosis on the witches, claimed that he was trying to recover his health.[76] The long persistence of witchcraft cases in Tain might possibly be attributed to the town's situation on a frontier zone between Gaels and Lowlanders of the type that Hugh Miller would later describe in Cromarty.[77]

Many late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travellers expected to hear about the supernatural, since Scotland was regarded as a backward country preserving primitive cultures and superstitions. The *Gàidhealtachd* was especially targeted in this regard. Lord Grange's report of 1724–5 to Viscount Townshend, secretary of state, observed that the 'barbarous' Highlanders 'are much addicted to a kind of sorcery and charming; and it is commonly said that … there are still several among them who deall with familiar spirits'.[78] He may of course have been feeding the preconceptions and prejudices of his patron. Grange, after all, was the man who marooned his unfortunate wife on St Kilda.[79]

Thomas Pennant was intrigued to discover, in 1769, that Perthshire 'still retains some of its ancient customs and superstitions'. He came across a variety of customs and beliefs, still very much alive, though witchcraft, he thought, had died out in certain places. Of Perthshire he remarked, 'the notion of witchcraft is quite lost: it was observed to cease almost immediately on the repeal of the witch act'. The drawback

of being a tourist was that knowledge acquired, and impressions formed, were at times shaped by the particular people encountered. Had he ventured to Kenmore he might have learned of a series of investigations into witchcraft and charming, the last of which occurred in 1753. As he progressed northwards, to Banffshire and Speyside, he discovered that witch beliefs were not yet extinguished, 'even in this cultivated country'. Many were still bleeding supposed witches, for instance. Pennant seemed puzzled to find witches more strongly entrenched in the richer farmlands of the north-east than in the hardier landscapes of Breadalbane.[80]

Robert Kirk, an episcopalian minister and well-respected Gaelic scholar from Balquhidder and Aberfoyle, was more interested in Scotland's fairy folk than in its witches when he wrote his *The Secret Common-Wealth* (1691).[81] However, he did provide a couple of tantalising clues regarding the nature of witch belief in late seventeenth century Perthshire. He commented on the 'skilfull women' who stole milk, by way of a hair-tether, from their neighbours cows and 'convey'd to their homes by secret pathes … by art Magic'. The milk could be carried 'as far off as a bull will be heard to roar'. The way to recover the stolen milk was 'a bitter chyding of the suspected inchanters, charging by a counter-charme to give them back their own, in God, or their Masters name'.[82] Kirk, like Martin Martin, referred to such women not as witches but as 'skilfull women' or 'inchanters' – a subtle, yet important distinction.

Kirk also referred to a woman from Colonsay, who had lived there at the time of the Montrose wars in the 1640s. She was alleged to have second sight, which Kirk thought was unusual as, in his view, only men were so gifted. 'Being asked who gave her such sights and warnings' she revealed that 'as soon as she sett three crosses of straw upon the palm of her hand, a great ugly Beast sprang out of the earth, neer her and flew in the air'. If the answer to her question was positive 'the Beast would descend calmly, and lick up the crosses': otherwise it would 'furiously thurst her and the crosses over on the ground, and so vanish to his place'.[83] Again, Kirk did not specifically refer to this woman as a witch although she was seemingly involved in a diabolical ritual of some sort. Her powers were not 'natural'; that is, she was not claiming to be born with them, but rather acquired her secret knowledge via the 'beast' who appeared during her ritual. Such claims were not unusual in cases of witchcraft where suspects had been known to confess that the fairies were responsible for any magical powers – including second sight – they might have had.[84]

Kirk said little about witches – he was, after all, writing on second sight and fairy belief – but he did mention the devil's mark and witch-pricking: the 'damnable practise of evil angels, their sucking of blood and spirits out of witches bodys (till they drein them, into a deformed and dry leanness) to feed their own vehicles withal, leaving what wee call the Witches mark behind'. Kirk regularly placed distinctive interpretations upon the evidence he gathered. It was 'evil angels', a more theologically-sophisticated phrase to describe the more recognisable demons or familiar spirits found elsewhere in Scotland, that sucked the life-force out of witches, leaving them drained and withered. Kirk had himself seen the evidence: 'a spot that I have seen as a smal mole horny and brown coloured, throw which mark, when a large brass pin was thrust (both in buttock, nose and roof of mouth) till it bowed and became crooked; the witches, both men and women, neither felt a pain, nor did bleed, nor knew the precise time when this was a doing to them (their eyes only being covered)'.[85] Unfortunately he did not say when or where he saw this test of guilt being conducted.

VIII

People in the rest of Scotland believed that Gaels were particularly prone to witchcraft. Some of these Gaels, indeed, resided in the Lowlands. One of the witches executed for her part in the affair at North Berwick kirk was known as 'Ersche Marioun', that is, Irish or Gaelic-speaking.[86] Catherine MacTargett, an East Lothian witch of 1688, described her initiation into the diabolic arts but made no mention of the more exotic details found in some confessions.[87] There were no wild parties or sex with the Devil, and no flying through the air to covens. However, MacTargett maintained that she entered the service of the Devil through the instruction of a Highland woman called Margaret McLain who bade her to renounce her baptism. That a woman from Dunbar should have claimed to have learned her art from a Highlander is perhaps more revealing than if she had declared the Devil had taught her, for many Lowlanders would have had a poor view of Gaels at the time. A witch in Galloway in the mid-eighteenth century was accused of stealing butter and sucking milk from cows in the shape of a hare. She was said to have muttered her incantations in Gaelic, a language which had died out in the area probably by the sixteenth century.[88]

The incident in Paisley (1696–7) involving the bewitchment of 11-year-old Christian Shaw included Highland suspects. The episode began when Christian accused one of the maids in the house of stealing

milk. The thieving maid was a Highlander named Katherine Campbell, who, it is said, was 'of a proud and revengeful temper, and much addicted to cursing and swearing', and in a rage did say to Christian, 'The Devil harle [i.e. drag] your soul through hell'. Very soon after, Christian's seizures began and she accused Campbell as one of her tormentors. During the time of Christian's bewitchment, 'there came an old Highland fellow to Bargarran, who, calling himself a weary traveller', was brought into the kitchen to receive alms. In another part of the house, Christian began to exhibit the signs of demonic possession and her mother brought her down to the kitchen, asking the 'Highland fellow' to take her daughter's hand, which he did; 'the girl immediately upon his touch was grievously tormented in all the parts of her body'.[89] This is just a small sample, but it can be seen that Highlanders as practising witches are to be found in Lowland witch cases, thus broadening the scope of enquiry. Such accounts may well have reinforced the idea among Lowlanders that witches were more numerous in the Highlands than elsewhere.

IX

It is generally assumed that witch belief survived much longer in the *Gàidhealtachd* than elsewhere. There are indeed late references to witches, such as in Skye in 1880 where members of the Free Kirk at Uig petitioned against a mother and daughter who 'by evil arts take the milk from the neighbours' cows', but some of my own research suggests similarly late evidence in Lowland Scotland, again in the south-west.[90]

There are many wonderful stories of witches in the oral tradition. Hugh Miller of Cromarty's account of a witch by the name of Stine Bheag o' Tarbat (Sheena Veg) related to events in 1738, orally communicated to Miller who published the story in 1835. Stine Bheag, who muttered her spells in Gaelic, was 'much consulted by seafaring men' as she could control the winds.[91] The English engineer Edmund Burt, based in Inverness from the late 1720s to the late 1730s, commented upon the widespread acceptance of witchcraft that he encountered in the Highlands. Burt had an argument with a local laird and a minister on the topic; in an effort to persuade the sceptical Burt of the reality of witchcraft, the minister related a story he felt sure would convince him. A 'certain Highland laird' discovered that some of his wine was being stolen. The servants were cleared of any blame, and so witchcraft was suspected. Late one night, the laird went to his cellar 'at an hour when he thought it might be watering-time with the hags', and under

cloak of darkness, sprang into the room swinging his broadsword to and fro until he was sure he had hit one of the culprits. In the darkness he could make out the eyes of several cats, but when he lit a candle they had vanished, leaving nothing but some blood on the floor. The laird immediately went to the house of a reputed witch, an old woman who lived some two miles away. Inside her hut, he found her in bed, bleeding effusively and 'casting his eye under the bed, there lay her leg in its natural form!' Much to the puzzlement of the minister, Burt was far from persuaded by the story and continued to express his disbelief. His host turned to the minister and said, 'Sir, you must no mind Mr. Burt, for he is an atheist'.[92]

X

This brief survey suggests that the richness of traditions about Highland witches in folklore is matched by the survival of a surprising amount of information in the historical record. The number of persecutions certainly seems larger than is often assumed, while the number of executions, though indeterminate, is not insignificant. Evidence of Highland witches and witch beliefs surfacing in non-Highland contexts, if considered, may well boost the numbers even further.

When compared with other parts of Scotland, it is hard to find anything particularly unique or distinctive about Gaelic witch beliefs. There was, perhaps, greater emphasis given to second sight, the significance of dreams, and the power of the evil eye, although these can also be found in non-Gaelic contexts. J. G. Campbell's comment that Highland witches were less 'repulsive' than their 'southern sisters', less likely to engage in demonic pacts, attend sabbats or raise the dead, is to some extent true though there are plenty of examples where Lowland witches were equally uninvolved or uninterested in the demonic side of witchcraft. As elsewhere in Scotland, Gaelic witches might speak with the fairies, transform into cats, or murder children, but they were more often blamed for stealing milk, charming cattle, or foreseeing the future.

Janet Horne from Sutherland may have been the last to suffer the pain, terror and ignominy of a brutal execution, but many had perished before her. Witch persecution in Gaelic-speaking Scotland is far from a blank canvas, and I, for one, think it is time to fill in at least some of the blanks – which in fact are less numerous than commentators such as Truckell or Larner assumed – and finally give proper acknowledgement to all those who lost their lives.

Notes

1 E. J. Cowan and L. Henderson, 'The last of the witches? The survival of Scottish witch belief', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), 205–9. It is not certain when the name Janet Horne was first attributed to the victim; she is not identified in the literature up to and including the time of Scott. In the paper cited it was erroneously stated that Janet Horne is not mentioned in C. D. Bentinck, *Dornoch Cathedral and Parish* (1926). There are, however, references to her on pp. 280 and 461–5. Janet is named in H. M. MacKay, *Old Dornoch: its Traditions and Legends* (Dingwall, 1920), 110.

2 W. Matheson, 'The historical Coinneach Odhar and some prophecies attributed to him', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 46 (1968), 1–23; Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, III, 193.

3 His name has various spellings in the record: McGilliewareycht-dame, Mcgillieuorie-dam, McGilliveri-dame, McGillieveridame, McGillevori-dame. Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, III, 195–6.

4 Matheson, 'The historical Coinneach Odhar'; Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, III, 192–204; P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton, 2001), 135–41. For more on elf-shot see L. Henderson and E. J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: a History* (East Linton, 2001), 77–9, 93–4, A. Hall, 'Getting shot of elves: healing, witchcraft and fairies in the Scottish witchcraft trials', *Folklore*, 116 (2005), 19–36, and H. Cheape, '"Charms against witchcraft": magic and mischief in museum collections', Chapter 10 below.

5 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, i, III, 201–4.

6 C. Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981), 80.

7 For kirk sessions in the Highlands see J. Dawson, 'Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd in Scotland', in A. Pettegree *et al*. (eds), *Calvinism in Europe, 1540–1620* (Cambridge, 1994), and Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 121. Larner hinted at this in *Enemies of God*, 55–6, 80.

8 In the Ross-shire witchcraft cases of 1699, as 'the distance was great, and the travelling expensive', a commission was granted to Robertson of Inshes and 'several other gentlemen of the district, for doing justice on the offenders'. R. Chambers, *Domestic Annals of Scotland from the Reformation to the Revolution*, 3 vols. (3rd edn, Edinburgh, 1874), iii, 216.

9 Cf. C. W. J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: the Transformation of a Culture Region* (London, 1988), esp. 1–33.

10 F. Thomson, *The Supernatural Highlands* (London, 1976), 23.

11 A. E. Truckell, 'Some notes on witchcraft and magical practices in Dumfries and Galloway', MS. Dumfries and Galloway Archives, 3.

12 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 98.

13 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 80, 8.

14 There are many examples of the 'evil eye' to be found in the Lowlands. A woman allegedly sold her cow because 'an ill e'e' had been put on her: A. Stewart, *Reminiscences of Dunfermline and Neighbourhood* (Edinburgh, 1886), 41. Charms against 'evil eye' are noted in W. Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders* (London, 1879), 187–8. In Orkney, accused witch Katherine Grant (1623) cursed a man by looking over her shoulder and turning up the white of her eye, in

G. F. Black, *County Folklore*, vol. iii: *Orkney and Shetland Islands* (London, 1903; repr. London, 1974), 81.

15 R. C. MacLagan, *Evil Eye in the Western Highlands* (London, 1902; repr. Wakefield, 1972), 216, 129.

16 M. Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (2nd edn, 1716; repr. Edinburgh, 1976), 123.

17 J. G. Campbell, *Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1902), 59–66.

18 W. MacKenzie, 'Gaelic incantations, charms and blessings of the Hebrides', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 18 (1891–2), 97–182, at p. 131.

19 J. M. McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland* (London, 1929), 191–3.

20 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 202. Ronald Hutton has observed that one of the less discussed aspects of the Scottish witch trials is 'their apparent absence from … the Gaelic-speaking zone': 'The global context of the Scottish witch-hunt', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context*, 31–2. Stuart Macdonald points out that the 'characterization of the Highlands as an area where the witch-hunt did not occur is far too simplistic. (Nor, if one reads closely, is this what Larner said)': *The Witches of Fife: Witch-Hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560–1710* (East Linton, 2002), 22.

21 SSW. See also the *Scottish Witch-Hunt Database* (CD-Rom, 2001), compiled by Stuart Macdonald.

22 J. G. Kyd (ed.), *Scottish Population Statistics* (SHS, 1952); Withers, *Gaelic Scotland*, 179–80.

23 Thomson, *Supernatural Highlands*, 20, drawing on Campbell, *Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Scottish Highlands*, 2.

24 Thomson, *Supernatural Highlands*, 20–1.

25 For south-western witch belief see L. Henderson, 'The survival of witchcraft prosecutions and witch belief in South West Scotland', *SHR*, 85 (2006), 54–76. See also S. Macdonald, 'In search of the Devil in Fife witchcraft cases, 1560–1705', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*.

26 J. G. Campbell, *The Gaelic Otherworld*, (ed.) R. Black (Glasgow, 1900; repr. Edinburgh, 2005), ch. 12. For more on the Devil's appearance see J. Miller, 'Men in black: appearances of the Devil in early modern Scottish witchcraft discourse', Chapter 6 below.

27 I am grateful to Dr MacInnes for sharing this information with me. See also J. MacInnes, 'The Church and traditional belief in Gaelic society', in L. Henderson (ed.), *Fantastical Imaginations: the Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture* (East Linton, forthcoming).

28 'All printed notices of Irish witchcraft, with one possible exception, are recorded in books published outside the country': St J. D. Seymour, *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology* (Dublin, 1913; repr. New York, 1992), 12, 16.

29 Seymour, *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology*, 18–19, 20.

30 Hutton, 'Global context', 32.

31 Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 106–41; cf. J. Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft in its European context', Chapter 1 above.

32 E. C. Lapoint, 'Irish immunity to witch-hunting, 1534–1711', *Eire-Ireland,* 27 (1992), 76–92. On the North Berwick trials see Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*. See also J. Goodare, 'The Aberdeenshire witchcraft panic of

1597', *Northern Scotland,* 21 (2001), 17–37, at p. 30, for the earls of Huntly and Errol, who were Catholics heavily involved in witch-hunting.

33 E. J. Cowan, 'Clanship, kinship and the Campbell acquisition of Islay', *SHR,* 58 (1979), 132–57, at p. 139.

34 According to Margaret Campbell's deposition, Ardkinglass consulted her as it was heard tell that the women of Lorn were wiser than the women elsewhere in Argyll: *HP*, i, 159–60.

35 *HP*, i, 165.

36 *HP*, i, 165.

37 Euphrick Nikceoll was taught her charms by old Mackellar of Cruachan, who in turn learned them at the priory of Icolmkill (Iona): *HP*, i, 166.

38 Though she was privy to the secrets of the conspiracy, no mention is made in the deposition records of Mary's personal prediction on the matter: *HP*, i, 166–7.

39 According to the editor of *HP* this was Patrick MacQueen, son of Patrick Oig MacQueen, who was minister of Rothesay in 1589 and transferred to Monzie in 1595. He is mentioned in a contemporary narrative as 'Patrik McQuene ane deboysched and depryved minister' who testified against Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy in 1601: *The Black Book of Taymouth, with Other Papers from the Breadalbane Charter-Room*, (ed.) C. Innes (Bannatyne Club, 1855), 36.

40 *HP*, i, 167–9.

41 *Minutes of the Synod of Argyll, 1639–1651*, (ed.) D. C. MacTavish (Edinburgh, 1943), p. xii.

42 *Minutes of the Synod of Argyll*, 73, 54–5.

43 *Minutes of the Synod of Argyll*, 46, 84, 59.

44 *Minutes of the Synod of Argyll,* 153.

45 *RPC*, 2nd ser., ii, 489. The provost, John MacCulloch of Tain, was granted a commission to apprehend and try four suspects: Helen Gow (wife of Finlay McAllane, cordiner in Tain), Elspeth Simsoun in Badarrachin parish of 'Kincairdin', Agnes Nein Donald in Bruach parish of Logie, and Marion Nein Gillimichaell in the parish of Edirtayne. As in so many cases it is difficult to be sure whether such persons should be classified as Gaels, though the last two names seem to be Gaelic. However, the folk of Tain were later known as 'Highland Lowlanders', a situation that may have already been detectable by the early seventeenth century.

46 Commission to Colin, earl of Seaforth, and Mr Alexander MacKenzie of Culcowie, *RPC*, 2nd ser., iii, 15–16.

47 *RPC*, 3rd ser., i, 207.

48 *RPC*, 3rd ser., i, 221.

49 Suspected witches in Conveth were Beak Nean Finlay Vic Ean Vic Homas, Jonet Nein Ean Cheill, Donald Vic McPhaill, Beak Nein Ean Duy Vic Finley, Kathrin Nein Ean Vic Conell Eir, Jonet Nein Rory Buy, Cormule Nean Ean Duy Vic Conchie Vic Goune, Mary Nein Allaster Vic Conchy, Cristian Nein Ferquhar Vic Ewin, Cristian Nein Phaill, and Mary Nein Gowin. The commission also tried Muriall Duy Nein Giliphadrick, in Buntoit. A commission was also granted to Hew Fraser and Chisholm of Commer to try Issobell Duff from the town of Inverness. *RPC*, 3rd ser., i, 233–4.

50 Cristian Neil Ferquhar Vic Ean and Mary Nein Goune once again appear on the list of suspects from Strathglass with a further 15 possible new additions: Hectour and Donald McCleanes, Jonet McClean, Margaret McClean, Ninian Coell, Kathrin Ninian Ear Vic Ean Culleam, Jonet Ninian Rory Mie, Mary McFinlay Vic Comes, Kathrin Nyn Owan Vic Omnoch, Mary Dollour, Kathrin Nein Ferquhar McEan, Gormyle Grant, Baike Ninian Dowie Vic Finley, Baik McNish, Mary Muarn Vic Innish, and 'certain others'. *RPC*, 3rd ser., i, 237.
51 W. Mackay, 'The Strathglass witches of 1662', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness,* 9 (1879–80), 113–21.
52 *HP*, iii, 3–30; *RPC*, 3rd ser., i, 208.
53 *HP*, iii, 8. For more on the Devil's appearance see Miller, 'Men in black'.
54 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, 602–16.
55 The term 'shooting' here refers to elf-shot – magical projectiles in the form of arrows or darts.
56 *HP*, iii, 19–20.
57 *HP*, iii, 3.
58 *HP*, iii, 14–20.
59 *HP*, iii, 4, 9.
60 *HP*, iii, 23–4.
61 *HP*, iii, 4.
62 *Obaidh* meant a 'charm' or 'incantation': MacKenzie, 'Gaelic incantations', 101.
63 *HP*, iii, 5–6, 9.
64 *HP*, iii, 31–5.
65 *RPC*, 3rd ser., iii, 78.
66 *HP*, iii, 36–7.
67 *HP*, iii, 37–8; *Justiciary Records of Argyll and the Isles, 1664–1705*, 2 vols., (eds) J. Cameron and J. Imrie (Stair Society, 1949–69), i, 80–2; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 42–3, 46, 62, 66, 172.
68 J. K. Hewison, *The Isle of Bute in the Olden Time*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1895), ii, 264.
69 Martin, *Description*, 121–2.
70 C. MacNaughton, *Church Life in Ross and Sutherland, from the Revolution (1688) to the Present Time* (Inverness, 1915), 15.
71 Trial of Margaret Provost, Margaret Bezok and Mary NicInnarich, Fortrose, 6 Oct. 1699. C. Larner *et al.*, *A Source-Book of Scottish Witchcraft* (Glasgow, 1977), 275–7.
72 Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, iii, 216–17; Larner *et al.*, *Source-Book*, 280.
73 Lachlan and George Rattray: Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, iii, 302.
74 MacNaughton, *Church Life in Ross and Sutherland*, 50–1, 72–3, 77–8, 145.
75 Tain Presbytery Records, 25 July 1750, quoted in MacNaughton, *Church Life in Ross and Sutherland*, 199–206; MacPherson, *Primitive Beliefs*, 223.
76 The counter-spell did not work as the man died shortly thereafter: MacNaughton, *Church Life in Ross and Sutherland*, 204, 206.
77 H. Miller, *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1835). Cf. L. Henderson, 'The Natural and Supernatural Worlds of Hugh Miller', in L. Borley (ed.), *Celebrating the Life and Times of Hugh Miller* (Cromarty, 2003).

78 NAS, 'Account of the Highlanders and Highlands by Lord Grange for Viscount Townshend, Secretary of State', 29 Dec. 1724 and 2 Jan. 1725, GD/124/15/1263.
79 M. Harman, *An Isle Called Hirte: a History and Culture of St. Kilda to 1930* (Waternish, 1997), 90–1.
80 T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland in 1769* (3rd edn, Warrington, 1829; repr. Perth, 1979), 95–7, 141.
81 Kirk rarely referred specifically to witches, though see these passages: 'albeit were-wolves and witches true bodies, are (by the union of the spirit of nature, that runs thorow all, ecchoing and doubling the blow towards another) wounded at hom, when the astral assumed bodies are stricken elsewhere', and the somewhat obscure 'in a witches eye the beholder cannot see his own image reflected'. R. Kirk, *The Secret Common-Wealth*, (ed.) S. Sanderson (Cambridge, 1976), 57, 82.
82 It was possible to prevent such magical theft of milk by putting a little of the mother's dung on the calf's mouth before it started to suckle: Kirk, *The Secret Common-Wealth*, 53–4.
83 Kirk, *The Secret Common-Wealth*, 68–9.
84 Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, ch. 4.
85 Kirk, *The Secret Common-Wealth*, 97.
86 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, ii, II, 543. The unfortunate Marioun, complete with soubriquet, was also mentioned in despatches by Robert Bowes in 1590; *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547–1603*, 13 vols., (eds) J. Bain *et al.* (Edinburgh, 1898–1969), x, 467.
87 *RPC*, 3rd ser., xiii, 245–62.
88 R. deBruce Trotter, 'No. III. The witch of Hannayston', *The Gallovidian*, vol. 4, no. 13 (1902), 40–4.
89 *A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire* (Paisley, 1877), 71–2, 98–9. For more on this case see B. P. Levack, 'Demonic possession in early modern Scotland', Chapter 7 below.
90 A. A. MacGregor, *The Peat-Fire Flame: Folk-Tales and Traditions of the Highlands and Islands* (1937; repr. Edinburgh, 1947), 262; Henderson, 'The survival of witchcraft prosecutions and witch belief in South West Scotland'.
91 Miller, *Scenes and Legends*, 269–76. In Gaelic stories, the witches of Lewis are noted as the best for raising winds: A. Bruford, 'Scottish Gaelic witch stories: a provisional type list', *Scottish Studies,* 2 (1967), 13–47.
92 E. Burt, *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland to his Friend in London*, (ed.) A. Simmons (London, 1754; repr. Edinburgh, 1998), 148–52.

5
Scottish Witchcraft Panics Re-examined

Lauren Martin

A consensus about the patterns of witchcraft prosecution in early modern Scotland has emerged over the last 25 years. Scholars generally agree that early modern Scotland was gripped by five national witchcraft panics in 1590–1, 1597, 1629–30, 1649–50 and 1661–2; and that these 'panics' were part of a larger, European witch-hunt that Scotland joined in its second wave.[1] These national peaks were primarily identified quantitatively by counting the number of recorded witchcraft suspects accused annually in Scotland, but qualitative sources were also used to estimate the numbers of accusations made in the 1590s.[2] The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, completed in 2003, confirms the general pattern of peaks and troughs in annual rates of witchcraft prosecution in Scotland and identifies a few additional peaks.[3] The pattern is so well established that it opens and frames nearly every recent article about Scottish witchcraft, including my own and several chapters in this volume.[4] The general chronological pattern of national witchcraft prosecution in Scotland, therefore, is not in question. But what does this pattern mean? Is it the most illuminating way to frame witchcraft accusation and prosecution? How is our understanding of witchcraft belief shaped (and possibly constrained) by this perspective? Are there other possible models for thinking about patterns of witchcraft prosecution?

I

In this chapter I want to re-evaluate the common assumption that the peaks in accusation displayed in this well-established chronological pattern are indicative of so-called national 'witch-hunts' or national 'witchcraft panics'. Research for the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft

raised doubts about the accuracy of the conflation of annual peaks in witchcraft accusation with the idea of 'national panic'. I believe that a 'suspect-based' model, described in detail below, is at the heart of our reliance on chronological patterns of witchcraft prosecution for framing our understanding of witchcraft belief.[5] Instead, a focus on the experiences of witch-accusing communities rather than on witchcraft accusations and suspects illuminates the full breadth and scope of witchcraft prosecution.[6] In the process, the usefulness of the concepts of 'hunt' and 'panic' for understanding witchcraft accusation and prosecution will also be assessed.

This shift in model has the potential to reveal more about how, where, when and why witchcraft prosecutions affected the lives of early modern Scots than a suspect-based analysis. I suggest that most people touched by witchcraft accusations and prosecutions – the hundreds of neighbours, friends, associates, victims and investigators of a witchcraft suspect diffused throughout the suspect's social and economic life – were involved only in one or two prosecutions even during the so-called 'panic' years. From the point of view of witch-accusing communities the prosecution of large numbers of suspects was uncommon. In some instances investigators, prosecutors and others clearly sought and found multiple suspects and sometimes communities joined those efforts. While at least half of all witchcraft suspects were prosecuted during years labelled as 'panic' years, a focus on witch-accusing communities suggests that the phenomenon of large-scale serial witch hunts was not the way that most people experienced witchcraft prosecutions.

Witchcraft as seen from the perspective of witch-accusing communities brings the cultural and social dimension of witchcraft prosecution to the fore. The conceptual shift suggested here is not simply a change in the object of study from witchcraft suspects to witch-accusing communities; it is also a change in focus from witch-hunting and witch-hunters to the processes of witchcraft belief and experience.

I want to be clear from the outset how the term 'belief' is used in this chapter. From my reading of witchcraft documents 'witchcraft beliefs' were not a set of predetermined ideas or a static symbolic system from which people drew meaning and oriented their actions. Belief is part of how people live, not just about what they think. Witchcraft beliefs emerged from specific concrete material and social contexts and actions. Rather than forming coherent, static and agreed 'meanings', witchcraft beliefs were formed through agreed ways in which certain words and actions were understood as constituting the stuff of

witchcraft such as malefice or demonic relationships.[7] Scrutiny of the conceptual models and language we use to understand witchcraft prosecutions gets to the heart of how we, in the twenty-first century, understand early modern witchcraft beliefs and the experiences of witchcraft prosecution in everyday life. This chapter is as much about unpacking our modern beliefs about witchcraft as it is about early modern beliefs and experiences of witchcraft.

II

Describing the annual rates of witchcraft prosecution in Scotland, Christina Larner wrote, 'There were considerable fluctuations in the annual rate of prosecution. There were lulls in which there were almost no cases, there were periods in which there was a regular small supply and there were five peaks of intensive prosecution.'[8] Most scholars have gleaned from this pattern that the annual peaks in the number of suspects represent what have been called national 'witch-hunts' or witchcraft 'panics', reflecting and contributing to a broad and diverse literature on European witchcraft prosecutions that has developed since the 1950s.[9]

Before getting into evidence and the numbers behind the chronological patterns of witchcraft prosecution in early modern Scotland, I want to clarify my use of, and apprehensions about, the terms 'hunt' and 'panic' as applied to witchcraft investigation and prosecution. A 'hunt' for a witch or witches implies that people, whether prosecutors, investigators or neighbours, actively sought to find a culprit (or culprits) for perceived crimes whether magical harm or pact-making with the Devil. In a search (or hunt) for accomplices to known witchcraft suspects, in some instances the crime was constituted by the investigation. This was especially true when a suspect with no previous reputation for witchcraft was named, interrogated, tortured or forced to confess.

Once a suspect or suspects have been identified, I believe the terms 'investigation' and 'prosecution' perhaps more accurately reflect the activities usually involved with gathering evidence and conducting the trial than the term 'hunt'. This reserves the term 'hunt' for the initial search for suspects and those instances of investigation and prosecution that created an ever-expanding pool of witchcraft suspects using extraordinary measures, such as torture or sleep deprivation, until prosecutions were barred or available suspects were burned out. In these instances (though I argue below that they were less common than

previously thought), the term 'witch-hunt' can be useful to differentiate between empirically different degrees in the practices of prosecution. While the phrase 'witch-hunt' may call to mind its modern usage, implying that the crimes and culprits of witchcraft were not 'real', I believe it is a useful historical term.

'Witchcraft panic' is a slippery term that implies both a state of mind (panic or craze) and a set of investigative and prosecutorial practices (witch-hunting). People could panic about witches without ever seeking specific suspects, they could engage in witch-hunting without panicking and they could fail to find or prosecute suspects. Early modern people may well have panicked about witches during some local and regional instances of large-scale witchcraft prosecutions. While recognising the contribution of important scholarship about witchcraft panics, I prefer not to use the term 'panic' when referring to the practices of hunting, investigating and prosecuting witchcraft suspects. The dual connotations of the term 'panic' cause its meaning to be unstable and shifting. Further, the state of mind aspect of 'panic' can put pejorative connotations of irrationality onto early modern legal practices.[10] My proposed terminological shift folds the practices associated with many scholarly uses of term 'panic' into the term 'hunt', reserving 'panic' for the state of mind not the practices of witchcraft prosecution.

With terminological caveats aside, what is the evidence behind the well-established chronological pattern of witchcraft prosecution and what does it mean? Christina Larner was the first scholar to establish the numbers, chronology and geography of witchcraft prosecution in Scotland. *A Source-Book of Scottish Witchcraft*, compiled by herself, Christopher Hyde Lee and Hugh V. McLachlan in 1977, identified approximately 3,000 people accused of witchcraft, putting to an end some of the more exaggerated claims of the numbers prosecuted for witchcraft in Scotland. The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, using additional sources and more modern database technology, has identified just under 4,000 witchcraft suspects.[11]

As stated in the introduction, the chronology of witchcraft prosecution in early modern Scotland is well established. Larner represented this chronological pattern in a graph called 'Approximate Number of Cases (Processes and Trials) 1560–1730'.[12] However, Larner's graph has a few inconsistencies. First, the peaks of 1591 and 1597 are somewhat speculative, although Julian Goodare has filled in some of the documentary gaps with qualitative and anecdotal evidence.[13] Second, some of the national panics identified by Larner lasted for one year while

others were made up of two consecutive annual peaks. But otherwise her graph seems quite straightforward.[14] A similar visual representation of witchcraft accusations and prosecutions in Scotland, created with the more complete data collected for the Survey, has been provided in Chapter 2 above, Figure 2.1, 'Number of accused witches per year, 1561–1736'.

Figure 2.1 suggests that yearly peaks in accusation (which were defined as 50+ per year) occurred 14 times, although some of these 14 years were consecutive. The 'national panics' identified by Larner and others incorporated only eight years. The Survey did not make any estimates of cases to account for possible missing sources, so the peaks in 1590–1 and 1597 look much smaller than in Larner's graph and 1590 does not even register as a peak year. But 1628, 1643, 1644, 1650, 1658, 1659 and 1679 all saw more than 50 accusations. The Survey's data also changed the relative size of some of the peaks from Larner's original graph. In Larner's graph, accusations and prosecutions in 1661 and 1662 far exceed earlier years. With the addition of church sources, the 1649 peak (with 367 accused) looks more comparable to the large peaks in 1661 and 1662.

The way of counting suspects represented in graphing the number of 'accusations per year', both Larner's and the Survey's, has some flaws and complications. First, it is not always clear exactly what phenomenon or event is being measured 'per year'. Larner's *Source-Book* counted accusations of witchcraft, but some suspects were accused of witchcraft more than once. The Survey allowed for this, and its graph displays the last known date for each suspect. Any given person accused of witchcraft had many possible dated events potentially connected with their case, including: the initial accusation to a local authority; interrogations, confessions and witness depositions; issue of a commission for a local trial; the trial; and the execution. In most cases only a fragment of the documents associated with these events has survived. Thus any attempt to graph accusations per year will be based on a jumble of non-comparable dates corresponding to different moments in the possible trajectory of a witchcraft accusation. Second, 'accusations per year' graphs count two phenomena: people accused of witchcraft but never tried, and people who were brought to trial for witchcraft. Third, these graphs disguise the long and deep local history of witchcraft accusations. While the last known date of a case may have been in 1662, investigators and local victims could have been pursuing the suspect for ten years – leaving nine years of witchcraft investigation activity uncounted. A sustained local interest in witchcraft prosecution

cannot be measured by the 'accusations per year' graph. Fourth, it does not tell us whether a peak year represents a cluster of accusations in one locale or accusations that were evenly distributed across Scotland. This problem will be explored in more depth below when the evidence for national panics is explored.

The fifth and final problem with the 'accusations per year' graph is that it is skewed by the huge number of witchcraft suspects from the Lothians, Haddington (East Lothian) in particular.[15] The Lothians contributed one-third of all people accused of witchcraft in Scotland although only 11 per cent of the Scottish population lived there (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). Only eight out of the 34 Scottish counties had a higher proportion of witchcraft suspects than the general population.[16] Haddington was by far the most extreme county, with 18 per cent of

Table 5.1 Number of Suspects by Region and County*

Lothian	1,028	Tayside	192
Edinburgh	371	Forfar	82
Haddington	543	Perth	110
Linlithgow	114		
		Highland	191
Strathclyde	438	Cromarty	2
Argyll	6	Inverness	45
Ayr	153	Nairn	55
Bute	54	Ross	74
Dunbarton	25	Sutherland	15
Lanark	77		
Renfrew	123	Far North	149
		Caithness	52
Fife	382	Orkney	71
Fife	375	Shetland	26
Kinross	7		
		Dumfries and Galloway	127
East Borders	297	Dumfries	77
Berwick	126	Kirkcudbright	35
Peebles	90	Wigtown	15
Roxburgh	60		
Selkirk	21	Central	71
		Clackmannan	18
Grampian	211	Stirling	53
Aberdeen	174		
Banff	9		
Elgin	26	TOTAL	3086
Kincardine	2		

*Data in all tables from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.

Table 5.2 Intensity of Prosecution by Region

Region	% Suspects	% Population	(suspect : population) Intensity
Lothians	33	11	3.0
Fife	12	7	1.7
East Borders	9	6	1.5
Far North	5	5	1.0
Strathclyde	14	20	0.7
Dumfries and Galloway	4	6	0.7
Central	2	4	0.5
Highland	6	11	0.5
Grampian	7	16	0.4
Tayside	6	15	0.4

Population percentages calculated from a 1755 census tabulated in J. G. Kyd (ed.), *Scottish Population Statistics* (Scottish History Society, 1952), 82.
The totals do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Scottish witchcraft suspects and only 2 per cent of the Scottish population. The population in general was more evenly spread across Scotland than were witchcraft suspects.[17] Witchcraft suspects from the Lothians dominated ten out of the 14 peak years (see Table 5.3). The 'national' chronology of witchcraft accusations is virtually the same as the Lothians' regional chronology of accusations. Each of the nine other groups of counties displays its own unique chronological patterns of accusation. In many ways, the so-called 'national' chronological pattern of witchcraft prosecution is really the Lothians' pattern writ large.

Counting suspects necessitates the construction of a boundary around which witches to count. The use of boundaries may seem obvious, justified and neutral. But there is a self-fulfilling quality to boundaries – if we look for national patterns, such as in a graph displaying annual accusations per year in Scotland, all the patterns that are found look 'national'. The same is true for a regional or local boundary.[18] While obviously the drawing of boundaries of some kind is necessary, it is important to recognise that the boundaries we choose are boundaries that have been chosen, not given.

III

Given the difficulties with counting accusations per year and problems with the term 'panic', where does this leave the notion that annual

Table 5.3 Regional Involvement during Peak Years

Year	No. of Accused	No. of Regions	Dominant Region	Regional %
1591*	69	2	Lothians	99%
1597*	111	4	Grampian	70%
1628	72	8	Lothians	57%
1629	175	9	East Borders	46%
			Lothians	23%
			Strathclyde	18%
1630	130	8	Lothians	31%
			Dumfries and Galloway	22%
1643	101	7	Fife	54%
1644	67	7	Lothians	39%
1649	367	9	Lothians	51%
			East Borders	26%
			Fife	18%
1650	188	9	Lothians	40%
			Strathclyde	38%
1658	74	8	Strathclyde	59%
			Central	22%
1659	84	7	Lothians	56%
1661	210	7	Lothians	86%
1662	402	8	Lothians	26%
			Highland	22%
			Strathclyde	18%
			Tayside	17%
1679	56	5	Lothians	63%

*The data from these years are fragmentary. I include them only to identify the dominant region. It is probable that more accusations were made.

peaks in accusations represent 'national witchcraft panics' (sometimes also referred to as national witch-hunts)? The label 'national' implies that the witchcraft accusations must have been distributed widely across Scotland. The term witchcraft panic denotes intensive prosecution activity within a relatively short-time span. This requires both numerous witchcraft suspects and an active prosecutorial team seeking, investigating and trying those suspects as part of a co-ordinated activity. Thus the pairing of the terms 'national' and 'panic' must mean an

intensive hunt for witchcraft suspects across most of Scotland. Given that definition, how 'national' were the various peaks in annual witchcraft accusations? And were they panics?

Witchcraft prosecution in Scotland broadly defined was a national phenomenon; witchcraft suspects were accused in every part of Scotland. But such a broad interpretation of 'national' does not help us assess whether the term 'national witchcraft panic' is accurate for the periodic increases in witchcraft accusations in Scotland. A more meaningful measure of whether peaks were national witchcraft panics would look at the geographical distribution of witchcraft accusations in each peak year.

The Survey records detailed information about the residence of witchcraft suspects when known. The most reliable information is the county of residence, which is known for 96 per cent of named witchcraft suspects. Table 5.3, 'Regional Involvement during Peak Years', shows that most peak years were dominated by one or two regions (such as Lothian in the south-east Lowlands, in 1591, 1628, 1644, 1659, 1661 and 1679; Grampian in the north-east, in 1597; and Fife in mid-east, in 1643). The cases not from the dominant region in any given peak year were distributed between an average of seven other regions. Thus assessment of the regional distribution of cases suggests that most of the witchcraft prosecution activity in peak years was regionalised, that is centred in one or two regions.

Witchcraft prosecutions in the peak year of 1662 provide a good example of how a 'national' focus can mask a variety of regional phenomena.[19] The Survey found 402 cases whose end date was in 1662, the largest-ever number. The geographical distribution of cases in 1662 was, arguably, the most national of any peak year. Witchcraft cases were documented from eight regions in Scotland – all except Dumfries and Galloway and the Far North. Further, as Table 5.3 shows, four regions contributed a significant number of cases, with no one region clearly dominating. If ever there was a national panic in Scotland, there was one in 1662.

The Lothians contributed the largest number of suspects, and nearly all of them (plus a few from neighbouring regions) can be traced back to one boy, James Welch.[20] That means that over one-quarter of the cases in 1662 derived from one massive serial witchcraft prosecution centred in East Lothian.

The Highlands, Strathclyde and Tayside regions, areas usually outside the main witch-accusing locales, named an unusually high number of suspects in 1662. This year was by far the largest annual peak in the

Highland region; and cases were distributed across four out the five counties in the Highland region.[21] However, Table 5.4, 'Breakdown of Highland Region Cases in 1662', shows that witchcraft prosecutions came mainly from three distinct incidents in Auldearn,[22] Kiltarlity and Convinth,[23] and a group trial held in Inverness.[24] The 1662 cases from Strathclyde were overwhelmingly from unknown parishes in the county of Bute, with two smaller groups of accusations in Inverkip in Renfrewshire and Largs in Ayrshire (see Table 5.5, 'Breakdown of Strathclyde Region Cases in 1662'). The Tayside pattern of accusations was different from the other dominant regions. There appears to have been a general low-level increase in prosecutions in many parishes across the Tayside region, with only one large group from Fossoway and Tullibole (see Table 5.6, 'Breakdown of Tayside Region Cases in 1662').

The rest of the 1662 cases came from eight other counties spread across four regions. Table 5.7, 'Breakdown of all other counties with cases in 1662', shows that Berwick, Fife and to some extent Roxburgh had accusation patterns similar to Tayside – small clusters of cases from many parishes. The remaining counties had only a handful of cases. While the 1662 peak certainly was national, it contained a wide variety of types of prosecution, not all of them deserving the label 'panic'.

Table 5.4 Breakdown of Highland Region Cases in 1662

Highland Region County	**Parish**	**No. of Suspects**
Cromarty	Unknown	2
Inverness	Dyke	2
	Contin	2
	Inverness	1
	Kiltarlity and Convinth	12
	Unknown	17
Nairn	Auldearn	43
	Nairn	2
	Elgin	1
	Unknown	5
Ross	Contin	1
	Tain	1
Sutherland	none	0
Total		89

Table 5.5 Breakdown of Strathclyde Region Cases in 1662

Strathclyde Region County	**Parish**	**No. of Suspects**
Ayr	Largs	6
Argyll	none	0
Bute	Kingarth	1
	Rothesay	2
	Unknown	43
Dunbarton	none	0
Lanark	none	0
Renfrew	Greenock	1
	Inverkip	16
	Kilwinning	2
Total		71

Table 5.6 Breakdown of Tayside Region Cases in 1662

Tayside Region County	**Parish**	**No. of Suspects**
Forfar	Cortarchy	1
	Forfar	3
	Inverarity	1
	Kirriemuir	1
	Montrose	4
	Oathlaw	2
Perth	Abernethy	3
	Aberuthven	1
	Dunning	6
	Findo Gask	6
	Forteviot	2
	Fossoway and Tullibole	27
	Methven	3
	Ruthven	9
Total		69

The clustering of witchcraft accusations (both small-scale prosecutions and serial witch-hunts) in certain years, such as in 1662, suggests that there were aspects of witchcraft prosecution outside local inclination. Larner looked at political events, wars, prices, famine, plague and

Table 5.7 Breakdown of All Other Counties with Cases in 1662

County	Parish	No. of Suspects
Berwick	Ayton	3
	Coldingham	2
	Duns	1
	Eyemouth	7
	Foulden	1
	Langton	2
	Lauder	5
	Mordington	1
Clackmannan	Alloa	3
Fife	Abdie	3
	Collessie	5
	Creich	1
	Dunbog	1
	Falkland	3
	Flisk	4
	Forgan	2
	Kilmany	2
	Newburgh	5
Kinross	Kinross	3
	Orwell	1
Roxburgh	Bowden	2
	Crailing	2
	Jedburgh	1
	Melrose	1
	Unknown	4
Selkirk	Selkirk	1
Total		66

other disasters and did not find any clear-cut correlation between these events and increases in witchcraft prosecution.[25] The legal procedures for trying a witch in Scotland necessitated some form of intervention from authorities outside local communities because localities needed central approval to bring a witch to trial. The peaks and troughs of witchcraft accusations and prosecutions may indicate a greater or lesser willingness on the part of central authorities to prosecute witches.[26] But does the shift in mood or inclination of some members of a ruling elite equal a national event? It is beyond the scope of this chapter to draw general conclusions about why accusations were clustered in

certain years (and not others) because the local research has not yet been conducted.[27]

The aim of this chapter is not to suggest that counting witchcraft suspects is misguided. On the contrary, it is a necessary first step for understanding witchcraft prosecutions. However, the conclusions drawn from counting accusations per year can be misleading. When witchcraft suspects are singled out for counting they are divorced from the contexts and trajectories in which they were accused. The body of the witchcraft suspect becomes the focus of analysis rather than all those other non-witch people who made the accusation, participated in the investigation and prosecution or simply stood back and watched. Further, searching for spectacular 'hunts' and 'panics' creates a distorted picture because it skews our understanding of witchcraft belief towards the more conspiratorial, often elite-based, aspects of demonic witchcraft. This misses many of the more obvious and mundane aspects of witchcraft prosecution and belief that emerged in and through local community relationships that are explored below.[28]

IV

'Accusations per year' and national panics are not the only ways scholars have conceptualised witchcraft within the broad outlines of a suspect-focused model; they have also looked at serial witch-hunts. Scholars have also examined the numbers of linked suspects in specific instances of witchcraft prosecution as a way of measuring the intensity, quality and impact of the experience.[29] In these instances witchcraft suspects were usually intertwined through the processes of denunciation, confrontation, or direct suggestion and questioning by an investigator. 'Suspect-counting' of this kind looks for groups of accusations per year, traces them to their source whether it was a settlement, parish, presbytery or county, and identifies witch-hunters in common.

It will never be possible to reconstruct all the links between cases, as many documents have not survived. And of course some cases may have been linked in a more diffuse way, such as through the spread of the idea of witchcraft prosecution or a generalised fear of witches. These types of connections of mentality are very difficult to document and did not necessarily lead directly to witchcraft prosecution. But the Witchcraft Survey helps to identify serial witch-hunts. The database records detailed information about a suspect's place of residence (when known) and names of investigators. Cases from the same place, or prosecuted by the same people, can be identified. Witch-accusing parishes can be mapped,

displaying instances where witchcraft investigations were confined to or moved over parish, presbytery or county boundaries.[30] And suspects from within the same presbytery or linked across parishes can be counted.

Identifying and counting all the serial witch-hunts that took place in Scotland is well beyond the scope of this chapter. However, by counting the number of suspects per year per parish (when known), a rough indication of the number of suspects involved in a specific instance of witchcraft prosecution can be approximated. Just under 49 per cent of accused witches were accused in a group of 6 or more people from one parish per year, 21 per cent of witchcraft suspects were accused in a group of 3–5 other people and 35 per cent were accused either alone or with only one other person.[31] The largest group we know about was 43 people accused of witchcraft in Auldearn in 1662. Thus if we are looking at witchcraft prosecution from the point of view of groups of witchcraft suspects, 70 per cent of suspects were accused as part of a group large enough to indicate a probable serial witch hunt. Groups of witchcraft suspects from the same parish and year are more prominent during the peak years. This *seems* to suggest that in Scotland the language of 'hunts' and 'panics', if restricted to a description of local or regional witchcraft prosecution activities, may be an accurate reflection of how Scotland experienced witchcraft prosecutions.

However, this perspective may be misleading. While our estimate of linked suspects (arrived at through the shorthand of counting parish clusters of suspects) tells us much about the experience of accused witches, it does not tell us about the general experience of witchcraft prosecution and belief in Scotland. When witchcraft prosecutions are examined from the perspective of the accused witch, groups of linked suspects skew the figures. One local peak of 43 witchcraft suspects from Auldearn represents a very intense experience in one time and place. By contrast, 43 witchcraft suspects accused, one at a time, in 43 different parishes represent a more widespread and less intense experience of witchcraft prosecution for those non-witchcraft suspect people touched by the accusation and prosecution. Witchcraft prosecution affected more people than just the suspects and the trial participants. The grounds for and substance of accusations intertwined throughout people's everyday relationships and struggles.[32] Yet when we base our understanding of witchcraft prosecution on counting accused witches, the one extreme experience in Auldearn masquerades as representing half of how witchcraft prosecutions happened in Scotland. I believe that this data skewing is a paradigm problem inherent in the idea that counting witches is the same as understanding witchcraft prosecution. This is not to suggest that large-scale prosecutions should

not be studied. Rather, it suggests that large-scale prosecutions do not define the experience of witchcraft and its prosecution in early modern Scotland.

The suspect-counting model – relying on accusations per year, linked suspects, and the idea of national panic – draws attention towards witchcraft accusation episodes with large numbers of suspects. And it assumes that the numbers of witchcraft suspects accurately reflects the experience of witchcraft prosecution. What about episodes where very few people were accused? The accused witch was only one of anywhere near a hundred people involved in the prosecution of a witch, including victims, witnesses, bystanders, investigators, prosecutors, the jury and other officials. Too close a focus on witchcraft suspects elides the ways witchcraft may have been a more diffused part of early modern daily life.

Counting suspects and locating instances of serial witch-hunting is not inherently wrong or somehow incorrect. The model has offered many insights into early modern witchcraft. It gauges the experiences of accused witches, identifies years of greater interest in witchcraft prosecution, and has led to some profound insights about European history. The difficult and painful experiences of early modern women and men accused of witchcraft have been brought to light, as have the actions of some investigators and accusers. We have a greater understanding of the kinds of legal apparatus and the changes in legal regulations that opened the way for the many judicial and prosecutorial abuses that occurred during witchcraft prosecutions. Several micro-studies of peak years have revealed a wealth of information about the legal, social and political underpinnings of Scottish witchcraft prosecution.[33]

But do witchcraft suspects, counted as free-floating objects detached from the contexts in which they were accused, tell us the whole story about witchcraft prosecution or witchcraft belief in Scotland? To understand the impact of witchcraft prosecution on early modern Scotland and its relationship to witchcraft belief, surely we also need to take account of all the non-witchcraft suspect people who were intimately involved in prosecutions. This requires a shift away from the aggregate numbers of accused witches and towards a broad view of the *local scene* of witchcraft accusation, investigation and prosecution.

V

What does witchcraft prosecution in Scotland look like if explored from the perspective of witch-accusing communities, rather than from the experience of suspects or through counting suspects?[34] The Survey

found that for roughly 65 per cent of the parishes in Scotland there is no evidence of formal witchcraft prosecution activity between 1563 and 1736.[35] Thus the majority of parishes did not experience a witchcraft prosecution at first hand – although belief in and fear of witches was surely prevalent throughout Scotland. Witchcraft prosecution directly involved only a little over one-third of Scottish parishes.

In what follows I isolate and analyse the one-third of parishes involved in witchcraft prosecution in Scotland. Total figures for all Scottish parishes are provided in the reference notes. To what degree were the witch-accusing parishes involved in witchcraft prosecutions? Did most of them produce or participate in serial witch-hunts? There are two ways to measure parish witchcraft prosecution intensity: the number of years in which a parish made accusations, and the number of suspects that a parish accused at a time.[36]

Table 5.8, 'Number of parish accusation episodes per witch-accusing parish per year', shows that while a few parishes did repeatedly accuse people of witchcraft, most witch-accusing parishes (75 per cent) accused a parishioner of witchcraft in only one or two years.[37] Only 2 per cent of witch-accusing parishes accused someone of witchcraft in more than ten years. The most frequently repeating parish was Ayr,

Table 5.8 Number of Parish Accusation Episodes Per Witch-Accusing Parish Per Year

No. of Years	No. of Parishes	% of Parishes
1	198	54%
2	77	21%
3	33	9%
4	22	6%
5	11	3%
6	8	2%
7	6	2%
8	5	1%
9	2	1%
10	1	0%
11	2	1%
12	2	1%
13	0	0%
14	0	0%
15	0	0%
16	1	0%
Total	368	

Table 5.9 Number of Suspects Accused in Parish Accusation Episodes Per Year

1 to 2 suspects	75% of accusation episodes
3 to 5 suspects	14% of accusation episodes
6 to 10 suspects	7% of accusation episodes
11 to 20 suspects	3% of accusation episodes
21+ suspects	1% of accusation episodes

where at least one person was accused of witchcraft in 16 separate years. Even this seems sporadic given that the witchcraft was a capital crime for 173 years.

It is more complicated to gauge the number of suspects each 'witch-accusing' parish accused at a time. It is necessary, first, to categorise the size of each witchcraft accusation episode per parish per year. Then the episodes can be compared to determine the frequency of serial witch-hunts. Table 5.9, 'Number of suspects accused in parish accusation episodes per year', shows that the proportion of witchcraft accusation episodes involving large numbers of suspects was small.[38]

The most common parish experience, at 75 per cent, was to accuse only one or two people at a time. This probably includes a combination of individual, neighbourhood witchcraft prosecutions and some ripple effect from prosecutions elsewhere. But the point is that in most parishes the people around a witchcraft suspect either did not seek or were unable to find more suspects.

In around 25 per cent of parish episodes three or more people were accused, indicating possible serial witch-hunts. Parishes that accused a small group of three to five suspects in one year (14%) probably does represent a small serial witch-hunt, involving some degree of inquisitorial pressure that led to further denunciations. The 11 per cent of parish episodes where six or more people were accused of witchcraft in a year are the kinds of prosecutions I think people have in mind with the label 'panic'. These episodes probably involved the use of extraordinary prosecutorial measures involved in a witch 'hunt' and the mental state of panic; and people without previous witchcraft reputations were probably denounced and prosecuted. Again, for the purposes of understanding the *practices* of witchcraft investigation and prosecution and their effect on early modern communities I would advocate use of the term 'hunt'.

While, as Larner suggested, the difference within this range is probably one of degree rather than kind, further subdivision of this category helps clarify the intensity of prosecution. Table 5.8 shows that only a

very small number of parishes accused more than 11 people in any given year. While such accusations are rare, nearly every region in Scotland had at least one parish that conducted one at least once between 1563 and 1736. So this phenomenon was thinly distributed across Scotland.

Witchcraft prosecution looks very different when seen from the perspective of the witch-accusing parish rather than from the aggregate number of suspects. While a few parishes clearly engaged in serial witch-hunts accusing large numbers of people at a time, most parishes did not. What does the chronology of Scottish witchcraft prosecutions look like when seen from the perspective of parish involvement? Interestingly, the peaks look roughly the same as the chronology of suspects. See Figure 5.1, 'Number of Witch-accusing Parishes, 1563–1736'. The largest number of parishes involved in a witchcraft prosecution in any given year was 70 out of 861 parishes in Scotland. In any given year, most parishes did not formally accuse anyone of witchcraft.

Like Figure 2.1, showing the number of suspects per year, the peaks in Figure 5.1 display several phenomena at the same time. At least half of each peak represents parishes that accused only one or two people of witchcraft in that year. Parish witchcraft episodes where more than two people were accused of witchcraft in a year (per parish) were mainly confined to the peak years. Figure 5.2 shows the proportion of parishes that accused only one or two suspects compared with parishes

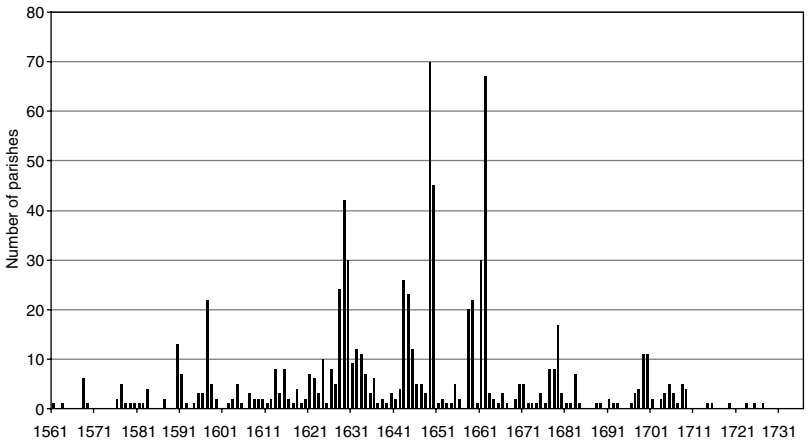

Figure 5.1 Number of Witch-accusing Parishes, 1561–1736

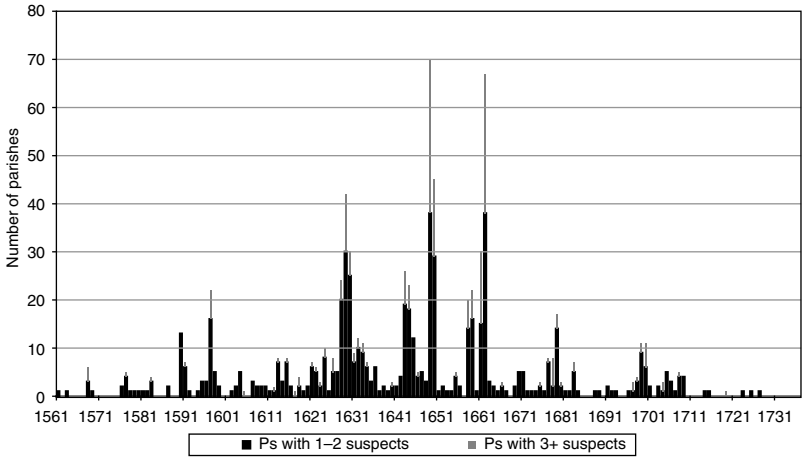

Figure 5.2 Number of Witch-accusing Parishes, 1561–1736 (Showing parishes with 3 or more suspects at a time)

that accused three or more suspects in any given year. Peak years contain increases in two types of phenomena: more parishes accused one or two suspects; and some parishes accused three or more suspects in that same year. A small proportion accused more than 11 suspects.

The suspect-counting model suggests that panics and hunts, where large numbers of witchcraft suspects were accused at the same time, was the normal or dominant pattern of witchcraft prosecution in Scotland. A shift in paradigm to a model that puts the witch-accusing community (represented here by the parish of residence of accused witches) at the centre of the analysis presents a very different picture of the way Scottish witchcraft suspects were prosecuted. Three-quarters of witch-accusing parishes accused only one or two people, only once or twice, during the 173 years in which witchcraft was a capital crime.

While both models count, they count different things. The community experience model, focusing on individual local episodes, counts communities not just accused witches. A paradigm that highlights the experiences of witchcraft suspects and witchcraft prosecutors draws attention to large serial witch-hunts and instances of intense prosecution. From this perspective, annual peaks in accusation represent witchcraft panics. However, from the perspective of community experience, witchcraft prosecutions tended to focus on only one or two suspects at a time, with serial witch trials a rarer occurrence. The annual peaks were not simply an increase in the number of suspects, but rather an

increase in the number of parishes willing to make formal accusations than in other years. I will return to the importance of this distinction for how we understand witchcraft *belief* (rather than accusation and prosecution) in a moment.

The pattern of periodic annual peaks in witchcraft suspects and witch-accusing parishes emerges within both the suspect-based and witch-accusing community models. We still have to ask why more parishes decided to accuse witchcraft suspects in some years but not others. The change of model does not negate the necessity of exploring trends. Rather it focuses our analysis on a different object, the community rather than the suspect, allowing for more targeted questions to be asked about witchcraft investigation and prosecution that incorporate all the people and processes involved. Further, it helps us avoid the assumption that witchcraft prosecution was accomplished through panic and that therefore the Devil-based, conspiratorial witchcraft beliefs were somehow more important than the everyday experiences of malefice.

If we want to know why witches were prosecuted, then we need to understand the communities that accused them and the conditions and contexts for those accusations. Part of this, of course, implies the necessity of understanding the pressures surrounding and binding communities. But it is not enough to look at witch-hunting or the activities of investigators and prosecutors who were most active during a serial witch-hunt. This only gets at a quarter of witch-accusing communities and presumably only a quarter of the neighbours affected by and involved in witchcraft investigation and prosecution. To understand the peak years we need to understand why more parishes decided to accuse a few suspects in that year and why some decided to hunt for multiple suspects.

VI

With a suspect-based model, serial witch-hunting appears to be the norm; to focus our research efforts on hunts and panics thus seems appropriate. With the witch-accusing community model, on the other hand, large serial witch-hunts seem to be unusual events in the context of witchcraft prosecution. Most accusations, even during peak years, were made one at a time in separate parishes. The Survey database cannot identify those instances where the idea of investigating a suspected witch may have spread from somewhere else. But the point is that most parishes in Scotland, once they investigated a witchcraft

suspect or turned a suspect over to a higher authority, did not continue to produce more suspects. I believe that this finding shifts the premises through which we pursue our understanding of early modern witchcraft belief. Most Scottish parishes – neighbours, elders, church officials and local magistrates – were not prone to panic about witches. This suggests that the conspiratorial aspects of witchcraft belief prevalent in learned treatises and used as the rationale for sleep deprivation and other forms of torture to elicit accomplices were not necessarily the dominant understanding of witchcraft in Scotland.[39]

This does not mean that it is invalid to chart the numbers of suspects, that large groups of suspects were never prosecuted together, or that there was no regional (or even national) co-ordination of witchcraft prosecutions. Rather, I want to suggest that these ideas do not necessarily reflect the general pattern of how witches were prosecuted in early modern Scotland. An over-reliance on suspect-counting and national panics glosses over the complicated ways that people in some communities came to find a witch in their midst.

The pattern of accusation, with often far-flung parishes making formal accusations in the same year, survives the shift from suspect to community focus. The annual peaks in accusation were a combination of different types of community experiences of witchcraft – mostly investigation and prosecution of one or two neighbours. A community approach also flags up those instances where local (or perhaps regional) serial witch-hunts may have occurred, prosecuting people with no previous reputation for witchcraft.[40] Here more inquiry is needed, both into the practices and contexts of local and regional witchcraft accusations, and into the specific practices of local, regional and national connections.

The various witchcraft accusation patterns that emerge by looking at the community experience of witchcraft prosecution rather than the aggregate numbers of accused witches open up exciting new avenues. Most especially, it suggests the dominance of small-scale witchcraft accusations rather than large-scale campaigns directed at hunting 'witches' in general. This indicates the importance of community relations and the emergence of witchcraft belief out of everyday life.

Notes

1 The five peaks in annual rates of witchcraft prosecution in Scotland were first identified by C. Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981), 60. Larner called these peaks 'national hunts' (*Enemies of God*, 61). The consensus on chronology and geography of witchcraft prosecution in Scotland is well described by S. Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-Hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560–1710* (East Linton, 2002), 16–29.

2 See Larner, *Enemies of God*, 61–2; J. Goodare, 'Witch-hunting and the Scottish state', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), 136–9.
3 The Survey's chronological account of witchcraft prosecutions in Scotland can be viewed in Figure 2.1. Its findings are further discussed in L. Martin and J. Miller, 'Some findings from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft', Chapter 2 above.
4 Stuart Macdonald has noted that 'What has gone largely unnoticed in the statements made since *Enemies of God* was published, was the tentativeness and limited nature of the discussion within the book itself of the geographical and chronological patterns of the Scottish witch-hunt': *Witches of Fife*, 18.
5 In addition to charting the chronological patterns of witchcraft prosecution, scholars have charted the geography of accusations in Scotland; see for example the map 'Distribution and Intensity of Prosecutions' in Larner, *Enemies of God*, 81. Although not the main subject of this chapter, the mapping of Scottish witchcraft usually maps witchcraft suspects, employing a suspect-based model like the chronology of witchcraft.
6 The idea of a 'witch-accusing community' model as described below follows from recent studies emphasising the neighbourhood dynamics of witchcraft accusation, prosecution and belief: see especially R. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: the Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (2nd edn, London, 2002). However, following recent trends in Anthropology, I do not see a necessary opposition between a focus on neighbourhood (or community) processes and state formation: K. Crehan, *The Fractured Community: Landscapes of Power and Gender in Rural Zambia* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997). Rather, they are part of the same processes. Communities participated in the ways the Scottish state was formed and were in turn shaped by the ways state power was exercised. See for example W. Roseberry, 'The language of contention', in G. Joseph and D. Nugent (eds), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC, 1994).
7 For more on the concept of 'belief' see L. Martin, 'The Devil and the Domestic: Witchcraft, Women's Work and Marriage in Early Modern Scotland' (New School University PhD thesis, 2004), ch. 2.
8 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 60.
9 These terms are reflected in the titles of some books about early modern European witchcraft prosecutions. See, for example, H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Harmondsworth, 1969); H. C. E. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany, 1562–1684* (Stanford, Calif., 1972); B. P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (3rd edn, London, 2006); A. L. Barstow, *Witchcraze: a New History of the European Witch-Hunts* (San Francisco, Calif., 1994).
10 The idea of a 'witchcraft panic' carries the possibility that witchcraft prosecutions may have arisen from a craze or other agitated state of mind. While undoubtedly inspiring fear and great concern in the early modern world, witchcraft, witches and witchcraft prosecutions were also part of everyday life and thought for early modern people and were not *de facto* irrational. See for example, S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997); Martin, 'The Devil and the Domestic'.

11 The exact number of suspects identified by the Survey, 3,837, gives too precise an impression because references that indicated groups of suspects were counted as three suspects so as not to overestimate. Thus the Survey's final number is most likely an underestimate. The Survey eliminated several hundred duplicate entries in the *Source-Book* in addition to identifying many more named witchcraft suspects. For more details see Martin and Miller, 'Some findings'.
12 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 61.
13 The actual number of cases cannot be known before about 1610 due to a shortage of surviving evidence. Larner used impressionistic sources to estimate the size of the peaks. Julian Goodare has estimated that about 400 people may have been accused in 1597: 'The Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597', in Goodare (ed.), *Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 70.
14 Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 19–25, evaluates Larner's geographical and chronological findings with his own digitised and updated version of Larner *et al.*, *Source-book*. Macdonald finds that 'there seem to have been two witch-hunts going on concurrently in Scotland during this period; the one driven by village tensions (as in the case of Elspeth Thomson); the other by elite fears, which resulted in the persecution of otherwise harmless individuals like Andro Man': *Witches of Fife*, 25. Despite criticism of the idea of national witchcraft panics and his suggestion that 'terms such as "large panic" are not particularly helpful' (*Witches of Fife*, 41), Macdonald retains the idea of national witchcraft panics and refers to the peak years as 'the great hunts' (*Witches of Fife*, 25).
15 For ease of discussion and in order to assess the distribution of witchcraft cases I have grouped the 34 counties of Scotland into ten geographical 'regions', some of which roughly correspond to the modern regions that were in use from the 1970s to the 1990s. I do not mean to suggest that all of these regions were historically meaningful, rather I adopted them as a convenient way to label groups of counties.
16 With percentage of suspects in parenthesis and percentage of general population following, those counties were: Berwick (4%) 2 per cent; Bute (2%) 1 per cent; Edinburgh (12%) 7 per cent; Fife (12%) 6 per cent; Haddington (18%) 2 per cent; Linlithgow (4%) 1 per cent; Peebles (3%) 1 per cent; and Renfrew (4%) 2 per cent. Data from the Witchcraft Survey, and the 1755 census tabulated in J. G. Kyd (ed.), *Scottish Population Statistics* (SHS, 1952), 82.
17 See Table 5.2.
18 Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 33, argues that in Fife the presbytery was the most meaningful boundary for counting because it was 'the local geographic unit in which most witch-hunting occurred'.
19 For witchcraft prosecution in 1661–1662 see B. P. Levack, 'The great Scottish witch-hunt of 1661–1662,' *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (1980), 90–108.
20 James Welch, a minor from Haddington parish, denounced at least 90 people as witches in 1662. A further 20 people were denounced, once removed from Welch. That makes 110 cases out of 402 that can be traced back to one person. This huge serial witchcraft prosecution was clearly linked to accusations that had come to fruition in 1661 (i.e. those recorded in the 1661 peak), as some of those denounced by Welch were linked to an earlier group of

cases in East Lothian. The database tables 'Other Named Witches' and 'Mentioned as a witch' in the Survey can be used to recreate chains of accusation. These figures were derived from counting the numbers of other named witches associated with Welch and those named by him.

21 Of the 89 known cases from the Highland region in 1662, the parish of residence is known for 67. A total of 191 suspects were named from the Highland region between 1563 and 1736. The next largest peak was 24 witchcraft cases in 1577. For more on witch-hunting in the Highlands see L. Henderson, 'Witch-hunting and witch belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*', Chapter 4 above.

22 Isobel Goudie named the 43 suspects from Auldearn.

23 *RPC*, 3rd ser., i, 233–4. The Survey decided that 'Conventh' was Kiltarlity and Convinth parish.

24 *RPC*, 3rd ser., i, 237, 242, 259. The fifteen suspects were related to the Macleans, who petitioned the privy council alleging that they were wrongly accused of witchcraft by a rival family, the Chisholms.

25 Larner, *Enemies of God*, Appendix 1.

26 J. Goodare, 'The framework for Scottish witch-hunting in the 1590s', *SHR*, 81 (2002), 240–50; M. Wasser, 'The privy council and the witches: the curtailment of witchcraft prosecutions in Scotland, 1597–1628', *SHR*, 82 (2003), 20–46.

27 A few recent local studies have shed light on the neighbourhood roots of witchcraft prosecution. See for example A. L. Cordey, 'Witch-Hunting in the Presbytery of Dalkeith, 1649 to 1662' (University of Edinburgh MSc thesis, 2003).

28 See Martin, 'The Devil and the Domestic'.

29 E.g. J. Goodare, 'The Aberdeenshire witchcraft panic of 1597', *Northern Scotland*, 21 (2001), 17–37.

30 Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 33; Cordey, 'Witch-Hunting in the Presbytery of Dalkeith'. My preliminary investigation of the serial witch-hunt surrounding Alexander Hamilton in 1629 confirms that accusations readily moved across parishes and could spread wide distances.

31 These figures count only those suspects with a known parish of residence – roughly two-thirds of all named witchcraft suspects. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to devise a method of including mentions of witchcraft prosecution activity where no specific suspect was named. Again these figures are meant to provide an approximation. More detailed research into specific instances of witchcraft prosecution is needed.

32 See Martin, 'Devil and the Domestic'.

33 E.g. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597' and M. Wasser, 'The western witch-hunt of 1697–1700: the last major witch-hunt in Scotland', both in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*; Levack, 'Great Scottish witch-hunt'; Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*; Cordey, 'Witch-Hunting in the Presbytery of Dalkeith'.

34 The Survey recorded the settlement, parish, presbytery, county and burgh of residence for witchcraft suspects when known. The analysis below was produced using the parish of residence, which is known for two-thirds of all named witchcraft suspects. Settlement of residence is the most unreliable residence field, while presbytery and county are too big to capture the face-to-face accusation and investigation process. The concept of 'community' is

difficult to systematise and clearly a parish is not the only way to define community. For the purpose of this exercise, the parish is a good unit for uncovering possible serial witch-hunts because the parish minister and secular officials with roughly parochial jurisdiction were often key figures in the initial stages of witchcraft investigation.

35 The exact figure is 63 per cent. This means that based on the surviving documents there is no record of a witchcraft accusation that was seriously investigated by either church or secular authorities. The Survey did not include cases of witch-calling that were deemed slander. It is impossible to ascertain whether communities may have identified suspects who were not reported to authorities. The Survey found 370 parishes that accused a suspect at least once. The exact number of parishes varied during the period. Figures were calculated using the number 1000 (P. G. B. McNeill and H. MacQueen (eds), *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1996), 402).

36 The second measure was calculated using the number of suspects per witch-accusing parish per year using the last known date associated with each suspect. Unfortunately this cannot quantify suspects accused in one parish over the course of more than one year.

37 Thirty-seven per cent of all parishes in Scotland accused someone of witchcraft at least once.

38 Parishes that had more than one witchcraft accusation episode could fall into more than one category because each annual witchcraft accusation episode is counted separately. For example, Ayr is counted 16 times because it had at least one witchcraft accusation episode in 16 separate years. Each of these 16 episodes is categorised according to its intensity. This table measures witchcraft accusation episodes per year per parish.

39 This does not necessarily mean that the Devil was absent from everyday witchcraft beliefs or that people disbelieved in the idea of a demonic witches' conspiracy. Rather it suggests that when confronted with a local witch, most parishes did not act on those beliefs when pursuing prosecution.

40 See Cordey, 'Witch-Hunting in the Presbytery of Dalkeith', and J. Goodare, 'Women and the witch-hunt in Scotland', *Social History*, 23 (1988), 288–308, at pp. 300–1.

6

Men in Black: Appearances of the Devil in Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft Discourse

Joyce Miller

I

The church in Scotland was striving to create a godly society from the start of the Reformation in 1560. During the years 1563 to 1736, however, it was God's opponent the Devil who appeared to get many of the headlines.

Using evidence from witchcraft trials, it is possible to claim, as Christina Larner did, that ultimately we know more about how Scottish peasants saw the Devil than we do about how they saw God.[1] The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed internecine struggles between opposing bodies of church organisation, the fight for dominance over society between secular and religious authorities, as well as the battle between God and the Devil over the souls of men and women. The archetypal image of a horned and cloven-footed, fiery-red male Devil, which has become associated with the discourse of witchcraft and demonology, was perpetuated over time. Reginald Scot's description of the Devil conveys a stereotypical image: 'an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in his breech, eies like a bason, fanges like a dog, clawes like a beare, a skin like a Niger, and a voice roring like a lion'.[2]

However, the figure of the Devil that featured in much of the documentary material associated with Scottish witchcraft is a much more complex being and indeed was rarely red-skinned or horned. Demonic figures may well have been most frequently male and they often wore black, but they could also wear other colours, some of which were symbolic of spiritual beliefs, notably that of fairies or 'good neighbours'. The figures could be old or young, handsome or ugly, or grim or gentlemanly in appearance. The demon might wear a hat or bonnet, a

shawl or hood, or carry a staff. He could offer food, drink or some other relatively small-scale rewards. The demonic figure could appear in female form, albeit quite rarely, or take the form of an animal. Finally, he could take a more ethereal guise and appear as a spirit – sometimes as a ghost or angel.

Although demonic figures of one form or another were mentioned 392 times in witchcraft investigations and trials, an exact description of the Devil is difficult to find. It is clear that the red-skinned, horned one – Auld Nick, the earl of Hell, auld hornie, Mahoun[3] – was not only usually not named in person, but would also appear to have been mostly absent from Scottish witchcraft. Demonic beliefs and figures were crucial to witchcraft, but the whom and the what are just as complex and abstract as witchcraft itself. Despite the apocalyptic conviction that many churchmen had that the Devil was ubiquitous, it seems that the Devil may have been quite an elusive figure. Possibly it was because the Devil was so fundamental to the concept of witchcraft that his presence did not require explicit reference. Nevertheless it is surprising that it featured in such a relatively small number of cases: 226 out of 3,837 accused or around 6 per cent.[4] Of course this figure only accounts for those cases which mentioned something specific that was then recorded in the documents. In most cases we simply do not, and cannot, know all of what was mentioned. It may be that the Devil was mentioned much more often but, because most references are simply a record of an application for, or issuing of, a commission we cannot know exactly how often such detail was mentioned. It would also be inaccurate to assume that non-mentions indicate a lack of belief in, or absence of, demonic ideas.

To a modern audience, the Devil that is described in witchcraft evidence may, therefore, seem to be a mysterious figure. What can be demonstrated, however, is both interesting and paramount to the further understanding of witchcraft and demonic belief. Larner was correct: we do know a fair amount about the Devil, but on close examination his image is more varied than we may have anticipated.

Several questions will be addressed in this paper. How did the Devil described in elite demonological theory compare to the Devil that appeared in Scottish witchcraft documents? Was there a shared cultural foundation for elite theory and popular belief, or were there distinct differences? Was the Devil necessarily always a spiritual concept or could the descriptions have a more mundane and corporeal explanation? Was the description of the Devil figure the result of pressure on suspects from religious and legal authorities? How far was Devil a

construct of elite theologians, whose belief in eschatology meant that they expected the last days of the world to be dominated by demonic powers, rather than a reflection of popular beliefs and culture?

II

Although documents containing evidence about witchcraft belief can give some indication of how the Devil was conceived and perceived by some sections of society, much of it contrasted with other elite descriptions of the Devil. Elite Biblical exegesis and other demonological sources gave some indication of who, and what, the Devil was – usually a form of animal or beast. The Devil that appeared in confessions about witchcraft was, however, mostly human.

There are relatively few descriptions of the physical appearance of the Devil in the Bible and most of them are in the New Testament.[5] In the words of Saint Peter: 'your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (I Peter, 5:8). In Revelation, there were descriptions of four demonic beasts – the first a lion, the second a calf, 'the third beast had a face as man' and the fourth was like an eagle (4:7). Later on the Devil was described as a dragon and serpent: 'the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world' (Revelation, 12:9). In the next chapter, chimera-like beasts were described, one with seven heads and ten horns, that had ten crowns on its horns. This beast was like a leopard, with bear-like feet and the mouth of a lion (Revelation, 13:1–2). Another beast had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon, who deceived by means of miracles and marked everyone on their right hand or forehead (Revelation, 13:11–16). It would seem then that, even in the Bible, the Devil could take several forms, mostly animal, although one had a human face.

Similarly the Biblical Devil had several names: Satan, Beelzebub and Lucifer were the most common, but others included Asmodeus, Behemoth, Leviathan, Belial and the Prince of Darkness.[6] The Biblical naming of the Devil was just as varied as its description. Satan is the Hebrew for adversary or plotter, and Second Corinthians had Satan 'transformed into an angel of light' (11:14). Satan was also mentioned in First Chronicles (21:1); and in Luke, Satan was described as lightning, which fell from the sky (10:18). An alternative name, Lucifer – bringer of light or Latin for the morning star – was said to have been one of God's archangels, who was cast out of heaven: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning' (Isiah, 14:12). This

would seem to relate to the description of Satan being transformed into an angel of light. The light and lightning that are both associated with the biblical image of the pre-fall Devil contrast neatly with the dark and black, which are more commonly associated with his popular, or earthly, fallen image. A third epithet, Beelzebub, was from the Hebrew *bá'al zebûb* meaning Lord of the Flies. In Second Kings Beelzebub, or Baal-zebub, was god of Ekron or king of the Philistines (1:2), another opponent of God whose name was interpreted by the Jews as meaning 'lord of the dungheap'. In Matthew, Beelzebub was said to be the prince of the devils (12:24). According to Jewish demonology, Asmodeus was another prince of demons who appeared in the book of Tobit, found in the Apocrypha. Bestial images or representations of the Devil were suggested by Behemoth, a gigantic beast – possibly a hippopotamus – described in the book of Job, and Leviathan, a sea monster (chapters 40 and 41). Belial, from the Hebrew *belî ya'al* meaning 'without worth', was an apocalyptic demon associated with Satan.[7]

There are few visual illustrations of the Devil before the sixth century and even fewer of these were in popular circulation in early modern Scotland. One of the earliest representations had the Devil in red, not black, although neither colour is specified in the Bible; and as an angel, illustrating his previous incarnation as the archangel Lucifer before his fall from grace.[8] Few medieval images showed the Devil in human form; more often the Devil was portrayed as some form of beast or a combination of beasts. Woodcuts and carvings, paintings and stained glass windows illustrated the Devil in variety of guises, with a number of motifs: black, red, scaly-skin, horns, tails, wings and talons or hooves. The serpent and dragon in Revelation were depicted frequently and, in paintings by Hieronymus Bosch, the Devil was represented by insects and beetles: the Lord of the Flies was literally a miniaturised version of the Devil. Although they were found more often on the Continent and England than in post-Reformation Scotland, which had rejected religious images and iconography with the reform of the church in the sixteenth century, these diverse images attempted to accommodate the confusing names, descriptions and explanations that were found in theological sources.

Many of these ideas were later used in the demonological writings of James VI. In his *Daemonologie* there were a number of descriptions of Satan. The Devil could transform himself into an angel of light – a reference to Second Corinthians (11:14).[9] James claimed that the Devil could also appear as a male goat, particularly at sabbats or witches'

meetings.[10] James repeated the standard view that Satan and other devils or demons were originally angels who had been expelled from heaven.[11] *Daemonologie* also described spirits that could take various forms, such as *Lemures* or *spectra*, which were horrible or monstrous spirits that haunted houses and people. Spirits could also appear in the likeness of dead people, sometimes specifically referred to as ghosts, in which case they were called *umbrae mortuorum*.[12] James believed that all these different manifestations of spirits were in fact the same, and that ghosts were not the spirits of dead people but demons.

Theologians thought that demons were not composed of flesh and blood, but were entirely spirit in form. This meant that the Devil could take any form he chose – as seen by the above examples – or he could take possession of or inhabit the body of a human being, although this latter form appears to have been relatively rare in Scotland.[13] Another form of demonic spirit described by James was a rough man, often called a brownie. Brownies and possibly *gruagach* or *glaistig* – female versions which helped with dairy work recorded in Gaelic folklore – were thought to attach themselves to households and help complete unpopular tasks without payment. As James VI wrote, 'some were so blinded as to believe that their house was all the sonsier [i.e. luckier], as they called it, that such spirits resorted there'.[14]

III

If the theologians and other elite theorists thought that the devil had such a varied appearance, in what form did he appear to those who confessed to having met or associated with him? It would seem that the Devil or devils found in the discourse of Scottish witchcraft trials was just as diverse as the theological or demonological one. He appeared as a human, animal, insect, spirit (including ghosts), angel and fairy or elf. The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft recorded 392 references to a Devil, or non-natural being as it was categorised for the purposes of the database during the research period.[15] Out of those 392 citations, 276 took human form. Of those, 250 were male and 26 were female. Individually, the Devil in male form was the most common by far; the second most frequent was in the form of an animal, which had 60 references. Next were those in the form of a female, then fairies, which accounted for 18 (nine male, six female and three non-specific gender). This was followed by the category of unidentified spirits, which were mentioned 17 times, then ghosts, which had five references. There were three mentions of inanimate objects including a ruck

of hay and a wind, and on one occasion a whirlwind. Finally appearances of the Devil in the form of an insect, a baby or child were all mentioned once, and were therefore statistically not really significant.

Given the gender stereotypes associated with witch belief, it was not surprising that the male form dominated the statistics for the majority of those women who described meeting the Devil: 216 out of 335.[16] The majority of demonic encounters described by men were also in male form: 34 out of 57 mentions. Six mentioned the Devil in female form – around 11 per cent. This contrasts with only 20 references to the Devil as a female out of 335 mentions that were recorded by women – around 6 per cent. Men also mentioned spirits, ghosts, fairies and other unspecified demons, but did not mention babies, children, insects or inanimate objects.

Confessions may have been influenced by the interrogators. What questions did they ask and what preconceptions did they have about the content of the confessions? Unfortunately, evidence about direct questioning is extremely limited and so we are left with an impression of what was on the minds of the questioners. It would seem that, like the confessions, their ideas were equally varied. In most cases the different descriptions of different demonic spirits appear to have been accepted, in that that they confirmed demonic associations and proof of guilt. There does not seem to have been any attempt to shape them into any one form or another, i.e. the Devil found in demonologies and the Bible. This raises the question: were the interrogators, many of whom were ministers or elders, looking for a singular Devil or multiple demons or devils or both? It is not possible to answer this, but since spirits of animal, inanimate, female and male forms were all deemed demonic by post-Reformation Protestants, they were all equally dangerous.

IV

The description of the male Devil was not uniform. The most common was as a black man or dressed in black, which was mentioned in 81 out of 392 occasions. It is not clear if the term black man referred to a man in black clothing, a man with black hair or one whose skin was black. Where clothing was specified, black was cited most frequently, with 51 references. Green was the next most common, with 23 mentions, followed by blue with 21. Grey accounted for nine references; white and brown were mentioned on five and four occasions respectively. Red was not mentioned in any description of a Devil figure (apart from a copper-faced man mentioned by Janet MacNicol).[17] The colour black

was associated with sin, which was clearly related to demonic activity and may explain why this featured most frequently. The black male demonic figure was not unique to Scotland or even Britain: in Spanish *Coco* was the black devil and in Italian he was called *l'homo negro*.

Typical examples of men in black are illustrated by Alexander Hamilton, executed for witchcraft in 1630, who described a black man in black clothes who did not have a cloak but had a wand.[18] Agnes Clarkson, from Dirleton, accused of witchcraft in 1649, described meeting a black man with a staff.[19] When she initially refused to join the Devil, she said that the house had filled with a black wind and mist. Isobel Smith, from Bolton, tried for witchcraft in 1661, described a black man dressed in green and, in 1662, Janet Morrison, from Rothesay, confessed to seeing the Devil as a naked man with a black head and another black man who was rough and fierce.[20] Margaret Jackson, from Paisley, executed for witchcraft in 1677, described a black man with a bluish band and white cuffs, who wore hoggers (stockings worn as gaiters), but no shoes.[21] It appears that even those who were described as men in black were not all the same.

The colour green was often associated with misfortune rather than sin.[22] It was also frequently associated with fairy or elfin figures of some form, which were perceived to be demonic. In many cases it was not always stated categorically by the accused or recorded accurately by officials that what was meant was an elf or fairy: some descriptions would simply refer to 'a man in green'. If all references to green were taken to indicate fairy belief then this would alter the statistical analysis slightly, increasing the appearance of the Devil in the form of fairies to 40 references. Since there was often no further unequivocal reference to the Devil figure as a fairy, this was not taken as an absolute or objective indicator. In 1616, Elizabeth Riach from Orkney claimed that she met a male devil in green tartan. She also claimed that she met another male, this time a male fairy who was her relative.[23] The male fairy in Isobel Haldane's account from 1623 had a grey beard.[24] Barbara Parish, from Livingston, who was probably executed in 1647, confessed that she met a male fairy in green clothing with a grey hat.[25] In 1662, Isobel Goudie described meeting a well-favoured man who was the king of fairies at the church of Auldearn.[26] It is undoubtedly possible to suggest, however, as others have done, that what is indicated by the conflation of the colour green and fairies and devils in witchcraft testimony is that the figure of the Devil in early modern Scotland was a mixture of elite demonological and other popular beliefs, rather than simply a straightforward elite theological interpretation.[27]

Other descriptive elements of the Devil included reference to him being a gentleman, who could be pleasant, trim, well-favoured, pretty and gallant. He could also be grim, fearful, fierce, rough, cold or ill-favoured. Agnes Pogavie, from Liberton, who was executed in 1661, claimed that she met an 'ill-hewed man' – possibly an unhealthy or pale figure – and Janet MacNair, from Stirling, confessed that she met a 'grim, black man' – a very typical description.[28] Positive descriptions, however, like that of Marion Lyne, from Prestonpans, who described meeting a gentleman, and Isobel Ramsay, from Duddingston, who claimed that she met a pleasant young man, somewhat surprisingly, appeared slightly more frequently than negative ones.[29]

In terms of size the Devil was more often large, meikle or great than he was little. According to Agnes Naesmith from Erskine, who was executed in 1697, the Devil had long black hair, which, perhaps to indicate a more bestial image, was described as a mane.[30] Not all the figures had black hair: Janet Miller from Rerrick, who was executed in 1658, confessed that she met a man of middling height, who was 40 years old and who had flaxen hair.[31] The image of the man in black may seem obvious enough but a more general term like 'rough' man may have equated to the popular idea of a brownie, the helpful domestic spirit that featured in a number of folk beliefs and folk tales throughout Scotland.[32] In 1649 Thomas Shanks confessed to meeting a 'thick little man' and in 1680 Margaret Comb, from Bo'ness, described seeing a 'thick, little man', both of which might indicate a brownie.[33]

When clothing was specified, the male Devil was reported to have worn different types of bonnet, cravat, hat, coat, shawl and hood or, more vaguely, was very well-dressed. Janet Man, from Stenton, confessed that she met a figure wearing 'grey clothes like a gentleman'.[34] This poses a variety of questions. The negative descriptive elements conform to expectations of ugliness, cruelty and danger; but how could the Devil be pleasant, pretty and gallant? How could he be a well-dressed gentleman? Peter Maxwell-Stuart suggests that during the sixteenth century witch prosecution was part of an attack on Catholicism or pre-Reformation religious practice.[35] His thesis is that the figure of the Devil dressed in black, in a black gown and bonnet, might have been a pre-Reformation priest. He cites the example of Janet Stratton, who was one of those accused during the North Berwick trials in 1591. She claimed that the Devil appeared to her as a 'blak priest with blak claithis'.[36] In another case, Maxwell-Stuart cites Robert Grierson as describing a man wearing a black gown and a skull bonnet.[37] While

these cases may be particularly indicative of pre-Reformation clerics, post-Reformation ministers also wore black gowns and bonnets, albeit probably not skull bonnets.[38] It might therefore be pertinent to extend Maxwell-Stuart's point and suggest that some of these 'men in black', and especially those wearing bonnets, such as that described by Margaret Alan, from Bathgate, who was banished for witchcraft in 1661, may have been clerical figures of either pre-Reformation or post-Reformation churches.[39]

Although it is unlikely that all the outdoor meetings described by people accused of witchcraft during the seventeenth century were conventicles or religious meetings, it is possible that some of them were. Clandestine conventicle meetings started in 1619 during one of the many unsettled periods of the Reformed church. Later, numerous crises of authority between royal or secular power and ecclesiastical or spiritual power led to further splits and eventual revolution. The church in Scotland was by no means a unified organisation during the seventeenth century. After 1661 around one-third of ministers were expelled from their positions.[40] It is interesting to note that there were 95 references to the Devil in 1661 and 1662 and 75 of them were to men (60 in 1661 and 15 in 1662). In total there were 108 references to men in black and a fifth of all descriptions of men in black came from these two years – 18 in 1661 and four in 1662. It is unlikely that these 'men in black' were individual ministers who had been expelled, as most of the deprivations occurred after 1662, but there may have been some cultural link. Men in black were mentioned nine times before 1600 and 17 times between 1600 and 1650. Eighty-one mentions of the Devil as a man in black occurred after 1650. The Devil as a man in black was clearly a seventeenth-century phenomenon.

V

According to biblical authority, the Devil could change his appearance as he desired. He appeared as a lamb but could speak like a dragon (Revelation, 13:11). He could be a roaring lion who devoured all those around him (I Peter, 5:8). He was also described as a serpent (Revelation, 4:7). On the whole very little of this type of imagery was confessed or described during investigations for witchcraft in Scotland. There are 60 references to beasts and fewer mentions of bestial human devils. Six references were made to male devils with cloven feet and two with cloven lips.[41] These include Janet Miller, from Kirkliston, who described meeting a man who had cloven feet like an ox.[42]

Helen Casse, from Duddingston, executed in 1661, confessed to meeting a cloven-footed man, as did Margaret Jackson, from Paisley, in 1677.[43] The Devil met by Janet Braidhead from Auldearn was a 'mekle, roch man with cloven feet'; however, none of the descriptions included horns, tails, wings or fur.[44] This does rather negate the image perpetuated by theological or demonological works or by contemporary visual representations. The figure preaching from the tree stump which illustrates *Newes from Scotland* (1591) is suggestive of some form of tailed and horned beast: perhaps a dragon. The woodcut included by Guazzo in his *Compendium Maleficarum* (1626) of the Devil taking the young child from its parents depicts a winged, cloven-footed beast standing on two legs. These were easily identifiable as the Devil. There was no mistaking either of these images of the Devil as a human, which appeared to be something the ordinary population of most European countries did. It would appear from both biblical descriptions and other testimony that the Devil was a master of disguise and found it more efficient and threatening to appear in a more mundane disguise than in an obvious grotesque shape. What is also interesting is that, like men in black, the references to cloven-footed devils all came from the second half of the seventeenth century: 1661, 1662 and 1680. This would seem to be a reflection of the increased stereotyping of the Devil by elite opinion, and which appeared to influence, and increasingly dominate, the language of witchcraft that was recorded during investigations and trials.

Janet MacNicol, from Dunoon, mentioned one form of deformed demon in 1673. She described three forms of male Devil: one was a well-favoured young man, one a gross, copper-faced man and one a leper.[45] Leprosy was a common enough and well-recognised disease in the early modern period, and lepers had restricted entry to most burghs. They were permitted to beg but were excluded from regular social interaction.[46] This leprous devil figure would certainly suggest a more repulsive image, as the disfiguring skin lesions would immediately identify an individual who was not part of regular society. As lepers were not that uncommon at this time, however, this image may have seemed less frightening to an early modern community than it would to many of us today.

One question that seems obvious is: why was the Devil figure found in popular culture not more monstrous? Even the animals that were described as devils were hardly grotesque. These included dogs, cats, birds, horses and foals, deer or stags, cows and calves, lambs, rats and 'beasts'. The most common were dogs, which accounted for 25 out of

60 references, followed by cats and 'beasts', which had six mentions each. Birds, including crows, ravens and magpies, and deer, were mentioned five times. Foals, horses, calves, cows, rats and lambs accounted for 12 in total. There were young dogs, black dogs, brown dogs, big rough dogs, round headed cats, and white and grey stags. These everyday animals are illustrated by the magpie and jackdaw described by Thomas Leys, from Aberdeen, who was executed in 1597; a horse that was recorded in the trial of James Reid, from Inveresk, who was executed in 1603; a black dog described in 1649 by Isobel Murray, from Pencaitland; and the dog and cat which Katherine Walker, from Brechin, claimed to have seen in 1650.[47]

In *Daemonologie* James VI noted that the Devil could appear in the likeness of a dog, cat, ape or other such beast.[48] His claim that the Devil often appeared at witches' meetings as a goat buck is not confirmed by the evidence.[49] The most monstrous sounding descriptions found in the documents are those of rather unspecified 'uncouth beasts', a dog with a sow's head, described by Janet Black from Stirling, and a rough dog who could speak, recorded in Katherine Shaw's trial in Lanark in 1644.[50] Yet, apart from the dog with a sow's head, none of these sound very chimera-like. They do not conjure up images of hippopotamus-like Behemoth, a Leviathan-like sea-monster or the apocalyptic image of Belial. There were not even any references to slightly less monstrous serpents or dragons. Virtually all of the animals cited as demonic were domestic. Apart from perhaps deer or stags, they would all have been well-known, even to town dwellers. Yet again it seems that in popular culture the Devil was more effective disguised in domesticity than disgust.

VI

There are far fewer references to the Devil as a female than as male: 26 in all, although this increases to 32 if Devil as female fairy is also included. There is less variation in the appearance of the Devil as female: two wore green, one wore white, one appeared like the accused herself, another woman had a black pot, and four were recorded as Queen of Elves.[51] Alison Pierson, Andrew Man, Isobel Goudie and Jean Weir all mentioned meeting the Queen of Elves.[52] Although two of these references are from the sixteenth century – Pierson (1588) and Man (1598) – it is clear that the concept of the Queen of Elves did not disappear in the seventeenth century, as the other two references came from 1661 and 1670.

Twenty-one people described the female Devil as 'Antiochia, gentle wife of the Devil'.[53] The overall statistics for the Devil as female are skewed by the over-representation of this description. They all came from a large group of people, including Agnes Naesmith, Katherine Campbell, Margaret Fulton, Margaret Laing, John Reid, James Lindsay, Elizabeth Anderson and Mary Morrison, who were accused of bewitching Christian Shaw in 1697. The consistency of the language used in the reference indicates that there may have been a very opinionated hand behind the acquisition, or the recording, of the information rather than reflecting a widespread popular idea.[54] Although it is almost impossible to judge who or what this figure was, it is interesting to note that she was referred to as the 'gentle wife' of the Devil. Indeed apart from this, none of the other descriptions of the Devil in female form include any reference to size, nature or physical features.

What does this indicate about early modern society's attitude towards the gender of supernatural or preternatural beings? Does it confirm the suggestion that the female figure was believed to be softer and gentler and therefore society was unable to reconcile her with anything demonic? Early modern Christian society perceived God as male, but in pagan religions both gods and goddesses were quite acceptable. Although in monotheistic Christian theology God, and his counterpart, were overwhelmingly perceived as male, technically God was neither male nor female but a pure form of androgynous spirit. Both God and the Devil were, however, described, for the most part, in male terms. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit was identified by ancient Semitic cults as female. *Hagia Sophia* (sacred wisdom) or *Logos* was the second part of the Holy Trinity and was deemed to be female. Although there was a female aspect to the Christian belief in the Holy Trinity, a similar degree of femininity did not extend to the Devil. What was more acceptable for society was to have the female figure subservient to the male. The Devil could be male, or take any other form, but the female witch was always in an inferior position.[55]

Two of the female demonic representations wore white. White was traditionally associated with purity or virginity, and was also associated with the Magi and Druids. There is no indication, however, that either of these meanings was implied in these cases. Indeed both contrast quite markedly: one had a spiritual meaning and the other a more mundane explanation. In 1597 Marion Grant from Methlick described her female Devil as wearing a 'white wylicoat' (waistcoat). She claimed that the figure was called 'Our Ladye', which is suggestive of the Virgin Mary rather than anything demonic.[56] Post-Reformation church theology

removed the figure of the mother of Christ, as well as saints, from the ritual of holy worship and so perhaps this is an example of a recasting of pre-Reformation religious worship as demonic and dangerous. In contrast, in 1658 Katherine Remy, from Alloa, said she met a female Devil figure in a white gown. Later, during further questioning, she claimed that the figure might simply have been Elizabeth Black, one of the other women who were investigated at the same time – a rather more straightforward explanation.[57] Given the popularity of Marian cults in the sixteenth century, however, it is perhaps surprising that there were not more references to 'Our Lady' if witchcraft prosecution was being used as an attack on pre-Reformation religious practice and belief.

VII

Since God and the Devil were both pure spirit and could take any form, it is relevant to examine the Devil figures that were described as spirits, rather than those that took a more corporeal human or animal form. There were 17 references in total. Although some of them took a physical form, they seem to have been regarded as distinct from the other corporeal forms. Some of the references to spirits appear to have been more like ghosts, although they were not always called that in the documents. Also, rather than being an androgynous spirit, some appeared to have a specific gender: two were stated as being female and four of them were male. Some of the spirits were angels, including two who were called Christsonday. Sometimes the angels were part of a larger group of non-natural beings that the accused claimed to have seen. Alternatively, they seemed to be able to appear in different forms at different times, confirming the theory that spirits had the ability to change shape. In 1590 Isobel Watson, from Glendevon, told the presbytery of Stirling that she had seen a spirit in the form of an angel.[58] She also told the authorities, however, that the spirit could also take the form of a male human and called him Thomas Murray. It is not clear if she meant a ghost at this point, as the term was not used, but it is a possibility given other similar examples. Thirdly, she also claimed that the 'fair folk' or fairies had visited her. Again it is not clear if she meant that the spirits and ghosts were the same as the fairies or were different in some way and, if so, how. It is therefore not really legitimate to conflate them into one form or another. Another illustration that confirms that those who were describing events made some distinction between the forms of spirits is seen in the case of Jean Weir

from Edinburgh. Weir confessed to witchcraft and incest in 1670, 80 years after Isobel Watson.[59] She told the authorities that she met a female spirit as well as the Queen of Elves. Weir claimed that the spirit woman intervened with the Queen of Elves on her behalf so Weir could get help with her spinning.[60] This clearly indicates that every mention of a female spirit did not necessarily always refer to the Queen of Elves.

Christine (Christian) Reid (1597) and Andrew Man (1598), both from Aberdeenshire, described meeting a spirit in the form of an angel, whom they both called Christsonday.[61] Man also confessed to meeting a wide range of spirits in various forms: a stag deer, the ghosts of Thomas the Rhymer and James IV, a black beast, and the Queen of Elves. Reference to angels would certainly tie in with the theological idea that Satan was a fallen angel, a theory that was also supported in demonological writings. Another point to note, however, is that the references to angels came from the sixteenth century, which would suggest that this was possibly indicative of pre-Reformation religious belief. Like the Virgin Mary and saints, belief in the active role of angels was excluded from reformed Christian doctrine of the seventeenth century. Images of angels were still used to decorate post-Reformation churches but their power as intercessors was no longer acceptable.[62]

There are two possible explanations for the presence of angels in sixteenth-century confessions and their disappearance from seventeenth-century accounts. One is that it might illustrate the demonising of pre-Reformation ritual by the post-Reformation religious authorities and the use of witchcraft prosecution as a front for attacks on Catholics. While this has quite an emotive impact there are limits to its application. If the numbers of confessions about angels and female spirits who might be regarded as suggestive of the Virgin Mary are combined, they account for a very small proportion of those who were accused between 1563 and 1736, and even of those just from the sixteenth century. While some of those involved in the investigation and prosecution of accused witches may have had an anti-Catholic agenda, particularly in the early years after 1560, it could not be the only explanation for their actions.[63] Another explanation for the apparent disappearance of angels in the seventeenth century is that the slow, but constant, attack on pre-Reformation belief had worked, and that society no longer accepted the possibility of spirits and angels in particular. This is of course not true. Like the Devil, angels did not disappear in the seventeenth century but remained very much part of

the cosmology of early modern society.[64] Unlike the Devil, however, who was still the main rival of the church, angels were not perceived as a threat. The seventeenth-century church, in order to focus its attention on the Devil, had simplified its description and instead concentrated on apocalyptic interpretations of the rise of the Devil.[65] Interest in angels and other spirits by the authorities had declined and this was reflected in the language of witchcraft investigation.

As in the case of Andrew Man, a number of the spirits described might have been regarded as ghosts of people who were known to the accused. Janet Boyman, executed at Ayr in 1572, claimed that the Devil appeared to her in the spirit of Maggie Dewand, a woman who was known to her, as well as in a whirlwind.[66] In 1576 Elizabeth Dunlop, from Lyne, claimed she met a number of ghosts: the ghosts of Thomas Reid, said to have died at the battle of Pinkie in 1547, and the Laird of Auchenskeith.[67] In 1605 Patrick Lawrie, from Dundonald, claimed that he met the spirit of Helena MacBurnie, although he did not say who she was.[68] Janet Morrison confessed that she met the ghost of Adam Kerr in 1662.[69] The spirits claimed to have been met by women from Culross in 1675 were all given names – Peter Solloway, Peter Drysdale and Laurie Moir.[70] It is not clear if they were thought to be the spirits of dead men known to the individuals or just some other form of spirits who had rather prosaic names. More categorically, in 1677 Margaret Jackson claimed that she met the spirit, or ghost, of her dead husband, Thomas Stewart.[71] Like others, Jackson had known the spirit in real life.

Agnes Sampson, one of those involved in the North Berwick episode in 1591, claimed that a spirit called Elva or Eloa visited her. Agnes claimed that she could call the spirit by its name and it could appear as a dog. *Elohim* is the Hebrew word for gods; the singular being *el* or *eloah*, and the word itself was believed to have magical properties. Sampson claimed that she uttered it when she was carrying out healing rituals, which would seem to reflect this ancient belief. This was an unusual reference and indicated some sophisticated, if rather fragmentary, theological knowledge, which is surprising given Sampson's ordinary social and economic background.

Another of the North Berwick group, Euphemia MacCalzean, said that an invisible spirit, who spoke to her, had visited her.[72] This spirit or Devil had no physical form at all. In another case, this time from 1706, well after the main periods of prosecution, Jean Brown, from Penninghame, also claimed that she conversed with invisible spirits.[73] Although she could not see them she could feel them and they lay

with her 'carnally as men and women do'. Unlike MacCalzean's descriptions, Brown's confession was full of religious language and convictions: she claimed the spirits represented her maker, and she also referred to them as her Father, Son and Holy Ghost. As this form of invisible spirit appeared so infrequently in the confessions of those accused of witchcraft, it would seem that in Scotland at least, people preferred their devils to be more substantial.

VIII

The Devil is present in Scottish witchcraft material, in various forms and in less detail than might have been expected. The Devil was more often mundane and inconsequential rather than monstrous and frightening, and demonstrates a combination of popular ideas and elite theories. Since the concept of the Devil that was created by elite theologians and demonologists of the Judeo-Christian tradition was an attempt to recast non-orthodox ideology as superstitious, it was only to be expected that the concept would have various forms. It was also not unexpected that the Devil was often rather understated and ordinary: if he was hard to identify then he would be far more dangerous. The Devil was a master of disguise so could appear in any form that fitted with the language used by those who described him. In order to entice individuals to join him, it was more effective to seem less terrifying.

The increased presence of the man in black is, however, likely to be a reflection of theological opinion. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theology and demonology reflected the apocalyptic ideas of the Book of Revelation. James VI referred to Revelation and the end of the world in *Daemonologie*:

> For the great wickedness of the people, on the one part, procures this horrible defection whereby God justly punisheth sin by a greater iniquity. And on the other part, the consummation of the world and our deliverance drawing near, makes Satan to rage the more in his instruments (Revelation, 12) knowing his kingdom to be so near an end.[74]

Witches were seen as precursors to Satan's domination of the earth and its population in advance of Christ's Second Coming, which in turn would indicate the beginning of the end of the world. Those who subscribed to an eschatological position engaged in a self-perpetuating argument: if the end of the world was due there would be an increased

presence of the Devil and therefore of witches and witchcraft. In turn, if more witches were discovered and confessed to increased involvement with the Devil this indicated a greater likelihood that the world would end. Catholics and Protestants alike subscribed to this assertion.[75] Nevertheless, as Stuart Clark points out, even eschatological ideas were not uniform. Some claimed the appearance of the Antichrist, some the Second Coming of Christ, others the resurrection of the dead, the end of the world and finally the Last Judgement.[76]

In 1598 Andrew Man described visions of the Day of Judgement, when 'fyre will burne the watter and the earth'.[77] During the seventeenth century, when the Devil and his disciples were increasing their activity, apocalyptic visions did not feature among the confessions. Somewhat ironically, it was not until the eighteenth century, in 1706 – after the end of the world did not happen – that Jean Brown described, in similar language, her vision of the apocalypse, when the heavens would be as thunder and fire.[78] In this case, rather than identifying this as straightforward witchcraft, the church initially decided that Brown's claims were blasphemous and delusions. She was only accused of witchcraft after she escaped prison, when she was issued with an order of excommunication.

The Devil was a fundamental element of witchcraft belief. The increase in his presence during the seventeenth century is likely to reflect an increased anxiety on the part of those investigating accusations and the recasting of their definition of demonic powers and activities. Perhaps we do know more about how Scottish peasant society saw the Devil than God, but what is most striking is that, despite the importance of the demonic pact as evidence of guilt, the Devil and his various guises, or associates, appear to have been relatively ordinary.

Notes

1 C. Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981), 134.
2 Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), VII.15.
3 Scottish terms for the Devil. Some of them were used from the eighteenth century onwards but Mahoun was used from the sixteenth century.
4 Although there were 392 references to a demonic or non-natural being of different types these were made by 226 different individuals as some people mentioned more than one being.
5 There are few 'biographies' of the Devil but J. B. Russell has attempted an extensive study of the subject: *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, NY, 1977); *Lucifer: the Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1984); *Mephistopheles: the Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, NY, 1986); *The Prince of Darkness* (Ithaca, NY, 1988); *Satan: the Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, NY, 1981). There are also several other works that cover interpretations and attitudes to the subject, notably K. Armstrong, *A History of*

God (London, 1993) and L. Link, *The Devil in Art* (London, 1993). P. Stanford, *The Devil – A Biography* (London, 1996), is also a useful, if less academic, work.

6 B. P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (3rd edn, London, 2006), 32–7.

7 John Milton in *Paradise Lost* described Belial thus: 'Belial came last – than whom a spirit more lewd, fell not from heaven, or more gross to love Vice for itself'.

8 The Devil appeared as an angel before Christ in a mosaic in San Apollinaire Nuovo in Ravenna on the east coast of Italy, dated around 520.

9 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 411 (*Daemonologie*, Book III, ch. 2).

10 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 387 (*Daemonologie*, Book II, ch. 3). See also L. Henderson and E. J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: a History* (East Linton, 2001), 15.

11 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 373 (*Daemonologie*, Book I, ch. 6).

12 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 404 (*Daemonologie*, Book III, ch. 1). For more on these various beings see J. Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft in its European context', Chapter 1 above.

13 See B. P. Levack, 'Demonic possession in early modern Scotland', Chapter 7 below.

14 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 411 (*Daemonologie*, Book III, ch. 2). Brownies were not unique to Scotland or even Celtic society: German folklore included a household demon – *Gütlein* – that did domestic chores and looked after animals.

15 The fields in the full version of the Survey database that were used for this statistical analysis are: 'WDB_DevilAppearance', 'Devil_type' and 'Devil_text'. In the initial stages of designing the database the term 'Devil' was used simply for any reference to the Devil. It subsequently became clear, however, that this was too restrictive and did not accommodate the variety of demonic and/or spiritual detail contained in the documentary material. It was therefore decided to expand the categories listed in the field 'Devil_type' to include: Baby: the Devil appearing in the form of a baby; Child Devil: the Devil appearing in the form of a child; Fairy: non-natural being appearing in the form of a fairy, gender not specified; Female: the Devil appearing in the form of a female; Female Fairy: non-natural being appearing in the form of a female fairy; Ghost: non-natural being appearing in the form of a ghost or dead person; Inanimate Object Devil: the Devil appearing in the form of an inanimate object; Insect Devil: the Devil appearing in the form of an insect; Male: the Devil appearing in the form of a man; Male Fairy: non-natural being appearing in the form of a male fairy; Other Demon: non-natural being appearing in the form of another non-specified demon; Spirit: non-natural being appearing in the form of a non-specified spirit; Unspecified Devil: non-natural being appearing in the form of a non-specified Devil. This range allowed the researchers to record a wider range of material, which also meant that it could be used for comparative analysis. The field 'Devil_text' provides extra information describing what was written or quoting from the document. This field is therefore useful for more qualitative comparison. Another field 'Devil notes' also provides expanded details. Both these fields contain significant information, such as the type or colour of clothing, the physique of the being, or perhaps a name if recorded. For

the Survey generally see L. Martin and J. Miller, 'Some findings from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft', Chapter 2 above.

16 Because women accounted for 85 per cent of all those accused of witchcraft in Scotland, the statistics for all the accused, both men and women, are mirrored by those found for women only. Thus for women, Devil as male was followed by the Devil as an animal, then as a human female, fairy (including male and female), spirit, unspecified form, ghosts, inanimate objects and also as a child, a baby and an insect. For males, the figures are essentially similar, although overall there was a smaller variety of forms described and there were also some interesting statistical variations.

17 *HP*, iii, 13–14, 26.

18 NAS, process notes, JC26/9; *SJC*, i, 132.

19 *RPC*, 2nd ser., viii, 189–90.

20 For Isobel Smith see *RPC*, 3rd ser., i, 659–60; for Janet Morrison see *HP*, iii, 20–8.

21 *RPC*, 3rd ser., v, pp. xxxv–xxxvi, 95 and Glasgow City Archives, Maxwell of Pollok Papers, T-PM 107/1417.

22 Green was also a popular colour for walls around the pulpit in post-Reformation churches in Scotland: M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, Conn., 2002), 328.

23 Orkney Archives, Acts of the Lawting Sheriff Justice Courts of Orkney and Shetland, 51–5; *Maitland Miscellany*, ii (1840), 187–91. D. Purkiss suggests that this case is about incest and that Riach used the description of a fairy as a metaphor for unspeakable acts rather than meaning more straightforward popular belief: 'Sounds of silence: fairies and incest in Scottish witchcraft stories' in S. Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft* (Basingstoke, 2001). Her thesis, however, is not supported by the majority of references to fairies/elves in witchcraft material or elsewhere.

24 *RPC*, xiii, 270; *RPC*, 2nd ser., viii, 352–4; *Spottiswoode Miscellany*, ii, (ed.) J. Maidment (1845), 304–5.

25 NAS, Livingston kirk session records, CH2/467/1, 76–83.

26 *RPC*, 3rd ser., i, 243; Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials,* iii, 602–15.

27 S. Macdonald, 'In search of the Devil in Fife witchcraft cases, 1560–1705', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), 46. See also S. Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560–1710* (East Linton, 2002), 182.

28 For Agnes Pogavie see NAS, process notes, JC26/27/5; for Janet MacNair see JC26/34.

29 For Marion Lyne see NAS, process notes, JC26/26/5/1; for Isobel Ramsay, see NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/11, JC2/10, fos. 21v.–7r.; process notes, JC26/27/1.

30 NAS, circuit court books, JC10/4, fos. 1r.–81r. (second pagination); privy council, PC1/51, 136–9.

31 NAS, process notes, JC26/24, JC26/25; circuit court books, JC10/1 fos. 217v.–9r., 223v., 236v.

32 See above, note 15.

33 For Thomas Shanks see NAS, Peebles presbytery records, CH2/295/3, fo. 130v. For Margaret Comb see NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/15, fo. 59r.; process notes, JC26/50.

34 NAS, process notes, JC26/26.
35 P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-century Scotland* (East Linton, 2001), 146–7.
36 NAS, process notes, JC26/2, item 19.
37 Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy*, 146, note 14.
38 See for example the woodcut portrait of John Knox by Theodore Beza, Geneva, 1580. There is also a copy of a painted portrait of Knox by Adrian Vanson (whereabouts of the original by Vanson are unknown) in the University of Edinburgh's Special Collections. The Vanson portrait was done in Edinburgh in 1579. This shows Knox in a black gown and a flat, black bonnet – a soft, flat, brimless hat.
39 NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/11, JC2/10, fos. 29v., 50v.–1v.; process notes, JC26/17.
40 M. Lynch, *Scotland: a New History* (London, 1992), 290. See also W. Makey, *The Church of the Covenant, 1637–1651: Revolution and Social Change in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1979).
41 The references to cloven lips are likely to indicate a hare lip, and therefore may be far less ominous than cloven feet. Any clear physical feature like this would mark an individual as being 'different' in some way, although it would seem to be more of a human characteristic than a demonic one.
42 NAS, process notes, JC26/27/1 and Janet Miller bundle.
43 For Helen Casse see NAS, process notes, JC26/27/1; books of adjournal, JC2/10 fos. 21v.–7r. For Margaret Jackson see *RPC*, 3rd ser., v, 95; Glasgow City Archives, Maxwell of Pollok Papers, T-PM 107/14/7; NAS, circuit court books, JC10/4 fos. 1r.–10r.
44 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials,* iii, 616–18.
45 *HP*, iii, 13–14, 26.
46 D. Hamilton, *The Healers: a History of Medicine in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1987), 16–17.
47 For Thomas Leys see *Spalding Misc.*, i, 83–4, 97–101; for James Reid see NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/3, fos. 999–1000, Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials,* ii, 421–7. For Isobel Murray see *RPC*, 2nd ser., viii, 191–3; for Katherine Walker see NAS, Brechin presbytery records, CH2/40/1, fos. 82–3, 94–5.
48 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 372 (*Daemonologie*, Book I, ch. 6).
49 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 387 (*Daemonologie*, Book II, ch. 3).
50 For Janet Black see Stirling Council Archives, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/6, 89–99; NAS, process notes, JC26/26/3. For Katherine Shaw see *RPC*, 2nd ser., viii, 148–9, 155–7.
51 The term 'Elphyne' or 'Elphane', meaning fairyland or land of the elves, was often used in the original documentation, thus 'Queen of Elphyne'. The more modern term Queen of Elves will be used in this discussion.
52 For Alison Pierson see NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/2, fos. 104v.–5v., Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials,* i, II, 161–4; for Andrew Man *Spalding Misc.*, i, 117–25; for Isobel Goudie, Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials,* iii, 602–15, and for Jean Weir, NAS, process notes, JC2/13 fos. 9v–12v.
53 I have been unable to find any reference to the Devil having a wife or to any demon named Antiochia or anything similar. St Margaret of Antioch, in present day Turkey, was the patron saint of women and nurses and was

traditionally invoked for help with conception, childbirth and breast-feeding. It is unlikely that the Antiochia mentioned here refers to this saint. It is likely that the name had some older root but does not appear in listings of demons and deities, e.g. K. van der Toom, B. Bekking and P. W. van der Horst (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1999).

54 NAS, circuit court books, JC10/4, fos. 1r.–81r. (second pagination), privy council, PC1/51, 136–9. For more on this case see B. P. Levack, 'Demonic possession in early modern Scotland', Chapter 7 below.

55 For some cases in which male witches were perceived as forming part of the Devil's authority-structure (e.g. as clerk, officer or cloak-bearer), see J. Goodare, 'Men and the witch-hunt in Scotland', in A. Rowlands (ed.), *Witchcraft and Masculinities in the Early Modern World* (forthcoming). Female witches were never so privileged.

56 *Spalding Misc.*, i, 170–2, 175–7.

57 Stirling Council Archives, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/ 722/6, 89–97; NAS, process notes, JC26/24, JC26/26 bundle 3.

58 Stirling Council Archives, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/2 (no pagination, 10/6/1590).

59 Jean was the sister of the notorious Thomas Weir. It has long been claimed as part of local folklore that Thomas, who was a very staunch Protestant, was tried for witchcraft and later was said to have haunted the West Bow in Edinburgh. However, according to his trial documentation, NAS, process notes, JC2/13, fos. 8v.–9v., he was tried for incest, adultery and bestiality. There does not appear to be any reference to witchcraft in his trial. His sister was tried for witchcraft and incest.

60 NAS, process notes, JC2/13, fos. 9v.–12v.

61 Accounts of both trials are found in *Spalding Misc.*, i. For Andrew Man see 117–25 and Christine Reid, 173–6.

62 Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, 329–30.

63 J. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft act', *Church History*, 74 (2005), 39–67. He discusses the authorship and intentions of the 1563 Witchcraft Act and argues that, while it may have been conceived as part of the Scottish Reformers' attack on Catholicism, the act was technically inept and problematic in confusing folk beliefs and practices with Catholic practices.

64 Robert Wodrow, *Analecta; or, Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences, Mostly Relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians*, 4 vols. (Maitland Club, 1842–3), i, 57, 59, describes incidents of angelic intervention that were witnessed in the seventeenth century.

65 S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), ch. 21, discusses the historiography of eschatological theories.

66 NAS, process notes, JC26/1/67; witchcraft papers, JC40/1.

67 NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/1, fos. 15r.–18r.

68 *RPC*, vii, 67; NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/4, fos. 58–60; Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials,* ii, 477–9.

69 *HP*, iii, 20–8.

70 The women were Janet Henry, Isobel Inglis and Agnes Henry: NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/14, fos. 346–54.

71 *RPC*, 3rd ser., v, 95; Glasgow City Archives, Maxwell of Pollok Papers, T-PM 107/14/7; NAS, cicuit court books, JC10/4, fos. 1r.–10r.

72 NAS, books of adjournal, JC2/2, fos. 201r.–7r., 221r.–6r.; Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials,* i, II, 237, 247–57.
73 NAS, Wigtown presbytery records, CH2/373/1, 220–30.
74 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 424–5 (*Daemonologie*, Book III, ch. 6).
75 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 322–30.
76 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 337.
77 *Spalding Misc.*, i, 117–25.
78 NAS, Wigtown presbytery records, CH2/373/1, 220–30.

7

Demonic Possession in Early Modern Scotland

Brian P. Levack

The early modern period of European history was not only the age of witch-hunting; it was also the age of demonic possession. The entrance of evil spirits into the bodies of human beings and their assumption of control of those persons' movements and behaviour became epidemic in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.[1] The Burgundian demonologist Henri Boguet wrote in 1602 that 'every day [Savoy] sends us a countless number of persons possessed of demons which, on being exorcised, say that they have been sent by witches'.[2] Between 1627 and 1631 the parish of Mattaincourt in Lorraine was home to no fewer than 85 possessed women and children.[3] At periodic intervals during the seventeenth century groups of nuns in French, Italian and Spanish convents went into fits; screamed, howled, vomited and fainted; spoke in foreign tongues; cursed their confessors and mother superiors; and performed great feats of strength. In Italy hundreds of self-proclaimed victims of possession flocked to the priest and exorcist Giovan Battista Chieasa to expel demons from their bodies.[4] In Germany scores of possession narratives, detailing the assaults of demons on young men and women, were published.[5] As far east as Russia women known as shriekers howled, screamed, convulsed and tore off their clothes, leading their neighbours to claim that they were possessed by devils.[6]

The epidemic of possession coincided with the increase in witchcraft prosecutions, and the two developments were related. Theologians argued that although a demonic spirit could possess the body of a human being on its own initiative (as long as God permitted it), the possession could just as likely occur at the command of a witch. In those cases the demoniac became the victim of witchcraft, and the demoniac's afflictions were considered to be *maleficia*, the acts of

harmful magic that witches allegedly performed. It was quite common for witches to be accused of having caused demonic possession. Boguet began his discourse on witchcraft with a discussion of the charges against Françoise Secretain for having used witchcraft to cause the possession of an eight-year-old girl.[7] In 1634 the parish priest Urbain Grandier was executed for causing the possession of a group of Ursuline nuns at Loudun by means of witchcraft,[8] while in the German university town of Paderborn a wave of possessions and exorcisms between 1656 and 1659 led to a witch-hunt that resulted in about 50 executions.[9] In 1692 a large witch-hunt began in Salem, Massachusetts when a group of young girls had fits and convulsions that were interpreted as signs of possession.[10]

However closely the phenomena of witchcraft and possession are linked, we must not conflate the two. Possession by the Devil himself, without the agency of a witch, had been the norm in the Middle Ages, and in many parts of Europe during the early modern period, especially in Germany, possession was not usually attributed to witchcraft.[11] Of more than 45 group possessions in European convents during the early modern period, only five French cases (including one at Aix-en Provence in 1609–1611, which was attributed to the witchcraft of Father Louis Gaufridi) had anything to do with witchcraft.[12]

There were two main reasons why cases of possession might *not* lead to trials for witchcraft. The first was that the initial accusations against witches for causing possessions came from the demoniacs themselves, and since their words were believed to be those of the Devil, the Master of Lies, they could not be considered reliable. The second was that to claim for witches the power to command demons to enter another human being was to detract from the power of God himself. As the Scottish jurist Sir George Mackenzie wrote in 1678, 'It is not to be imagined that Devils would obey mortal creatures, or that God would leave so great a power to any of them to torment poor mortals.'[13] Witchcraft and possession were thus distinct phenomena that only sometimes intersected. They both represented responses to the demonisation of European culture that began in the fourteenth century and reached its peak towards the end of the sixteenth century.

I

When we turn our attention to possession in Scotland, we are faced with a historical enigma. Although the Devil was certainly a prominent

part of Scottish theology and spiritual life during the early modern period, the record of demonic possession in Scotland is threadbare.[14] The narratives of possessions that appear so frequently in France, Germany, and England in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are not found in Scotland until the 1690s. Even more striking, the records of Scottish witchcraft prosecutions do not provide examples of witches sending demons into the bodies of their victims, once again until the 1690s.

If it had not been for the widely known possession of Christian Shaw, Scotland might have avoided the European epidemic of demonic possession entirely. In August 1696 Christian, the 11-year-old daughter of John Shaw, the laird of Bargarran, in the parish of Erskine, Renfrewshire, began to experience fits and bodily contortions; her body became stiff and motionless, and her tongue protruded at great length. She experienced temporary deafness, blindness and an inability to speak. She regurgitated hair, straw, coal cinders the size of chestnuts, gravel, pins, feathers of wild fowl and bones of various sorts. At times her head twisted around, as if her neck bone had been dissolved. Her stomach 'swelled like a drum, as like a woman with child'.[15] At times she had difficulty breathing and felt as if she was being choked. During some of her fits she took off all her clothes. Witnesses claimed that on a number of occasions she was carried through her house 'with such a swift and unaccountable motion that it was not in the power of any to prevent her – her feet not touching the ground'.[16] She also conversed with invisible spectres.

While experiencing her fits, Christian Shaw accused Katherine Campbell, one of the maids in the house, and Agnes Nasmith, described by her neighbours as 'an old widow woman, ignorant, and of a malicious disposition, addicted to threatenings', of having caused her suffering by witchcraft.[17] She later added others to the list of accused culprits. The entire affair was eventually referred to the privy council, which commissioned Lord Blantyre and eight other members of the local elite to interrogate and imprison persons suspected of witchcraft and to examine witnesses. The resulting precognitions, which were not taken on oath, led to the confessions of Elizabeth Anderson (aged 17), James Lindsay (aged 14), and Thomas Lindsay (a minor), all grandchildren of Jean Fulton, and the naming of accomplices who had allegedly gathered with the Devil. All in all, 24 persons were indicted for witchcraft. On 5 April a commission of justiciary granted by the privy council authorised a trial of seven of these persons. All seven were tried and executed at Paisley in May.[18]

The possession of Christian Shaw and the witch-hunt it had inaugurated were not the only cases of demonic possession that led to accusations of witchcraft in Scotland towards the close of the seventeenth century. Two years after the Paisley trial, another two demoniacs, Margaret Murdoch and Margaret Laird, who lived in the same vicinity as Shaw, accused more than 20 persons of witchcraft.[19] The symptoms of possession that these two young girls displayed were strikingly similar to those observed in Shaw. Witnesses claimed that Margaret Murdoch's body stretched back like a bow, while her neck, legs and arms became so stiff that they could not be moved. Observers reported that when her legs were wrapped around a chair, they could not be separated without breaking. She vomited up pins, straw, hair, wool, rags and feathers after her mouth had been searched to see if she had been concealing the substances. Her body showed signs of having been pinched and pricked, and one witness said that her flesh was blistered and burnt as if it had been seared by a hot iron. Her mouth was opened 'beyond measure' and her tongue drawn out 'to the tail of her chin'. She sat naked during some of her fits, and sometimes her arms were extended and positioned in such a way that people could not dress her without breaking her bones.[20]

Margaret Laird allegedly experienced many of the same symptoms as Murdoch and Shaw. She fell into a fainting fit and then a deaf fit, and when she recovered she cried out but was unable to speak. Thomas Brown, the minister at Paisley, described her torments as 'preternatural'. She was so badly contorted that three or four people could not hold her using all their power, while her throat swelled so much that attendants had to loosen her clothes. She claimed that the reason for that swelling was that one of her tormentors was pushing a button down her throat. Her hand also became swollen, and her arm became black from the finger ends to the elbow. During some of her fits she declared that the Devil was beside her in a chain.[21]

Murdoch and Laird named several tormentors, and when these accused witches were placed in their presence, the two girls fell into fits, in the manner of many other demoniacs. Their accusations for witchcraft led to a request to the privy council to authorise the precognition of witnesses, which took place at Paisley and Glasgow in April 1699. These precognitions, which came from a total of 91 witnesses, identified more than 20 witches, many of whom were accused of causing Murdoch's and Laird's fits. Some of those who were accused had been suspected of witchcraft before they were named as the source of the two girls' afflictions. This suggests that the residents of the area

were taking this opportunity to implicate individuals long suspected of witchcraft but never prosecuted. Their names might very well have been suggested to Murdoch and Laird while they were in their fits, so that they might identify them as their tormentors.

The similarities between the experiences of Murdoch and Laird on the one hand and those of Christian Shaw on the other were not fortuitous. The possession and dispossession of Christian Shaw was well known in the area around Paisley and Glasgow, and by 1699 narratives of Shaw's possession had also appeared in print, as shall be discussed below. Murdoch and Laird therefore modelled their behaviour on that of Shaw, while their families and neighbours continued to search for the witches in the region who were responsible for tormenting these young demoniacs.

Further connections between the events of 1697 and 1699 in the west country derived from the fact that Sir John Maxwell of Pollok, one of the commissioners who investigated and tried the persons accused of causing the possession of Christian Shaw, took the lead in the proceedings at Paisley and Glasgow in 1699. Maxwell, the son of a famous victim of witchcraft in 1678, was not as successful in 1699 as he had been with the Paisley witches two years before. In this case the privy council did not find the evidence sufficient for a trial and did not grant a commission of justiciary.[22] The likely explanation for their inaction was mounting scepticsm regarding the guilt of accused witches, especially in cases of demonic possession.[23]

A fourth Scottish possession took place in 1704 in the small coastal burgh of Pittenweem in Fife. Patrick Morton, a 16-year-old blacksmith, experienced bodily convulsions and 'swooning fits' reminiscent of Christian Shaw. His body became distorted and stiff, his back would rise up suddenly, and his stomach swelled. When he fell into his fits, he could not be raised up. After complaining that people were pinching him, witnesses saw the imprint of nails where he said he was hurting. The resemblance of Morton's possession to that of Shaw was not accidental, since the minister of Pittenweem, Patrick Cowper, had actually read an account of Christian Shaw's possession to Morton when he starting falling into his fits.[24] The possession of Christian Shaw, therefore, had begun to shape the behaviour of demoniacs not only in the west country but also in an eastern shire that had a history of intense witch-hunting.

Morton's fits were interpreted first as 'unusual' and then as 'preternatural'. Like Shaw, Murdoch and Laird, Morton accused several people of causing his fits by means of witchcraft. They included Beatrix Laing,

a woman of ill fame who had been barred from communion and for whom Morton had refused to make some nails; Janet Cornfoot or Corphat, known as a charmer; Nicolas Lawson, a reputed witch; Janet Horseburgh, the wife of a mariner; and Isobel Adam. Laing, Cornfoot, Lawson, and Adam all produced confessions and named two other people, Thomas Brown and Lillie Wallace, as accomplices. Another woman, Margaret Jack, was also implicated but like Brown, Horseburgh and Wallace did not confess.[25]

When Morton made his accusations, the minister and bailies of the burgh imprisoned these seven persons and had them pricked with pins (technically to find the Devil's mark) and deprived them of sleep in order to obtain their confessions.[26] The minister also beat them, and in this manner obtained a confession from Janet Cornfoot, including an admission that she had renounced her baptism.[27] This witch-hunt, however, like the one in the west country in 1699, did not result in any executions. After the kirk session of Pittenweem and the presbytery of St Andrews had examined the witches and witnesses in June, the burgh of Pittenweem petitioned the privy council for a commission of justiciary. On 20 July the lord advocate ordered the earl of Rothes, the sheriff of Fife, to transport the prisoners to Edinburgh to stand trial there. On 12 August friends of the five imprisoned women petitioned to have them released on bond, pending their transportation to Edinburgh.[28] The examination before the lord advocate apparently took place in November 1704.[29] A contemporary pamphlet claimed that the witches were released when it was determined that their confessions were false and that Patrick Morton was a cheat. This pamphlet also alleged that when the accused witches were released, they were each forced to pay the town officer £8 Scots for their freedom.[30]

In the end the possession of Patrick Morton did take a human toll. One of the witches whom Morton had accused, Thomas Brown, died from hunger in prison, while Janet Cornfoot was lynched by a mob in January 1705 when she returned to Pittenweem. After being dragged by her heels through the streets and along the shore, her tormentors swung her from a rope extended from a docked ship to the shore, threw stones at her, beat her with staves, and eventually pressed her to death by piling stones on a door placed on her chest. Both Brown and Cornfoot were denied Christian burials.[31] The bailies reported to the privy council on 15 February that several of the murderers had been imprisoned, but Cowper apparently set them at liberty.[32]

II

Before dealing with the sudden and belated eruption of these instances of demonic possession – all of them within an eight-year period and all of them tied to witchcraft – we must first account for the near absence of demonic possession in Scotland during the period from roughly 1590, the beginning of intense witch-hunting, until the mid-1690s, when witchcraft prosecutions were otherwise declining. The answer to this question has a great deal to do with Protestant belief, but Protestantism by itself cannot supply the answer. Protestants, no less than Catholics, accepted the possibility and reality of demonic possession. Possession did, after all, have a firm foundation in Scripture, the touchstone of Protestant belief. Christ had exorcised a number of demoniacs, and these dispossessions had given rise to charges by his opponents that he drove them out by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.[33] All the leaders of the Reformation accepted the reality of possession. At times it was uncertain whether they were considering possession to be spiritual rather than corporal, such as when Melanchthon declared it 'most certain that devils enter into the hearts of some men and cause frenzy and torment in them'.[34] The same ambiguity can be found in Luther's writings, but we do know that Luther once attempted an exorcism himself.[35] Calvin rejected the rite of exorcism as a papal relic, arguing further that the age of miracles had passed, but he did not, as the Jesuit Louis Richeome claimed, deny the reality of possession or the possibility of dispossession.[36]

Protestant demonologists, no less than their Catholic counterparts, found a respectable place for possession in their treatises. Certainly King James VI of Scotland – a good Calvinist – had no problem with the reality of possession, which he discussed in his treatise on witchcraft, *Daemonologie*.[37] Even Johann Weyer, the great sixteenth-century sceptic regarding witchcraft, acknowledged the reality of possession. Weyer, whose Protestantism was never in doubt, was far more credulous of reported cases of possession than of allegations of witchcraft. He argued, for instance, that the affliction of nuns in a convent at Wertet in the Spanish Netherlands 1550 should not be attributed to the activity of witches but to direct possession by the Devil.[38] One must look ahead more than a century, to the publication of the Dutchman Balthasar Bekker's sceptical *The World Bewitched* in 1691, to see how a Calvinist minister could use biblical scholarship to undermine the belief in demonic possession as well as witchcraft.[39]

Protestant countries, no less than those that were Catholic, were caught up in the possession mania. In the northern Lutheran territories of Germany there were actually more reported cases of possession than in the southern Catholic regions.[40] In the towns of south-eastern France and Switzerland, Protestant as well as Catholic communities often attributed demonic possession to witchcraft. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the staunchly Calvinist republic of Geneva prosecuted numerous witches for allegedly causing the demonic possession of their victims.[41] And as we shall see, most possession cases in the late seventeenth century came from Calvinist communities in New England, England, the Dutch Republic and Scotland.

One possible explanation for the near absence of reported cases of demonic possession in Scotland was a growing suspicion among Scottish ecclesiastical and secular authorities that demonic possessions were fraudulent. This suspicion developed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in response to the widely publicised exorcisms of demoniacs in Catholic countries, especially France. Protestants, who rejected exorcism as a magical ritual and insisted that only the scriptural practice of prayer and fasting could be used to expel demonic spirits, also came to believe that the possessions which had prompted these exorcisms were themselves staged for the purposes of religious propaganda. James VI regarded 'so manie of them to be counterfite which whyl the clergie inuentes for confirming of their rotten religion'.[42]

At the same time Scots learned that fraudulent possessions were not restricted to Catholic countries. In the years before and after James acceded to the English throne, English churchmen, most notably Richard Bancroft and Samuel Harsnett, uncovered a number of fraudulent possessions that Puritan ministers were exploiting for purposes of propaganda, and in 1607 James himself helped them prove that the Berkshire demoniac, Anne Gunter, had also faked her possession.[43] Well might James's councillors and churchmen in Scotland have concluded that *no* reports of possessions – Catholic or Protestant, French, English or even Scottish – could be trusted.[44]

There is fragmentary evidence that Scottish authorities did in fact treat reports of possession in their own country with caution during the 1620s. The evidence comes from John Maitland, second earl of Lauderdale, during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. Corresponding with the English Presbyterian Richard Baxter in 1659 regarding the possessions at Loudun, Lauderdale warned against excessive scepticism regarding witchcraft, demonic possession and the existence of spirits. Lauderdale attributed this scepticism, which he

labelled sadducean and atheistic, to the impostures of Roman Catholic exorcisms, the extreme credulity of those who attributed everything to witchcraft, and the over-eagerness of judges and juries to convict people of witchcraft.[45]

In order to prove the existence of spirits, Lauderdale recounted the case of a genuinely possessed woman who lived in the town of Duns in Berwickshire, when he was a boy, in the late 1620s. Lauderdale's father and the local minister, John Weems, were both convinced that this woman, unlike the nuns at Loudun, was genuinely possessed. To validate this claim, Lauderdale's father and Weems, together with a knight by the name of Forbes[46] and an unnamed minister from the north went to visit the woman, whom Lauderdale described as a poor, ignorant creature. When Weems spoke to Forbes in Latin, saying, '*Nondum audivimus spiritum loquentem*' (Now we will hear the spirit speaking), the demoniac, identified by other sources as Margaret Lumsden, said, '*Audis loquentem*' (You hear him speaking). The minister, amazed at this response, said '*Miseratur Deus peccatoris*' (God have mercy on sinners), to which Lumsden responded, '*Die peccatricis, die peccatricis*' (The day of the sinner).[47] Lauderdale was persuaded of the genuineness of this possession because the woman's linguistic facility (such as it was) was not displayed during a public exorcism, as often happened in the large public dispossessions in France.

Lauderdale complained to Baxter that Scottish authorities had given no credence to this woman's possession. When Weems had asked the privy council to declare days of humiliation to relieve her of her suffering, the council brought Lumsden, her mother, and her father-in-law to Edinburgh for examination, and then denied the request.[48] According to Lauderdale, who in 1659 was still a covenanter, the reason for this refusal was that the bishops were then in power and would not allow any fasts to be kept. It is more likely that upon examination the council concluded that Lumsford was faking her possession, just like all those French nuns and English children. Either way, we might conclude that the reason for the low incidence of demonic possession in Scotland during this period was the failure of secular and ecclesiastical authorities to take such reports of possession seriously.[49]

III

Lauderdale's correspondence with Baxter reveals a firm belief in the reality of demonic possession. It also served as an early contribution to a discourse regarding the existence of spirits that dominated late seven-

teenth-century British demonology. I contend that this discourse provides the crucial religious context for explaining the cases of Scottish possession that appeared toward the end of the seventeenth century.[50] The discourse made Scottish presbyterian ministers and laymen eager to find evidence of Satan's activities on earth, which they found in the afflictions of Christian Shaw, Margaret Laird, Margaret Murdoch and Patrick Morton.

The British discourse on the existence of spirits began in the mid-seventeenth century but it intensified in the 1680s with the publication of *Saducismus Triumphatus* by the English cleric Joseph Glanvill and *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* by George Sinclair, the Scottish natural philosopher from the University of Glasgow.[51] Both works recounted stories about witchcraft, apparitions, poltergeists and other preternatural phenomena in order to counter the claims of the so-called sadducees, the seventeenth-century name given to those who denied the existence of spirits.[52] Ultimately they were designed to prove the existence of God, for if one did not believe in spirits, the belief in God would likewise vanish. As Henry More, one of Glanvill's allies, put it: 'No spirit, no God'.[53]

The battle between the sadducees and their opponents entered a new phase in 1691 when Baxter, the English Presbyterian minister who had corresponded with Lauderdale in 1659, published *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits*. Baxter's entrance into the debate was significant for our purposes because he used many more instances of demonic possession than either Glanvill or Sinclair to prove the existence of spirits. Glanvill and Sinclair had emphasised poltergeists, ghost stories, and especially reports of witchcraft. Baxter, however, turned the reader's attention to possession, including Lauderdale's story and countless other episodes of possession throughout Europe. These included the story of Mary Hill, an 18-year-old girl from Beckington who vomited up no fewer than 200 pins and whose tongue swelled out of her mouth; a woman believed to be hysterical until she vomited long crooked nails, brass needles, and lumps of hair and meat; a 15-year-old girl from Louvain who in 1571 vomited 24 pounds of liquid a day, followed by the dung of geese and doves, hair, coal and stones; and the demoniac reported by Sebastian Brand who in one year vomited enough blood to fill 400 chamber pots. Baxter also mentioned Cotton Mather's recently-published apocalyptic book, *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (1689), which presented an account of the possession of the Goodwin children in Boston. Mather saw this and other possessions as signs that the rule of Satan was in its final days

and the Second Coming was imminent, a theme that Stuart Clark has shown to be central to contemporary accounts of demonic possession.[54]

From a polemical point of view the attention given by Baxter to possession was a deft move. Demonic possession provided much more certain proof of the existence of spirits than either witchcraft or poltergeists, because in possessions one could actually hear the Devil speak and witness the bodily movements he controlled. Baxter's book also had the effect of giving the debate over the existence of spirits a denominational character. During the 1690s, as the controversy over spirits intensified, the anti-sadducees – those who accepted the reality of possessions and witchcraft – tended increasingly to be English dissenters, New England puritans, and Scottish presbyterians.

During the 1690s there were plenty of new narratives that the anti-sadducees could use to bolster their position. First there was the episode of possession at Salem, which had led to the execution of 19 persons for witchcraft in 1692. The first narrative of the case, by Deodat Lawson, appeared in that year, and it was followed by Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*.[55] Then there was the case of the 'Surey demoniac', Richard Dugdale, a teenage gardener from Lancashire who began to experience fits in 1689 and who testified to the reality of his own possession in 1695. Dugdale's affliction became the subject of a major controversy which peaked in 1697 with the publication of a narrative of his possession, urged by the 'believers of Satan's activating men's bodies by possession, witchcrafts, etc. … as a very likely expedient for rooting out atheism, debauchery, sadducism, and devilishness'.[56] This pamphlet elicited a sadducean rejoinder from Zachary Taylor, *The Surry Impostor*, taking the position that the whole thing was a hoax.[57]

It is of crucial importance to appreciate the fact that the possession of Christian Shaw occurred in the midst of this controversy and that it was immediately seen as evidence of the anti-sadducean, presbyterian position. No sooner had the Paisley witches been executed than a number of pamphlets describing the case began to appear, including an anonymous account, *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle*, published in Edinburgh in 1698. This work has been attributed to Francis Grant, later Lord Cullen, the lawyer who prosecuted the Paisley witches, with the assistance of John MacGilchrist, a Glasgow solicitor who was Christian's uncle.[58] The polemical purpose of *A True Narrative* was clearly indicated in the preface, which used Shaw's possession to affirm the existence of God. Its purpose is also revealed by the title of the London edition of this work, *Saducismus Debellatus* (Sadducism Conquered).[59]

The publication of *A True Narrative* linked Shaw's possessions to others that were reported in the same year, especially that of Sarah Fowles, an English woman from Hammersmith, who in 1698 claimed to be possessed by the Devil and was accused in print of being an impostor.[60] In Scotland the narrative of Christian Shaw's possession also prompted the possessions of Margaret Laird and Margaret Murdoch in 1699 and Patrick Morton at Pittenweem in 1704. The author of one of the published accounts of the Pittenweem witchcraft trials not only compared Morton's affliction to that of Christian Shaw but also put the episode to the same use, 'for proving the existence of good and evil spirits'.[61]

Seen in this context, the sudden and belated appearance of cases of possession in Scotland at the end of the 1690s and the first prosecutions of witches for causing demonic possession in Scottish history begin to make sense. In the late 1690s the debate over the existence of spirits, reinforced by a growing belief in Scotland that the Second Coming was near, created a determination among Protestant ministers and pious laymen to look for evidence of Satan's activities on earth. They found it in the demonic possession of Christian Shaw and her imitators. The recent ecclesiastical changes that had occurred in the wake of the Glorious Revolution certainly gave them unprecedented confidence that such possessions would not be ignored or dismissed, as had happened with the possession of Margaret Lumsden in 1629. The decision by the government to proceed with the prosecution of the student Thomas Aikenhead for blasphemy and atheism in 1696, to the horror of all religious sceptics and most English observers, gave them further cause for hope that latter-day sadducees would not succeed in sapping Scottish society of its Christian vitality.[62]

This interpretation of Scotland's belated initiation into the age of demonic possession[63] still leaves unanswered the question how the possession of Christian Shaw began. When scholars study cases of demonic possession, they often try to discover what was *really* going on. Dismissing the possibility that these afflicted people might have been actually possessed by demons, they usually offer one of two explanations. The first is that the demoniacs were impostors, who faked the symptoms of possession in order to bring attention to themselves, use the excuse that they were under the Devil's influence to violate established social and moral norms, or retaliate against enemies by accusing them of witchcraft.[64] The other explanation is that the demoniacs were afflicted by some kind of medical disorder, such as hysteria or schizophrenia.

Scholars studying the case of Christian Shaw have usually followed one of these approaches or the other. The charge that she was the 'Bargarran impostor', who deliberately swallowed the objects she regurgitated, originated in the eighteenth century and is still widely held today.[65] The medical interpretation of what was *really* bothering Christian has been just as durable; only a few years ago Christian was posthumously diagnosed as having been afflicted by a conversion disorder, a trance disorder, a transient psychotic disorder, or childhood epilepsy.[66]

Christian Shaw may have been faking some of her symptoms and she also may have been afflicted by some sort of medical disorder. The important consideration is that by behaving as a demoniac Christian was conforming to widely acknowledged norms of demonic behaviour.[67] Demoniacs in all societies act the way in which their religious culture tells them they should act. Either consciously or unconsciously they learn how to act like possessed persons. Just like the French demoniac Marthe Brossier who in 1599 modelled her behaviour on that of Nicole Obry at Laon in 1566, and just like Anne Gunter who imitated the convulsions of the possessed Throckmorton children in 1593, Christian Shaw was following a script encoded in seventeenth-century religious life. Like them she learned this script either by reading about other possessions (something many demoniacs did) or through instruction from her parents and ministers. Whether ill or not, whether duplicitous or not, Christian was playing her appointed role in a religious drama of the utmost importance to those around her.[68]

Part of the role assigned to Christian in her deeply Protestant culture was to struggle against the temptation, presented by the demons who possessed her, to become a witch herself. Demonologists often made a distinction between demoniacs and witches on the grounds that possession, unlike witchcraft, was an involuntary condition and was not considered sinful or criminal.[69] The demoniac, unlike the witch, was not held responsible for her actions, which often included unconventional, rebellious, or immoral behaviour.[70] In early modern possessions this distinction between demoniac and witch occasionally became blurred.[71] Madeleine Bavent, one of the nuns believed to have been possessed at Louviers, Normandy in the 1640s, was accused of practising sorcery, attending sabbats, and copulating with devils. In Lutheran Germany some demoniacs were reported to have made pacts with the Devil,[72] while in Puritan New England a fear arose that demoniacs, if not dispossessed, would themselves become witches.[73] In Sweden two female demoniacs were accused of blasphemy before the king's council in

1690 and 1708 respectively 'for having let Satan take their body in possession'.[74]

Christian Shaw withstood these temptations to fall into witchcraft; she refused to renounce her baptism and attend the Devil's meetings.[75] Her edifying struggle against Satanic temptation, made possible by God's freely granted grace, was her own personal, Protestant version of exorcism – a ritualised combat or spiritual warfare that resulted in her dispossession. In 1696 Christian's personal triumph also provided conclusive evidence to contemporaries that the sadducees were wrong – that the Devil did in fact exist, and that in Scotland, where Satan 'shows the greatest malice and where he is hated and hateth most', the reign of Satan was nearing an end.[76]

Notes

1 These episodes were not restricted to Christian communities. Accounts of possession also appear in Jewish sources at this time after an absence of more than a millennium: J. H. Chajes, 'Judgments sweetened: possession and exorcism in early modern Jewish culture', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 1 (1997), 124–69.
2 Henri Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, trans. E. Ashwin (London, 1929), xxxiii.
3 W. Monter, 'The Catholic Salem; or, how the Devil destroyed a saint's parish (Mattaincourt 1627–1631)', in W. Behringer and J. Sharpe (eds), *Witchcraft in Context* (Manchester, forthcoming).
4 G. Levi, *Inheriting Power: the Story of an Exorcist*, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Chicago, Ill., 1988).
5 H. C. E. Midelfort, 'The Devil and the German people: reflections on the popularity of demon possession in sixteenth-century Germany', in S. Ozment (ed.), *Religion and Culture in the Reformation* (Kirksville, MO, 1989).
6 C. Worobec, *Possessed: Women, Witches, and Demons in Imperial Russia* (Dekalb, Ill., 2001).
7 Boguet, *Examen of Witches*, 1–14.
8 R. Rapley, *A Case of Witchcraft: the Trial of Urbain Grandier* (Montreal, 1998).
9 R. Decker, *Die Hexen und ihre Henker* (Freiburg, 1994).
10 P. Boyer and S. Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: the Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974).
11 Midelfort, 'The Devil and the German people', 108–9.
12 M. Sluhovsky, 'The Devil in the convent', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 1379–1411, at p. 1380. In his study of the possessions at Loudun, Michel Certeau has drawn a sharp distinction between the appearance of witchcraft in rural areas and concentration of cases of possession in the cities and towns: M. Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun*, trans. M. B. Smith (Chicago, Ill., 1996), 4.
13 Sir George Mackenzie, *Laws and Customes of Scotland in Matters Criminal* (Edinburgh, 1678), 99. Mackenzie presents both arguments.

14 For the Devil himself in Scottish witchcraft see J. Miller, 'Men in black: appearances of the Devil in early modern Scottish witchcraft discourse', Chapter 6 above.
15 *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle* (Edinburgh, 1698), reprinted in *A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire* (Paisley, 1877), 93.
16 *Ibid*., 84–5.
17 *Ibid*., 71–2.
18 For these commissions and proceedings see NAS, JC10/4 and *Witches of Renfrewshire*, 130–9.
19 Murdoch was the daughter of John Murdoch of Craigtoun in the parish of Govan in Glasgow. Laird, the daughter of John Laird, lived in Paisley.
20 NAS, JC10/4, unfoliated, precognitions; NLS, Wodrow Folio xxviii, fos. 168–74. These precognitions were taken at Glasgow on 22 April 1699.
21 NAS, JC10/4, unfoliated, precognitions taken at Paisley 19–21 April 1699, especially precognitions 1, 3, 39, 56, 59, 66. Most of these witnesses testified that Margaret Laird had named various people as her tormentors.
22 On Maxwell and the proceedings against witches in both 1697 and 1699 see M. Wasser, 'The Western witch-hunt of 1697–1700: the last major witch-hunt in Scotland', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002).
23 For the connection between scepticism regarding demonic possession and the decline of witchcraft see B. P. Levack, 'The decline and end of witchcraft prosecutions', in M. Gijswijt-Hofstra, B. P. Levack and R. Porter, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1999), 28–30.
24 *An Answer of a Letter from a Gentleman in Fife to a Nobleman* (1705), in D. Webster (ed.), *A Collection of Rare and Curious Tracts on Witchcraft and the Second-Sight* (Edinburgh, 1820), 70–1. The author of *A Just Reproof to the False Reports and Unjust Calumnies in the Foregoing Letter*, in *A Collection of Curious Tracts*, 89, admitted that the minister read the narrative when he saw that Morton had fallen into a convulsion, but stopped after reading only two sentences.
25 *An Answer of a Letter*, 71; *A Just Reproof*, 79–83; *A True and Full Relation of the Witches at Pittenweem* (Edinburgh, 1704), 8–12; S. Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560–1710* (East Linton, 2002), 161.
26 See the petition of Beatrix Lange to the privy council in May 1705, quoted in Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 161.
27 *An Answer of a Letter*, 69; *An Account of an Horrid and Barbarous Murder*, in Webster (ed.), *Collection of Curious Tracts*, 73. See letter from Mr Miller, 19 Nov. 1704, Folger Shakespeare Library, MS. x. d. 436 (58), reporting that the ministers beat the witches severely, for which many of them were summoned to Edinburgh. Cornfoot claimed that she had never renounced her baptism except to Cowper when he was beating her.
28 NLS, MS 683, extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Pittenweem, fos. 85–6.
29 The letter from Mr Miller reported that one of the witches told the lord advocate that she had confessed only because the minister had urged her to do so.

30 *Answer of a Letter*, 70–1. The author of this pamphlet claimed that Rothes released the prisoners after being sent to Pittenweeem to investigate, but the release probably came upon the command of the lord advocate after the hearing. The author also reported that when the privy council summoned Morton to Edinburgh, 'he recovered his former health' in a short time.
31 *An Answer of a Letter*, 71; *Account of a Horrid and Barbarous Murder*, 75–6. According to *A Just Reproof*, 88, many of the people who joined in the attack on Cornfoot were strangers from England and Orkney.
32 *An Answer of a Letter*, 71.
33 Mark 3:13–27; Matthew 12:22–9.
34 On Melanchthon and witchcraft see D. P. Walker, *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries* (London, 1981), 68, 73.
35 The exorcism took place in the parish church of Wittenberg in 1545. Luther performed it 'in his own manner, not according to the Catholic ritual'. The exorcism was unsuccessful. E. Klingner, *Luther und der deutsche Volksaberglaube* (Berlin, 1912), 35. On Luther's view of the Devil see H. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven, Conn., 1989).
36 Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book iv, ch. 19. On the difference between Calvin and Luther on exorcism see B. Nischan, 'The exorcism controversy and baptism in the late Reformation,' *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 18 (1987), 31–51.
37 James VI, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh, 1597), 62–6, 70–3; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 408–12, 415–18 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, chs 2, 4). James's position was theoretical, but he did refer to a young person troubled by spirits, 'knowen by experience': *ibid.*, 64. An earlier manuscript draft of the book refers to 'a younge lasse troubled uith spreits layde on her by uitchcraft.' The girl had fits and identified the shapes of men and women troubling her. James made a distinction between spirits who 'outwardlie' trouble a person, and those that 'inwardlie possess' them: *ibid.*, 62. This is the same distinction that contemporary demonologists occasionally made between 'obsession' and 'possession'. James nevertheless treated the two forms of spiritual assault as one phenomenon: *ibid.*, 64. The obsession or possession of this young girl may have occurred during the witch-hunt of 1590–1: J. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 53. The only method of dispossession that James approved of was by prayer and fasting, which he admitted would be effective even if practised by Catholics: *Daemonologie*, 72–3; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 417 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, ch. 4).
38 G. Mora (ed.), *Witches, Devils and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer*, De Praestigiis daemonum (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 73; Binghamton, NY, 1991), 304–7. On Weyer's credulousness of possession see C. Baxter, 'Johann Weyer's *De Praestigiis daemonum*: unsystematic psychopathology', in S. Anglo (ed.), *The Damned Art*: *Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft* (London, 1977), 63–4. H. C. E. Midelfort, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Stanford, Calif., 1999), 174, shows that Weyer did not believe that most cases of possession were legitimate.
39 Balthasar Bekker, *De Betoverde Weereld* (Amsterdam, 1691–1693), Book iv, in which he discredits stories about possession and witchcraft.

40 Midelfort, 'The Devil and the German people', 118.
41 E. W. Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: the Borderlands during the Reformation* (Ithaca, NY, 1976), 60.
42 James VI, *Daemonologie*, 71; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 416 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, ch. 4).
43 B. P. Levack, 'Possession, witchcraft and the law in Jacobean England', *Washington & Lee Law Review*, 52 (1996), 1613–40, at pp. 1626–30. In this undertaking James was assisted by Bancroft and Harsnett, who conducted an early seventeenth-century campaign to show that possessions and exorcisms being performed by Catholics and Puritans alike were nothing but 'egregious popish impostures'. Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (London, 1603).
44 Richard Baxter, who proclaimed the certainty of the existence of spirits, recognised that fraudulent possessions had led people to deny the reality of possession. 'And I confess very many cheats of pretended possessions have been discovered which hath made some weak, injudicious men think that all are such': Richard Baxter, *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits* (London, 1691), 2.
45 [Des Niau,] *The History of the Devils of Loudun: the Alleged Possession of the Ursuline Nuns and the Trial and Execution of Urbain Grandier*, trans. and (ed.) E. Goldsmid (Collectanea Adamantea, xxi, Edinburgh, 1887), iii, Appendix, pp. 31–8. The excerpt comes from Baxter, *Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits,* 82–92. It is also reprinted in C. K. Sharpe, *A Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft in Scotland* (London and Glasgow, 1884), 219–29. For Lauderdale's later scientific connections see M. Wasser, 'The mechanical world-view and the decline of witch beliefs in Scotland', Chapter 9 below.
46 Probably Sir William Forbes of Monymusk.
47 Weems had been implicated in a false accusation of witchcraft against Katherine Wilson and David Smith at Duns, but it was later disclosed that James Mowat, late deputy clerk for Renfrewshire, had signed a complaint in his name. *RPC*, 2nd ser., iv, 265–6.
48 *RPC*, 2nd ser., ii, 604, 608.
49 In making his case for the reality of possession in the face of widespread scepticism, Lauderdale also reported that in the United Provinces of the Netherlands some 30 or 40 years earlier there was another 'unquestionable possession' of a woman who spoke all the languages. He had heard about this case when he lived in the Low Countries. When possessions did actually occur in the Dutch Republic, however, they were either ignored by the authorities or their veracity was called into question. That is what happened when a group of Capuchin monks exorcised a demoniac at Utrecht in 1625. See Baxter, *Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits*, 109–18.
50 S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), ch. 26, establishes the importance of a demonological context in the study of possession.
51 Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus* (London, 1681); George Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* (Edinburgh, 1685). The translation of François Perreaud, *L'Antidemon de Mascon* (1653) as François Perrault, *The Devill of Mascon, or, a True Relation of the Chiefe Things which an Unclean Spirit Did, and Said at Mascon* (Oxford, 1658) can be considered part of

this discourse. Robert Boyle was responsible for getting Perreaud translated. On Boyle and witchcraft see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 308. For more on Sinclair see Wasser, 'Mechanical world-view'.

52 James VI, *Daemonologie*, xii, 55, gave the term the same meaning in stating his opposition to Reginald Scot and Johann Weyer; cf. Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 353–4, 402 (*Daemonologie*, Preface and Book 2, ch. 7). The original sadducees were a Jewish sect active in Judaea from *c*.200 BCE until 70 CE who denied the existence of spirits and the immortality of the soul.

53 Henry More, *An Antidote against Atheism* (London, 1655), 278.

54 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, ch. 27.

55 Deodat Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative of Some Remarkable Passages relating to Sundry Persons Afflicted by Witchcraft* (Boston, 1693); Cotton Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World* (Boston, 1693).

56 *The Surey Demoniack: or, An Account of Satan's Strange and Dreadful Actings in and about the Body of Richard Dugdale of Surey, near Lancashire* (London, 1697), Preface.

57 Zachary Taylor, *The Surey Impostor* (London, 1697). See the response by T. Jolly, *A Vindication of the Surey Demoniack* (London, 1698).

58 H. McLachlan and K. Swales, 'The bewitchment of Christian Shaw: a reassessment of the famous Paisley witchcraft case of 1697', in Y. G. Brown and R. Ferguson (eds), *Twisted Sisters: Women, Crime and Deviance in Scotland Since 1400* (East Linton, 2002), 68, argue that the main authors were Andrew Turner, minister at Erskine, and James Brisbane, minister at Kilmacolm.

59 Grant also cited the trial of Aikenhead to show what happened when someone denied the existence of spirits and a devil who tormented sinners: *Witches of Renfrewshire*, 64.

60 *The Second Part of the Boy of Bilson, or a True and Particular Relation of the Impostor Susanna Fowles* (London, 1698).

61 *A True and Full Relation*, title page. The author claimed that such deeds were 'done on her and this man as is impossible any disease or deceit could produce', 6. He also wrote that there were thousands of witnesses to the influence of evil spirits on both hemispheres, 5.

62 I. Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformations, c.1650–c.1750* (Oxford, 1997), 24–8, develops connections between Aikenhead and the witch-hunt. See also the letter of Robert Wylie, minister of Hamilton, to the laird of Wishaw, 16 June 1697, defending both the execution of Aikenhead and the renewal of witch-hunting: NAS, GD103/2/3/17/1. For the broad intellectual context of these changes in Scotland see Wasser, 'Mechanical world-view'.

63 Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland*, 60, refers to the seventeenth century as the golden age of the demoniac.

64 The nuns at Loudun were suspected of deceit by many contemporaries, and they still stand accused of feigning their possessions to attract public attention: Rapley, *A Case of Witchcraft*, 90–5.

65 Hugo Arnot made this claim in 1785, and John Millar took the same position in 1877. See *The History of the Witches of Renfrewshire,* xviii, 201–4. For a recent challenge to this interpretation see McLachlan and Swales, 'Bewitchment of Christian Shaw', 54–83.

66 S. W. McDonald, A. Thom and A. Thom, 'The Bargarran witchcraft trial: a psychiatric assessment', *Scottish Medical Journal*, 41 (1996), 152–8. Medical

explanations hold an important place in the history of possession. As Erik Midelfort has argued, demonic possession is an essential part of the history of mental illness. The most recent analysis of the nuns at Loudun supports the claim of Marescot and of nineteenth-century psychiatrists that the nuns were suffering from hysteria. Some of the reported symptoms of Christian Shaw, Margaret Laird and Margaret Murdoch, especially the extruded tongue, the bowing of the back, and the crossing of the rigid legs, were all reported by Jean-Martin Charcot in his study of clinical hysteria in Paris in the nineteenth century: J. Charcot, *Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System*, 3 vols., trans. G. Sigerson (London, 1877–9), i, 280.

67 This cultural explanation is compatible with a medical or psychiatric interpretation of possession. Anthropologists and many psychiatrists would argue that psychiatric illness tends to manifest itself in forms that reflect the cultural expectations of the society in which it appears. M. MacDonald, *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London* (London, 1990), xxxiv–xxxv and n. 65.

68 L. Yeoman, 'The Devil as doctor: witchcraft, Wodrow and the wider world', *Scottish Archives*, 1 (1995), 93–105, argues that Christian Shaw's possession was the result of a conversion experience that had gone bad.

69 Possessions were sometimes viewed as punishment for the sins of the demoniac, but that did not make the possession itself a sin or a crime.

70 One exception to this innocence was made when the demoniac was prosecuted for false accusations of witchcraft, such as Anne Gunter, who was prosecuted for conspiracy to indict three women for witchcraft in Berkshire in 1607. See Levack, 'Possession, witchcraft and the law', 1630–40.

71 In the Middle Ages it was more common to have the boundary line between the saint and demoniac blurred. See B. Newman, 'Possessed by the spirit: devout women, demoniacs, and the apostolic life in the thirteenth century', *Speculum*, 73 (1998), 733–70. On the blurred boundary between demonic possession and female charismatic spirituality in seventeenth-century France see S. Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (London, 2004).

72 Midelfort, 'Devil and the German people', 116–17. Luther, like a number of late medieval demonologists, believed that possession was punishment for sin, sometimes for the sins of the demoniac's father: *ibid*., 111–12.

73 C. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York, 1987), 242–4. See also H. C. E. Midelfort, 'Catholic and Lutheran reactions to demon possession in the late seventeenth century: two case histories', *Daphnis*, 15 (1986), 623–48, at pp. 625–8.

74 The two were ultimately convicted of fraud. S.-M. Olli, 'The Devil's pact: a male strategy', in O. Davies and W. de Blécourt (eds), *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, 2004), 111–12.

75 Margaret Murdoch also claimed to have been tempted by the Devil, who came to her with a piece of silver in one side of his mouth and a piece of paper in the other. When Janet Robison, one of the accused witches, asked her to subscribe to the paper, she refused: NLS, Wodrow Folio xxviii, fo. 170r.

76 *Witches of Renfrewshire*, 64. The phrase was taken from Cotton Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, 5, who used it with reference to New England.

8

A Comparative Perspective on Scottish Cunning-Folk and Charmers

Owen Davies

The academic study of early modern European cunning-folk, charmers and other types of 'good' magical practitioner has lagged behind that of witches. This is quite understandable. Although their activities were considered by many secular and ecclesiastical officials as either implicitly or explicitly diabolic, with some theologians asserting that they were as much of a threat to Christian society as witches, they were never prosecuted in significant numbers. Consequently there are fewer detailed records regarding them and their activities. Yet they appear fairly frequently in the stories told by witnesses in witchcraft trials. Furthermore the ecclesiastical courts kept a close eye on both practitioners of magic and their clients.

Scotland is no great exception to this general picture. Yet a comparative perspective does highlight several distinctive areas regarding the legal position of Scottish cunning-folk, their activities and their clients. Because of the paucity of trial pamphlets in Scotland and other relevant literary sources, at first glance the task of researching the subject seems limited by comparison with England. But for reasons which will become obvious later, Scotland has a rich body of relevant court material, while the vogue for 'touring' the Highlands during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to the recording of detailed ethnographic data on magical practices.[1] The work of nineteenth-century folklorists also provides valuable contextual information for understanding popular magic in the early modern period. Furthermore, the task of identifying cunning-folk in the Scottish archives has recently been made a lot easier thanks to the online Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, while Joyce Miller's innovative work on seventeenth-century folk healing provides an important foundation for future research.[2] The time is ripe for Scottish cunning-folk and charmers to assume a more prominent place in the history of the witch trials and popular culture more generally.

I

The terms 'charmer' and 'charming' were used in the Scottish court records and other sources to denote those acts of magic that did not cause harm but were nevertheless 'superstitious' and sinful in the eyes of the authorities. As a category of offence then it was distinguishable from 'witchcraft'.[3] This distinction between good and bad magic undoubtedly mirrored popular perceptions, although at a popular level charming was not considered as 'superstitious'. Yet in the court records the distinction was not always made. A number of the items of healing in Thomas Grieve's dittay of 1623, for example, were not described as charming but in such terms as 'cureing, by devillerie and Witchcraft', which more accurately reflected the Calvinistic conception of popular magic.[4]

As well as this complication, the label 'charmer' has, in the English and Scottish sources and current historiography, been used as a blanket term for all those who practised some form of beneficial magic. Work on English and Welsh popular magic in both early modern and modern periods reveals, however, that the popular usage of the term 'charmer' applied to specific types of healer.[5] Was the same distinction made in Scottish popular discourse as well? A full consideration of this would also need to take into account the different terminology used in the Gaelic Highlands. English historians have consistently conflated the terms cunning-folk and charmers, which has led to misleading statements being made about popular magic, and the generic use of charmer to describe Scottish magical practitioners has similar potential to obfuscate boundaries of practice.

In England and Wales 'charmers', also called 'blessers' and 'touchers' depending on their practices, were rarely professional healers. They had limited and specific healing powers conferred on them either by birthright (such as being a seventh son or daughter), by the possession of healing objects, or most commonly the possession or knowledge of simple written or oral healing charms which were often traditionally passed on contra-sexually, from male to female and *vice versa*. Their powers or knowledge were usually restricted to simple natural ailments such as scrofula, jaundice, toothache, bleeding, sprains, snakebites and the like. They rarely cured supernaturally inspired illnesses, and rarely offered diagnoses, though some also prepared herbal remedies. They had only modest, supposedly God-given powers and generally practised according to a tradition of altruism. No money was accepted, though a gift in kind was acceptable if given freely. These characteristics of the charmer also apply to the tradition in France as well.[6] In contrast cunning-folk, who were

also known in parts of England as wise-men and wise-women, conjurors and wizards, usually made a supplementary income from magic or lived entirely on the proceeds. They offered a comprehensive range of magical services including love magic, thief detection, fortune-telling, astrology, herbalism and unbewitching. As well as these two categories, which were not always hard and fast, there were fortune-tellers, often itinerants, whose skills were restricted to one or other of the various divinatory arts, such as palmistry or cartomancy. Finally, there were petty healers who earned a few pence treating ailments, including witchcraft, using herbs or a healing ritual, but did not offer any of the other services provided by cunning-folk. From this brief synopsis it should be obvious why the Scottish application of 'charmer' and 'charming' is problematic in a comparative context.

An examination of early modern Scottish trial material indicates that similar categories of magical practice existed both in a terminological and more obviously in a practical sense. Regarding the former, the term 'wise-woman', commonly used in northern England, also appears in the Scottish records. In 1597 Christian Lewinston was referred to as a 'wyise-woman', a 'wyise wyffe and a woman of skill', while Agnes Sampson, tried in 1591, was reported as being popularly known as the 'wyse wyff of Keyth', which suggests that a popular distinction was indeed made between simple charmers and multi-faceted cunning-folk.[7] Regarding the evidence of practice, the nineteenth-century ethnographic record contains a wealth of simple healing charms, some of which are common to Europe and some that are more geographically limited and demand detailed comparative analysis. All that can be done in this short space is to pick out a few early modern examples that tend to confirm that there was a distinct category of 'charmer' in the English sense.

The verse against sprains used by the Orkney charmer Catherine Carrie in 1616, which went: 'bone to bone, synnew to synnew, and flesche to flesche, and bluid to bluid',[8] is a classic type which usually began with Christ's mishap when riding, as used by Janet Brown in 1643:

> Our Lord forth raide;
> His foal's foot slade;
> Our Lord down lighted;
> His foal's foot righted;
> Saying Flesh to Flesh, blood to blood,
> And bane to bane
> In our Lord his name.[9]

This is one of the oldest recorded healing charms, recorded across western and eastern Europe.[10] It was enacted through oral utterance

and has also been recorded in Gaelic, where St Columba sometimes takes the place of Christ in the story.[11] In Scotland the charmer would sometimes tie a piece of thread around the injured part while murmuring the verse. Similar European healing formulae were also undoubtedly in use in early modern Scotland; the *casgadh fola* for staunching blood, for example. In his account of the western isles of 1695, Martin Martin wrote about the process of charming for 'excessive bleeding, either in man or beast', 'which is performed by sending the name of the patient to the charmer, who adds some more words to it, and after repeating those words the cure is performed'.[12] Katherine Craigie, executed in 1643 for healing and bewitching, confessed to having 'learned a charme for stemming of blood' from her husband.[13] The words in both cases may have been similar to the formula for staunching recorded by Mackenzie in the nineteenth century.[14] Just as in the English tradition, it was crucial that the staunching charmer knew the name of the person or beast concerned. As well as the possessors of such charms we also find seventh sons such as George Beir, brought before the Haddington presbytery in 1646 for curing the King's evil (scrofula), and the laird who owned the famed curative 'Lee Penny' to whom the sons of Isobel Young applied to cure their cattle of the 'rotting evil'.[15]

On this evidence, and more particularly on that from the later ethnographic sources, several distinct healing traditions seem to have operated in early modern Scotland. Consequently the use of 'charmer' should have a more restrictive usage than it has currently, and even though the term 'cunning-folk' was not used in Scotland, I still think it serves as a useful term of reference. It defines a distinctive group of practitioners, and from a comparative perspective it is a category used by historians and folklorists to describe similar multifarious practitioners of magic elsewhere in Europe.[16]

II

The 1563 Scottish statute against 'using witchcraftis, sorsarie and necromancie' appeared in the same year as the more detailed English act 'against conjurations, enchantments, and witchcrafts', though, as Julian Goodare's textual analysis shows, it was not inspired by it.[17] The Scottish statute was much briefer than the English one, and was more directly inspired by Calvinist thinking in a country which had only officially become reformed three years earlier. A textual comparison is revealing in terms of the Scottish statute's interpretation and

implementation in relation to cunning-folk and other magical practitioners. It was directed against 'the heavy and abominable superstition used by divers of the lieges of this realm' and for 'avoiding and away-putting of all such vain superstition in times to come'. Larner interpreted this usage of 'superstition' as indicating a degree of scepticism – that it implied witchcraft and magical practices were considered as deceits by its authors.[18] This would set it in contrast to the wording and thrust of the English Statute and laws elsewhere in Europe where the offences listed are obviously considered real, and not just sinful pretences. But Peter Maxwell-Stuart and Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts present a more accurate contextual reading of the use of 'superstition', seeing it in its Reformation context as denoting 'pagan or idolatrous religion', interpretable in terms of diabolism and adherence to Catholic beliefs and practices.[19] This makes much more sense. Scottish cunning-folk and charmers, just like their counterparts in other Protestant regions, were seen as being promoters of Catholic practices. There was, indeed, some justification for this. In 1657, for example, Adam Reid was reported to the kirk session of Logierait for having 'ane crucifix which people use to borrow when any thinge is stolne from them … which makes people feare it and reverence it'. Reid was ordered to hand over the crucifix, which he did reluctantly, and it was broken in the presence of the session.[20] A more common 'Catholic' problem for the kirk was the continued popular resort to healing and divinatory wells, which were often dedicated to the saints.[21]

In terms of content the English and Scottish statutes differed in two significant respects. First, in the Scottish statute there was no attempt to differentiate between the types of magical act that were seen as most problematic, whereas the Elizabethan statute clearly defined the crimes of theft detection, love magic, treasure conjuration, and the destruction of people or their goods, in other words witchcraft. Laws elsewhere, the Carolina Code of the Holy Roman Empire in particular, also recognised the difference between *maleficium* and someone who used witchcraft 'without causing injury', and allowed for judges to deal out punishments based on the 'magnitude of the crime', often fines, banishment and branding rather than death. Even when the law determined equally harsh penalties for good and bad magic, as in England or the province of Holland, judges were not inclined to implement the full force of the law. In Western Europe beneficial magic was hardly ever punished to the same degree as witchcraft.[22] The Scottish statute makes no such distinctions at all. Witchcraft and beneficial magic were just treated as one undifferentiated capital crime, which

certainly accurately reflected Calvinist theological thinking. As Julian Goodare has suggested, the Statute expressed a preoccupation with the pernicious influence of those who offered magical services rather than with *maleficium*, for the act was primarily conceived as a Reformist weapon against Catholicism and the 'superstitions' it had inculcated into the people rather than witches.[23]

Although in theory, then, cunning-folk and charmers in Scotland were equally if not more prone to secular prosecution and execution as witches, in practice there was no large-scale persecution. They make up only a very small percentage of the 3,837 or more people known to have been accused of witchcraft and magic before the Scottish secular and ecclesiastical courts. It would seem that the courts interpreted the statute according to different concerns and demands to those motivating its author. Still, the secular trial records reveal a significantly more prominent emphasis on healing magic than is discernible in England, the Dutch Republic and parts of France, for example, which may in part be a result of the generic wording of the Scottish statute. In England, cunning-folk were very occasionally tried under the Elizabethan Act for treasure seeking and thief detection, but never for unbewitching. Their role as healers and diviners was fairly frequently brought up incidentally in depositions, but it did not become part of the indictment. In Scotland it did. The classic example of this is the case of Agnes Sampson, who was tried and executed in 1591. Of the 53 charges brought against her over half concerned healing and divination. Item 21, for example, concerned 'the healing of the laird of Reidshill's son by witchcraft, whom the chirurgeons had given over', and Item 27 for curing a child by 'gripping him and speaking some words of charming'.[24] As well as bewitching the horses of Donald Ronaldson and magically breaking a miller's wheel, Isobel Strachan was also tried in 1597 for successfully curing Alexander Cruickshank's sheep and other acts of healing.[25] Of the 22 items against John Burgh in 1643, five concerned *maleficium* while the rest were cases of healing such as that conducted on a stirk belonging to Thomas Gibson, 'by applying of wort and walgrase [i.e. watercress] soddin together, and using of certain charms'.[26]

Even more striking is the fact that at least a handful of Scottish cunning-folk were tried and executed solely on the basis of beneficial magic. Across Europe cunning-folk were hardly ever executed except when they were charged with *maleficium* or satanic pacts. In Robin Briggs's analysis of 380 accused witches in Lorraine only two were prosecuted for healing alone, and only one of these was executed, primarily because he was charged with making a tacit pact with the devil.[27] So the Scottish

experience seems unusual. Take the case of Thomas Grieve for example. None of the 14 items in his dittay of 1623 concerned accusations of *maleficium* or satanic relations. Instead they included a variety of harmless sounding healing rituals.[28] Alexander Drummond was executed for similar crimes in 1629. Seventeen years later the king was petitioned to clear his name, as he was 'ane notable Christian and did all his wondrous cures by lawfull meanes'.[29] John Philips was likewise tried and executed in 1631. All the items in his dittay concerned beneficial magic, with his speciality being the ritual 'washing' of those bewitched. He was convicted as a 'sorcerar and charmare and illudare of the people … he knew that his washingis and wateris he useit haid done great evill'.[30]

Why did people like Grieve, Philips and Drummond end up being tried and executed when all their actions were aimed at reversing witchcraft, at restoring health? Cunning-folk certainly had disgruntled clients who paid significant sums for cures and advice that ultimately came to nothing, but would they really want to see them executed? I doubt it. The generic wording of the 1563 statute has already been noted, but there are two further factors that help explain the Scottish experience. First, we can point to the importance of what Julian Goodare describes as the 'harmonious co-operation' between the kirk and the privy council.[31] It was rarely the clients or general populace that pursued such serious prosecutions: it was the local minister. The clergy played an important role in the secular system of justice in Scotland for much of the early modern period. The decision of the privy council to instigate local commissions to try witches was often based on reports and witness testimonies gathered by presbyteries and kirk sessions. Unlike the laity, the desire of ministers to see the back of cunning-folk is quite understandable. It is no wonder that John Philips 'fledd' one parish 'for feare of Mr William Steinsoun, minister thaire'.[32] The trail of documents relating to the arrest and trial of Alexander Drummond is revealing in this respect. It would appear that the origins of his prosecution lay not in a complaint lodged by a client but in the presbytery of Muthill. It was they who wrote a supplication to the central secular authorities in January 1629 to take action against him as a:

> Notorious abuser of Gods peopill in any places of this kingdome by charmes, inchantments and uther divellish and unlaufull meanes, and by the gritt concurse of all sorts of peopill, who upon report of his fame (which hes lasted more nor fyftie years) did resort to him … [he] did sett up ane publict seat of abuse in dispyt both of kirk and cuntrey.[33]

Subsequently the privy council sent out a warrant for the collection of testimony against Drummond, ordering the brethren of the two local presbyteries to find persons 'who can give some light and information anent the said Alexander', and 'to examine them and set down ther depositions formally in writing'.[34] Similarly the presbytery of Perth pursued the prosecution of the healer Bessie Wright. She had been censured by the kirk session in 1611 and 1626 for healing, and the presbytery finally lost patience with her in 1628 and on 30 July wrote to the clerk of the privy council calling for a commission to try her for being 'an abuser of the people', for 'whatever charme is done by her all is done under the pretext and cullour of physicke'.[35] It would seem, then, that in Scotland both national and local authorities occasionally took it upon themselves to hunt down and exterminate individual cunning-folk – at least until the mid-seventeenth century.

The tragic history of Drummond, and others like him, is nevertheless exceptional. Throughout the period most complaints of 'superstitious' practices levelled at petty healers, cunning-folk and charmers went no further than the presbytery, and some ministers and kirk sessions were more active than others in persecuting them. In 1665, for example, the synod of St Andrews criticised the brethren of Meigle for not acting against Robert Small and those who consulted him for 'things lost or stollen', and so appointed the brethren of Dunfermline to collect evidence of his healing and detection activities.[36] Yet the Kirk persevered in its campaign to suppress magical practitioners and practices right up to the mid-eighteenth century – many years after other Protestant Churches had lost interest. The ecclesiastical courts had given up dealing with the problem by the mid-seventeenth century in England, and by the end of the century in Sweden and the Dutch Republic.

The second explanation for the significant number of items regarding healing in dittays concerns the popular belief that the act of removing witchcraft entailed its transferral to another person or animal. This is a classic example of the theory of limited good. One person's good fortune must result in someone else's bad luck. According to this way of thinking an act of witchcraft, unless removed by the initiating witch, had to run its course. The only way of removing it was to pass it on to someone else or more usually something else of lesser value. There are numerous examples of this in the court records, such as the case of John Neill, convicted and burnt in 1631. Nearly all the items in Neill's dittay concerned healing, and a number of his actions resulted in the transferral of the disease. One item concerned the 'cureing by sorcery and witchcraft of Helene Wedderlie' by

taking away her 'grievous sickness' and placing it 'upon Issobell Neische'.[37] Isobel Young was accused of curing Alison Paterson of a 'grievous disease' and laying the 'same sickness' upon James Liddell.[38] One item in John Philip's dittay states: 'for charming of Andro Clerk in Fyntray by casting the seiknes aff of him and putting it upon ane oxe'.[39] Within this tradition of healing, then, to unbewitch was to bewitch. As a result cunning-folk faced a real risk of being accused of *maleficium*. One way around the problem of transferral to humans or livestock was to transfer the disease or spell to water instead, which would symbolically and physically wash the witchcraft away. But even this had its pitfalls as illustrated by the following two cases. To cure the child of Andrew Duncan, Isobel Haldane washed its shirt in some water in the name of the Trinity and then took both to a stream and threw them in. On the way, however, she reproached herself for having spilt some of the water, knowing that if anyone passed over it the disease would be passed to them rather than being washed away in the stream.[40] The dangers were realised when John Philips, performing a similar cure, dumped the water outside only for a cat to run across it. The cat went mad and immediately attacked the nearest man.

Another key difference between the English and Scottish statutes had very serious ramifications for the 'cunning-trade'. Under the Scottish Act those who *consulted* magical practitioners, of whatever shade, were equally guilty of a capital offence. No person should:

> seek any help, response, or consultation at any such users or abusers aforesaid of witchcrafts, sorceries or necromancy. Under the pain of death as well to be execute against the user, abuser, as the seeker of the response or consultation.

In England there were no secular laws against the consultation of such people, although an attempt was made to criminalise it during the Rump Parliament (1648–53).[41] It was left to the ecclesiastical authorities to deal with those who committed the sinful act of consulting magical practitioners, just as it was throughout much of Protestant and Catholic Europe. The punishments meted out were penance, fines and occasionally excommunication.

The crime of consultation was rarely prosecuted.[42] Cases usually only concerned accusations of paying mercenary bewitchers, and normally involved land-owning social groups intriguing over inheritance and property. Some of the early cases were similar to the claims and fears of political sorcery, murder and conspiracy that, in England, inspired

Henry VIII's Conjuration Statute of 1542. These included the trial in 1577 of Katherine Ross (Lady Foulis) accused of employing 'witches' to perform image magic, and the trial in 1596 of John Stewart, accused of hiring Alison Balfour to use magic to murder his brother the earl of Orkney. Lower down the social scale, family squabbles and land disputes also led to similar 'consultations', as in the 1586 case of a farming family named the Findlaws who hired Tibbie Smart to murder by witchcraft the Reid family, with whom they had a vicious feud.[43] Such cases of consultation not surprisingly led to the prosecution of those being consulted as well, and from the trial material it is clear that at least a few of these were cunning-folk who practised *maleficium* as part of their commercial services. This may seem surprising, and it was obviously a dangerous trade to deal in, but it was only a small step from paying cunning-folk to torment witches and thieves to asking them to cast harmful spells on other enemies. The English evidence suggests, however, that this was not a common request and most cunning-folk were wisely reluctant to trade in bewitching.[44]

There were a few trials concerning consultation for services other than bewitching. In 1634, for example, a farmer named George Fraser and his wife were accused of consulting two cunning-men, John Philips and Walter Baird, to help them charm animals and to improve their oat crop by magic.[45] But such cases usually remained a 'moral' crime reported by ministers, dealt with by kirk sessions and presbyteries. The paucity of such cases shows that in practice secular and ecclesiastical officials clearly differentiated between the relative heinousness of the range of crimes encompassed by the 1563 statute, and were usually disinclined to treat consultation as an act worthy of secular attention. As with witchcraft, of course, accusations of consultation were occasionally made maliciously. The case against George Fraser seems to have been so inspired. Yet, considering the extent to which people resorted to cunning-folk and charmers, or conducted their own healing or divinatory rituals, if the letter of the law had been strictly adhered to the majority of the Scottish population would have been liable to execution.

III

The detection of stolen or lost property was an important aspect of the business of both cunning-folk and those who merely practised fortune-telling. The few English cases were usually handled by the quarter sessions rather than treated as capital crimes to be heard before a judge at the assizes. Parochial authorities evidently felt uncomfortable about

invoking the full force of the law. This situation would seem to have been mirrored in Scotland as well. The cases against the 'vagabond' Donald MacIlmichael, hanged in 1677 for 'corresponding with the devil for several years giving himself to have skill of discoverie and finding out all lost goods by which he was guilty of cheating and abusing ignorant people', initially came before the Argyll authorities only as a subsidiary crime to that of being involved with a gang of cattle and horse thieves.[46] Further research is needed to see whether such diviners were more likely to be charged under the Vagrancy Acts, such as that of 1575, which included 'knawledge in physnomie, palmestre, or utheris abused sciencis', and carried a lesser penalty.[47] However, it was certainly dealt with frequently enough by the kirk sessions, which were not inclined to send them on to the privy council. In 1671 it was reported to the kirk session of Yester that people were in the habit of consulting a man in the Canongate of Edinburgh who charged a small fee for detecting stolen goods. The Canongate kirk session dealt with a similar or the same man, a weaver named John Turnbull, who was charged with 'using devilish and unlawful ways for discovery of theft'.[48] In November 1707 the Glencairn session rigorously questioned a renowned detector of stolen and lost property named Alexander Dewart, a gardener of Maxwellton. The kirk session charged him with restoring stolen goods by:

> Charm or enchantment or some other pretended occult quality in herbs, along with some mutterings and gestures, as makes him so commonly reputed a charmer that he is sought unto by persons from divers corners of the country to the great scandal of religion.[49]

He explained that he put the herbs under his head and dreamed of the whereabouts of the stolen property. He refused to say what the herbs were: 'I will not tell that to any living if they should saw me asunder'. The popularity of thief detection and ministers' frustration with it is evident from the fact that both diviners and their clients continued to be hauled before the sessions for the misdemeanour into the 1730s.[50]

The belief that the deaf and dumb were somehow compensated for by the possession of occult powers seems to have been strong in Scotland. In the mid-seventeenth century the Haddington presbytery were informed of a 'dumb boy' of Ormiston and a dumb woman of Pencaitland who were consulted for stolen goods.[51] In 1678 the minister of Lasswade informed the Dalkeith presbytery that some of his parishioners had consulted a dumb man residing in the Edinburgh correction house regarding the discovery of some missing money.[52] The

tradition was maintained into the nineteenth century. James Napier, writing in 1879, knew of an itinerant deaf and dumb fortune-teller who travelled around the villages of western Scotland with his slate and a piece of chalk, and commented that such people 'were considered to possess something like second-sight'.[53] As well as an innate gift of foresight, mechanical divinatory methods such as palmistry seem to have been fairly common practices, and were employed by cunning-folk, fortune-tellers and the general public alike. The sieve and shears was one such thief detection ritual recorded in much of Europe. The sieve was either balanced on some shears or the shears were stuck into the rind of the sieve, and then following an appeal to the Holy Trinity or St Peter and St Paul the names of those suspected were called out and the sieve would turn at the mention of the guilty party. As in England, people were periodically punished for employing it in Scotland. In 1649 Margaret Monro was brought before the Dingwall presbytery for 'charming' by 'turning of the seive and the sheir'. The same year the Kingarth kirk session dealt with another case. The following year the Dunkeld presbytery questioned a woman if she had attended 'a meeting for turning of the riddle for some money she wanted [i.e. had lost] and a silver spoon 15 years since'.[54]

Love magic, again a staple of the cunning-folk's trade, which involved either divining and identifying future spouses or using charms and potions to draw someone's love, crops up several times in the court records. In his dossier on the activities of Isobel Strachan in 1597, the minister of Dyce said 'she was a common marriage maker'. Isobel was reported to have told one woman, 'Thow knows what good I have done in this parish to sundrie, in causing them marry who would not otherwise have done'. When the wife of Walter Ronaldson consulted Isobel about her husband's habit of beating her, she took several pieces of paper, sewed them together with different coloured threads, and buried them in the barn among some corn. 'From then on Walter did never strike his wife or found fault with her'.[55] Amongst the charges against Helen Isbister, tried in Orkney in 1635, was that she magically arranged a marriage against a bridegroom's will.[56] In 1640 Katherine Craigie was charged with telling Isobel Craigie that if she desired Harry Bellenden for a husband she would provide her with a certain grass, 'which being usit at my directioun it will cause Harie Bellanden never to have ane other woman but your self'.[57]

With regard to healing, there were numerous ways of tackling disease and illness, whether inspired by witchcraft or not. As elsewhere herbs were widely used by Scottish cunning-folk and other healers.

Christian Lewinston prescribed that one patient be bathed with red nettles and lovage, and be rubbed with lovage and butter. For heart sickness she told a client to drink broom and camomile in white wine. Another healer gave a bewitched man a herbal drink mixed with butter and saffron.[58] The use of threads was another common feature. This either involved tying thread around the affected part of the body or passing the sick person or animal through a skein of yarn. Thomas Grieve cured William Beveridge of a 'grevous seiknes' by making him pass through the yarn several times and then burning it in a big fire. John Philips was also accused of 'charming' Gilbert Leslie by putting him through the yarn, though he denied it.[59] The use of water from holy wells and south-running streams or rivers was also a prominent feature of Scottish healing. Grieve cured David Chalmer by making him wear a shirt washed in south-running water and making certain crosses and signs over him. Isobel Haldane washed one child in water she had brought in silence from the Well of Ruthen.[60] An intriguing and highly unusual ritual use of hot stones to divine and cure also appears several times in the trial records. I have found no parallels elsewhere to the technique employed by Katherine Craigie to treat the husband of Janet Craigie. She placed three stones, representing a hill spirit, water spirit and a kirk spirit, in a fire. She left them there to bake for a whole day and then after sunset placed them under the threshold of the door overnight. Before sunrise she took up the stones, still hot presumably, and placed them in a vessel full of water. From examining the reaction she declared, 'it is a kirk spirit which troubleth Robbie your husband'. She was then directed to wash her husband with water from the vessel. James Knarston, prosecuted in 1633, performed a variation of the same ritual.[61]

Another distinctive magical practice advised by cunning-folk and widely employed concerned the live burial of an animal, usually an ox, as a means of curing the sick. Alexander Drummond was charged with 'burieng a quick [i.e. live] ox for effectuating his sorcerie'. Church concern over the practice is evident from the records of the Dingwall presbytery. In 1656 the minister of Lochcarron and Applecross declared some of his parishioners to be 'superstitious, especiallie in sacrificeing at certaine tymes at the Loche of Mourie'. A presbytery investigation confirmed that people were 'accustomed to sacrifice bulls'. Twenty-two years later Hector Mackenzie in Mellan, two of his sons and a grandson were summoned before the presbytery for 'sacrificing a bull in ane heathenish manner, in the iland of St Ruffus … for the recovering of health of Cirstane Mackenzie, spouse to the said Hector Mackenzie'.[62] The burial of a live cock was also employed in cases of insanity and epilepsy,

and by implication the witchcraft to which both conditions were often attributed. In 1657 Christian Lewinston apparently performed this ritual, and it was still resorted to during the nineteenth century.[63] As well as its use in curing humans, animal burial was also commonly used to counter livestock disease. In 1650 a 'poore woman' named Margaret Dow was summoned before the kirk sessions for 'sorcerie by burieing a lamb under the threshold', which she justified by explaining that it was a 'preventative against the death of the rest of her bestiall'.[64] Six years later, four men were disciplined by the Dunkeld presbytery for 'using of a charm, to wit, the putting of an ox under the earth, and calling the cattle over him'.[65] Isobel Young, prosecuted for witchcraft in 1629, was charged with burying a live ox with the help of her sons. The authorities suspected a diabolic sacrifice, but her sons forthrightly asserted: 'To the fact and manner of the cure it has been the ordinary practice of husbandmen of the best sort who was never suspect nor delated of witchcraft in many parts within this kingdom.'[66]

IV

Larner switched between using a generic 'he' and 'she' when talking of 'healers'.[67] Yet by examining more precisely the gender ratios of different categories of healer some interesting issues emerge. The evidence from England shows clearly that around two-thirds of cunning-folk were male – a figure consistent in both early modern and modern periods, and matched elsewhere in Europe for the period.[68] On the other hand most simple fortune-tellers were women. No significant gender bias can be detected amongst charmers – one reason being the tradition of contrasexual transmission.[69] In comparison, Joyce Miller's analysis of 'charmers' brought before the presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling between 1600 and 1688 reveals that 66 per cent were women (41 individuals).[70] This is a reversal of the ratio from England. However, Miller is using 'charmer' in the generic Scottish sense and so her sample includes a range of fortune-tellers, petty healers, charmers, and cunning-folk. My own impression of the Scottish sources, albeit not one statistically calculated, suggests that once broken down into different categories of practice there were probably significant gender variations. The gender ratio for cunning-folk would seem to have been more even, while simple healers certainly seem have been predominantly women. As to charmers the situation appears similar to England.

Across parts of early modern Europe magical practitioners claimed to have gained their powers from relations with supernatural beings,

usually fairies in some guise or another.[71] Scotland is no exception. In 1598, for example, Andrew Man claimed that the Queen of Elves gave his powers to him. In 1628 Steven Maltman told the Stirling presbytery that he had his healing gift from the 'fairye folk'.[72] More significantly the Scottish trial material also confirms a phenomenon noted elsewhere: that women were more likely than men to claim the fairies or spirits as their source of power. In 1572 Janet Boyman explained how her healing powers derived from the ghost of a woman who had taught her to heal, and who came to her like a blast of wind when called upon. In 1597 the neighbours of Isobel Strachan claimed she obtained her powers from her mother who had learned them from an 'elf man' she had slept with. The same year Christian Lewinston explained how her daughter had been taken by the fairies. They had taught her 'witchcraft', and her daughter had passed the knowledge on to her. In 1623 Isobel Haldane explained how her power derived from the fairies after having spent three days in a fairy hill. Ten years later Isobel Sinclair said she had been with the fairies, who gave her the power of second sight regarding whether there was any 'fey body' in people's houses – that is if someone was about to die. In 1659 Alison Pierson told how she had made a pact with the fairies, and that she was a blood relation of several friends who attended the court of the fairies. Cunning-women could also source their powers to ecstatic experiences of a more religious nature. In 1643 the minister of Tibbermore reported to the Dunkeld presbytery that:

> There is one Jean Crie, widow, in his parish, who, through a melancholic disease, had fasted 17 or 18 weeks, or thereby, and twice in that time lay in trance for certain days, but now she taketh meat, and saith that she hath been in Heaven and Hell, and hath attained to great skill of all diseases, and of things to come, so that there is a great resort of the people to her.

The presbytery summoned Crie and ordered ministers to preach from the pulpit against consulting her.[73]

I have suggested elsewhere that the strength of the fairy source tradition and its relationship to gender is linked to the cultural influence of literacy and the spread of literature.[74] In considering this, the impact of the Reformation is central. The Protestant emphasis on the importance of being able to read the Bible had profound consequences on popular perceptions of what constituted knowledge, how it could be accessed and by whom. The promotion of popular education and the rise

of popular print not only enabled more people to access knowledge of ritual magic and conjurations, but also generated a greater awareness amongst the illiterate of the power of the written and printed word as well as the spoken word. One consequence was that book magic increasingly acquired greater popular respect than fairy magic. Thus in England cunning-men ceased to claim fairy power from the early seventeenth century onwards, and emphasised their possession of books instead. Some illiterate female healers, however, continued to publicise their fairy inspiration through to the end of the century.

At first, the Scottish situation seems to be at odds with this thesis. Calvinist Scotland has long been portrayed as a beacon of popular education during the early modern period, and so we might expect the influence of fairy power to have attenuated earlier or around the same period as in England. The *First Book of Discipline* (1561) declared the right of all Scottish children to be taught to read, girls as well as boys. During the seventeenth century various acts of parliament backed up this ecclesiastical principle, ensuring that every parish had a schoolmaster. By the eighteenth century Scotland was said to have the most educated peasantry in Europe. But as R. A. Houston has observed, 'Scottish literacy is legendary. It has reached the status of myth'.[75] Houston's impressive revisionist study of Scottish literacy has debunked the notion of a predominantly literate rural population. He reckons that in lowland Scotland during the early eighteenth century female literacy was probably as low as 20 per cent while male literacy was around 60 per cent. The percentages drop further for the Highlands. In comparison with England the male rate was higher in Scotland but the female literacy rate was lower.[76] Although such figures are calculated on the basis of signatures and the hidden figure of those able to read is significantly higher than those able to write, the gender gap remains stark. It needs to be remembered, furthermore, that a significant proportion of the people of the Western Highlands knew no English at all. Theirs was a truly oral culture. It was only in 1767, for example, that the New Testament was translated into Gaelic.

The above at least partly helps explain why there is little evidence of Scottish cunning-folk using occult texts such as the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* and the *Key of Solomon*, compared with those in England, the Dutch Republic and Italy for instance. What examples there are tend to confirm the different gender strategies. Alexander Drummond confessed to having a book of cures, which may simply have been a herbal rather than a *grimoire*. The documents confiscated from Bartie (Bartholomew) Paterson in 1607 contained a mix of Latin

and English and included occult tables, signs and symbols, presumably derived from either a book or one of the various magical manuscripts circulating at the time. Bessie Wright, who was brought before the Perth presbytery and subsequently a secular court in 1628, also claimed literature as her source of power. Her skill derived from a book that had belonged to her father and grandfather, and which was, she said, a thousand years old. It is telling, however, that she was apparently illiterate and had to rely on her son to read out the relevant sections to her.[77]

Another sign of the limited role occult literature seems to have played in the activities of Scottish cunning-folk is the lack of reference to judicial astrology. In England it was a prominent and promoted skill amongst cunning-folk and there were also numerous urban and rural astrologers of varying degrees of erudition plying their trade in the early modern period. Astrology was used or pretended to be used to identify witches and thieves, to predict the outcomes of wagers and law suits, and was very important in herbalism as well as providing general intimations of the future. This apparent absence of a vibrant astrological culture can be partly put down to the limited circulation of almanacs in early modern Scotland. It was only from the 1660s that regular almanacs were established in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Furthermore, the Scottish almanacs had little of the astrological and prophetic content of their English counterparts, containing little more than calendars, fair dates and weather forecasts.[78] Of course, English almanacs found their way across the border, but it was not until the rise of the Scottish chapbook trade in the second half of the eighteenth century that printed prophetic and divinatory knowledge began to be disseminated widely. The real boom came in the mid-nineteenth century with printers in Glasgow and Kilmarnock mass-producing cheap guides to divination.[79]

Extending the thesis into another realm, it is worth noting that according to Robert Kirk at least, at least some of the fairies' powers also derived from literature. As well as 'many pleasant toyish books' they possessed others which 'involved abstruse Sense, much like the Rosurcian [*i.e.* Rosicrucian] style. They have nothing of the Bible, save collected Parcells for Charms and counter Charms'.[80] Kirk was writing in the late seventeenth century, and if his views on fairy reading habits reflect wider popular belief then it only tends to confirm the growing perception that the most potent magical knowledge derived from literature. Even the illiterate through their relations with the fairies could benefit from the occult power contained in tomes of Neoplatonic magic and Bible-based healing charms.

The nineteenth-century folklore sources contain many references to the continued belief in fairies, the attribution of illness to fairies and the ability of certain individuals to counter the fairies, but little evidence that cunning-folk continued to advertise that their powers derived from them. The Galloway cunning-woman Jean Maxwell, whose prosecution in 1805 was printed and circulated for public consumption, is symbolic of the change.[81] Maxwell boasted not of her fairy relations but of her erudition. She claimed to be an 'Oxford Scholar' and learned her skills from a tome of magic she had inherited, and which she said was worth £9. By Maxwell's time, it would seem the book had finally ousted the fairy in the world of professional magic at least.

Scotland had one of the harshest legal codes against 'beneficial' magic in Europe, which targeted both cunning-folk and their clients. The judicial influence of the kirk, furthermore, ensured a considerable degree of complicity and cooperation between church and state in the fight against the 'user', 'abuser' and 'seeker' of magic. Complaints brought before the ecclesiastical courts were significantly more likely to be passed on to the secular courts than they were in England for example. Yet only a small proportion of cunning-folk were ever prosecuted under the 1563 Act. Their continued influence in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish society, which is evident from kirk sessions, court records, newspaper reports and folklore, provides one of the most striking proofs of the resilience of popular culture in the face of excommunication and execution. The tradition of popular magic may have changed over the centuries but it was in response to broad social developments and not authoritarian repression.

Notes

1 Most notably Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland … to which is added a brief description of the Isles of Orkney and Shetland* (London, 1703); Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides, 1772* (London, 1774–76).
2 SSW; J. Miller, 'Devices and directions: folk healing aspects of witchcraft practice in seventeenth-century Scotland', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002); J. Miller, 'Cantrips and Carlins: Magic, Medicine and Society in the Presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling, 1600–1688' (University of Stirling PhD thesis, 1999).
3 See also Miller, 'Devices and directions', 94–5.
4 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, 556.
5 See O. Davies, 'Charmers and charming in England and Wales from the eighteenth to the twentieth century', *Folklore*, 109 (1998), 41–53; O. Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London, 2003), 83–4.
6 See O. Davies, 'French charmers and their healing charms', in J. Roper (ed.), *Charms and Charming in Europe* (Basingstoke, 2004).

7 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, ii, 26; Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 207.
8 SSW.
9 C. Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981), 140.
10 O. Davies, 'Healing charms in use in England and Wales, 1700–1960', *Folklore*, 107 (1996), 19–33, at p. 27.
11 W. Mackenzie, *Gaelic Incantations, Charms and Blessings of the Hebrides* (Inverness, 1895), 70–3.
12 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 368.
13 *RPC*, 2nd ser., viii, 64.
14 Mackenzie, *Gaelic Incantations*, 61–2.
15 Miller, 'Devices and directions', 95; Miller, 'Cantrips and Carlins', 99; *SJC*, i, 110. On the Lee Penny see also G. F. Black, 'Scottish charms and amulets', *PSAS*, 27 (1892–3), 433–526. My thanks to Joyce Miller for this reference.
16 See, for example, R. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours* (2nd edn, London, 2002); W. de Blécourt, 'Witch doctors, soothsayers and priests: on cunning folk in European historiography and tradition', *Social History*, 19 (1994), 285–303; A. Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561–1652* (Manchester, 2003); T. R. Tangherlini, '"How do you know she's a witch?" Witches, cunning folk, and competition in Denmark', *Western Folklore*, 59 (2000), 279–303.
17 J. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft act', *Church History*, 74 (2005), 39–67, at p. 51.
18 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 66.
19 P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton, 2001), 36–8; Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 90–1.
20 J. Hunter, *The Diocese and Presbytery of Dunkeld, 1660–1689*, 2 vols. (London, n.d. [1918]), ii, 59.
21 See, for example, M. Todd, 'Profane pastimes and the Reformed community: the persistence of popular festivities in early modern Scotland', *Journal of British Studies*, 39 (2000), 123–56, at pp. 134, 139–43.
22 See de Blécourt, 'Witch doctors, soothsayers and priests', 289–94.
23 Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft act', 57–9.
24 Normand and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, 234–5.
25 *Spalding Misc.*, i, 177–80.
26 *SJC*, iii, 599.
27 R. Briggs, 'Circling the Devil: witch-doctors and magical healers in early modern Lorraine', in S. Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (London, 2001), 163.
28 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, 555–8.
29 SSW.
30 *RPC*, 2nd ser., iv, 639.
31 J. Goodare, 'Witch-hunting and the Scottish state', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 134.
32 *RPC*, 2nd ser., iv, 637.
33 *RPC*, 2nd ser., vol. 8, 454.
34 *RPC*, 2nd ser., iii, 104.
35 *RPC*, 2nd ser., ii, 623; SSW.

36 Hunter, *Dunkeld*, ii, 61.
37 *SJC*, i, 169.
38 *SJC*, i, 110.
39 *RPC*, 2nd ser., iv, 637.
40 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, ii, 537.
41 K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), 309.
42 Goodare, 'Scottish witchcraft act', 56.
43 Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy*, 94–6, 128. For the case of John Campbell of Ardkinglass who employed witches during a feud within the Campbell clan in the 1590s, see L. Henderson, 'Witch-hunting and witch belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*', Chapter 4 above.
44 Davies, *Cunning-Folk*, 111–12.
45 SSW.
46 *Justiciary Records of Argyll and the Isles, 1664–1742*, 2 vols., (eds) J. Cameron and J. Imrie (Stair Society, 1949–69), i, 81.
47 Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy*, 39.
48 R. A. Houston, *Social Change in the Age of Enlightenment: Edinburgh, 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1994), 190.
49 J. Maxwell Wood, *Witchcraft and Superstitious Record in the South-Western District of Scotland* (Wakefield, 1911; repr. 1975), 133.
50 See P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, 'Witchcraft and magic in eighteenth-century Scotland', in O. Davies and W. de Blécourt (eds), *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, 2004).
51 Miller, 'Cantrips and Carlins', 99.
52 Houston, *Social Change*, 190.
53 J. Napier, *Folk Lore: or, superstitious beliefs in the West of Scotland within this century* (Paisley, 1879), 72–3.
54 *Records of the Presbyteries of Inverness and Dingwall, 1643–1688*, (ed.) W. MacKay (SHS, 1896), 156; SSW; Hunter, *Dunkeld*, i, 101. Other instances can be found in the SSW.
55 *Spalding Misc.*, i, 179, 178, 177.
56 SSW.
57 *RPC*, 2nd ser., vii, 476.
58 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, ii, 27, 28; *Spalding Misc.*, i, 115.
59 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, 556; *RPC*, 2nd ser., iv, 637.
60 Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, ii, 538.
61 *RPC*, 2nd ser., vii, 474–5; SSW.
62 A. Mitchell, 'On various superstitions in the north-west Highlands and islands of Scotland, especially in relation to lunacy', *PSAS*, 4 (1860–2), 251–88, at pp. 255–8.
63 Mitchell, 'On various superstitions', 274.
64 *Records of the Presbyteries of Inverness and Dingwall*, 196.
65 Hunter, *Dunkeld*, i, 370.
66 *SJC*, i, 110, 111.
67 See Larner, *Enemies of God*, 138, 142.
68 See, for example, de Blécourt, 'Witch doctors, soothsayers', 301; Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany*, 69.
69 Davies, *Cunning-Folk*, 71; Davies, 'Charmers and charming'.
70 Miller, 'Cantrips and Carlins', 212.

71 See G. Henningsen, '"The Ladies from Outside": an archaic pattern of the witches' sabbath', in B. Ankarloo and G. Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1993); É. Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead: a Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age* (Budapest, 1999); W. Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoeckhlin and the Phantoms of the Night*, trans. H. C. E. Midelfort (Charlottesville, Va., 1998); Davies, *Cunning-Folk*, 70. On early modern Scottish fairies see L. Henderson and E. J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: a History* (East Linton, 2001); D. Purkiss, 'Sounds of silence: fairies and incest in Scottish witchcraft stories', in Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft*.
72 Miller, 'Cantrips and Carlins', 98.
73 Hunter, *Dunkeld*, i, 266–7.
74 Davies, *Cunning-Folk*, 70, 182–4.
75 R. A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1985), 11.
76 A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), 18.
77 SSW.
78 See B. Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs, 1500–1800* (London, 1979), 274–5; W. R. McDonald, 'Scottish seventeenth-century almanacs', *The Bibliothek*, 4 (1963–6), 257–322.
79 See, for example, *The Norwood Gipsy Fortune Teller* (Glasgow, *c*.1835); *The Spaewife; or, Universal fortune-teller* (Kilmarnock, *c*.1850). See also G. R. Roy, 'Some notes on Scottish chapbooks', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 1 (1974), 50–60.
80 Robert Kirk, *The Secret Common-Wealth* (London [1691], 1893), 17. See also the more recent edition with a good introduction: M. Hunter (ed.), *The Occult Laboratory: Magic, Science and Second Sight in Late Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2000).
81 *Remarkable Trial of Jean Maxwell, the Galloway Sorceress* (Kirkcudbright, 1805). The detailed indictment is reprinted in Wood, *Witchcraft and Superstitious Record*, 99–110. A summary can be found in E. J. Cowan and L. Henderson, 'The last of the witches? The survival of Scottish witch belief', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 212–13.

9

The Mechanical World-View and the Decline of Witch Beliefs in Scotland

Michael Wasser

> The decline and apparent final collapse of the witch-craze in the late seventeenth century, while other such social stereotypes retained their power, is a revolution which is surprisingly difficult to document.
>
> *Hugh Trevor-Roper, 1967.*[1]

I

Why did Europeans in general and Scots in particular begin to doubt the reality of witches and witchcraft?[2] This is an important and long-standing question. It was raised most recently for me when I wrote about the western witch-hunt of 1697–1700.[3] In that hunt large numbers of witches were accused but only a few were executed, despite 'ideal conditions' for a witch-hunt as judged by past Scottish experience. I concluded that the relative failure of the hunt was due to pervasive doubt on the part of the legal and political authorities concerning the reliability of the evidence used against the accused witches. But what was the source of this doubt? I intend to propose a solution here: the doubt concerning evidence was being inspired by what we call the 'scientific revolution', and especially – but not exclusively – the mechanical world view that was associated with it.

Linking science to the decline of both witch beliefs and witch-hunting is not new, but the difficulty of making a direct causal link has made scholars cautious.[4] One problem is that the chronology does not match. Witch-hunting (although not necessarily witch beliefs) declined in some countries such as the Netherlands in the early seventeenth century, while the scientific revolution was still in its early stages.[5] Another problem is alluded to in the quotation from Hugh

Trevor-Roper at the opening of this chapter. There were no direct attacks from any of the scientific pioneers against witch-hunts or even witch beliefs. On the other hand, there was an effort by some exponents of the new philosophy such as Robert Boyle and Joseph Glanvill to maintain beliefs in witchcraft. In addition, continuing systems of thought built around natural magic influenced the thinking of important scientists such as Isaac Newton. Thus there does not seem to be any simple link between the new science and the end of witch beliefs. Instead, it seems likely that the idea that the new science killed old superstitions is an anachronistic reading backward of the mental world of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment into the world of the late seventeenth century.[6] This conclusion is especially strong for Scotland since scholars are united in saying that Scotland lacked any direct published attack on witch beliefs prior to the repeal of the witchcraft act in 1736.[7]

If science was not responsible for a seventeenth-century decline in either witch-hunting or witch beliefs, then what was the cause of the decline of the witch-hunt in most of seventeenth-century Europe? The leading contender is the theory of 'judicial scepticism', best expressed by Brian Levack. This also provides an explanation for the doubt expressed concerning Scottish evidence in 1697–1700.[8] It explains the end of witch-hunting based on procedural caution and higher standards of evidence by judges and lawyers. This included a greater supervision of local judges by elite, well-trained, central judges; a restriction on torture; a suspicion of confessions involving demonological elements; a greater willingness to attribute the harm associated with *maleficium* to natural causes; and a more critical attitude towards bias or other disqualifying features in witnesses.[9] Levack acknowledges that many of these things were already present in the early years of the century and then intensified towards its end. However, he treats these legal developments as relatively autonomous. He decouples the link between witch beliefs and witch-hunting. Thus he acknowledges the possibility that the scientific revolution was undermining witch beliefs, but argues that it probably was not affecting the witch-hunt.[10]

Nonetheless, there are a number of reasons for thinking that philosophical scepticism concerning the existence of witches and witchcraft was growing out of the new science and that it was helping to end witch-hunting. It was beginning to take hold among some Scots in the late seventeenth century and contributed to the failure of the 1697–1700 witch-hunt. This can be approached on two levels, one theoretical, the other empirical.

The strongest objection to a causal link between the new science, witch beliefs and the end of witch-hunting is chronological. A basic principle of causality is that the cause must precede the effect. Thus the fact that witch-hunting was declining in nations such as England, France, Spain, and the Netherlands in the early seventeenth century, before the mechanical world view was fully developed, tells against a causal link (expressed as a temporal sequence) between it, the decline of witch beliefs, and the decline of witch-hunting. But this principle only applies if cause and effect are distinct and separate from one another. What if cause and effect are not separable, but are linked, and influence one another? This is a normal phenomenon in a complex system such as human society.[11] It is reflected in the question 'what came first, the chicken or the egg?' What I would suggest, therefore, is that the new scientific view of the world was evolving in conjunction with changes in elite witch beliefs and a decline in witch-hunting. The process of change was not complete until the mid to late eighteenth century, when witch beliefs were wholly discredited among secular-minded European elites and witch-trials came to a full stop. However, in the two centuries before this, these variables reacted unpredictably with each other and with other variables such as economic conditions, social changes, religion and politics, to produce widely different results across Europe. To return to Scotland, the period 1597–1628 saw a decline in witch-hunting that accorded with Levack's theory of judicial scepticism.[12] But it did not last. There were new, large-scale hunts in 1628–30, 1649 and 1661–2.[13] The Restoration decline in witch-hunting, which was longer-lasting, coincided with the reception of the ideas of the scientific revolution.

The link that I am suggesting between the new science and the decline in witch beliefs can also be described through a contrast between two metaphors. The traditional way in which the new science was thought to have killed off witch beliefs can be portrayed as a knight (the new science) slaying a dragon (superstitious witch beliefs). I would replace this metaphor with one where termites (the new science) ate away at the foundation of a house (the intellectual underpinnings of demonological ideas) until the house suddenly collapsed. This metaphor is imperfect, in that it does not portray the complex interdependence of cause and effect that I have suggested above, but it does have some advantages. First, it suggests that the discrediting of witch beliefs was a process, not an event, and took place over an extended period of time. Second, the relationship between cause and effect was asymmetrical, not symmetrical. This is to say that although

the termites took a long time to undermine the house, the visible effect of that process, the collapse of the house, happened quickly. The fact that termites operate in obscurity, out of sight, is also relevant, for I believe that the real struggle for belief occurred not in published treatises but in the individual minds of men and women where we cannot usually see it. The 'collapse of the house' occurred when people were able to say openly that witchcraft was 'an absurd and incredible imputation' without suffering any negative consequences in their personal or professional lives.[14] This had not happened in Scotland by the years 1697–1700; thus the lack of open attacks on witch beliefs. As will be seen below, my argument is that by 1697 a partial and imperfect absorption of the mechanical view of the universe was creating doubt about the existence of witches in addition to the evidence used to prove the crime of witchcraft. I am not arguing that a fully absorbed mechanical world view was producing a complete and certain rejection of witch beliefs.

The empirical reasons for linking science, witch beliefs, and the decline of witch-hunting are tied more particularly to late seventeenth-century Britain, where many English and Scottish scientists were afraid of a rising tide of atheism that they connected with the new mechanical philosophy. They regarded a lack of belief in witchcraft as a precursor or an indicator of atheism: 'And those that dare not bluntly say, there is NO GOD, content themselves (for a fair step and Introduction) to deny there are SPIRITS or WITCHES.'[15] The main exponent of this point of view in Scotland was George Sinclair, author of *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*.[16] The fears of these men need to be taken seriously; we should not assume that they were tilting at windmills.

This chapter has also been inspired by, and builds upon, the work of two modern scholars, Stuart Clark and Barbara Shapiro. Clark argues that demonology was a rational science linked to the natural philosophy of a 'Christianized Aristotelianism'. He suggests that the replacement of the principles of this philosophy with those of a mechanical, corpuscular universe in which God does not intervene was the true reason for the end of demonological beliefs. While Clark places this transition in the eighteenth century, I believe that the transition was longer and slower. It was a process that began early in the seventeenth, and was only completed in the mid to late eighteenth century.[17]

Shapiro argues that changes in attitude towards assessing evidence were evolving simultaneously across many different fields in late seventeenth-century England, including law, theology and the new science.[18] This involved a change in the classification of knowledge

inherited from the ancient world. Instead of a sharp break between certain knowledge derived from logical arguments and 'mere opinion' based upon experience, there developed a continuum of knowledge representing degrees of probability which were established by both reasoning and experience. What connected the changes across the different disciplines was 'the reorientation of all of them in the direction of empirical inquiry to establish matters of fact'.[19] Her work shows how causality in intellectual change is not simple or compartmentalised, but complex and cuts across disciplines. It suggests, on a theoretical level, that it is possible that philosophical doubts about witches and witchcraft were reinforcing and strengthening judicial scepticism about evidence and proof.

I would like to stress that this is an exploratory essay at the beginning of a research agenda that is far from its conclusion. I intend to proceed here by taking seriously the arguments of George Sinclair, who attacked sceptical thinking in Scotland, linking mechanical philosophies to doubts about witchcraft and atheism. Future research can go in two directions. One would be to read extensively in the contemporary scientific and demonological texts and in current writing on the philosophy and history of science. The second would be to conduct a prosopographical study of a population of contemporary Scots – for example, those who participated in the 1697–1700 witch-hunt. If both these programmes could be accomplished, it would give a much richer picture, both in theory and in detail, of what I will explore below.

II

In 1685 George Sinclair published *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*, the most important and widely read Scottish book on witchcraft. Sinclair was writing as part of a Restoration movement, centred in England but including Scotland. It sought to prove the reality of witches, spirits and demons by presenting a combination of philosophical reasoning and 'evidence' in the form of stories authenticated by trustworthy testimony. The main exponent of this effort was Joseph Glanvill, a member of the Royal Society, who used his prestige as a proponent of the new philosophy to further his arguments over spirits and witches.[20] Sinclair presented his book as a simplified and cheaper version of Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus*.[21] It consisted of a preface and a body of text. The preface stated the problem that he was addressing – disbelief in spirits and witches, leading ultimately to atheism – and gave reasons why this problem existed and why the conclusions of the sceptics were

wrong. The text provided the stories that formed the empirical evidence for the reality of spirits, witches and witchcraft.

Sinclair was a professor of natural philosophy at Glasgow university from 1654 to 1666. His book confirms many of the arguments that Stuart Clark presents in favour of treating demonology as a rational science. For example, like any science, demonology featured an internal discussion over what was or was not possible or true.[22] Sinclair demonstrated this when he agreed with critics that the transformation of witches into cats and hares and their transportation into far countries was not believable and when he disagreed with Glanvill as to the nature of the effect produced by the witch of Endor.[23] Demonology also displayed an ability to cope with criticism and to co-opt other systems of thought into itself. Clark cites Sinclair at various points as an example of how the new science could support demonologists. Sinclair stated that he was in favour of the 'new Philosophy' while implying that it had to conform to the principles of Christian theology; 'otherwise men might resolve to build Castles in the Air'.[24]

Sinclair also conforms to Clark's conception of the world view espoused by demonologists. The most basic element of this conception was that the universe was defined by dualist, contrary principles: good and evil, God and the Devil, forever at war with one another.[25] Sinclair reflected this in his analysis of the contest between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians which he saw as his strongest evidence: 'It is evident that this conflict was between the Kingdom of light, and the Kingdom of darkness, and the evil spirits thereof.'[26] Within this dualist world, causality was governed by Aristotelian cosmology and physics, assimilated into the Christian world by the medieval scholastic philosophers. Clark sees three types of causality in this universe. The ordinary realm of nature was composed of those relationships easily observed and understood by human beings, such as heavy objects falling to the ground. 'Preternature' featured relationships that were still natural, but were outside this 'ordinary' course of nature; their operations were usually hidden to the sight and understanding of human beings, but were understood by the Devil and his minions, who could manipulate them to work 'wonders'. The 'supernatural' was reserved for things completely outside and above the natural world. Only God the creator could operate outside nature; anything supernatural was a miracle worked by him. So strongly does Clark adhere to this threefold division that when a demonologist uses the term 'supernatural' to refer to something that should be preternatural, he glosses it as an imprecise use of language.[27] Sinclair reflected this division when

he discussed how witchcraft worked. In discussing poisoning, for example, he wrote: 'Not that they mischieve people ordinarly by natural poyson, as *Arsenick*, or the like, but rather by some hellish malignancy infused into things, by the art and malice of the Devil.'[28] In discussing another means whereby witches wrought harm he described how

> a Witch sendeth forth thorow her eyes venomous and poysonful Spirits, as Rayes, which lighting upon a man, will kill him. The *Basilisk* killeth this way. But the Devil and the *Basilisk* are both *Serpents*.[29]

These were descriptions of a preternatural world where the Devil used spirits through the medium of a witch to work harm. But Sinclair saw that not everyone believed in this. There were those who doubted the reality of spirits and who therefore threatened this whole world view. These people were breeding atheism. They had to be fought and refuted.

III

Sinclair attributed the 'disbelief of devils, witches and apparitions' to three things: mockery, atheism, and the belief that many innocent people had been executed as witches.[30] After offering a short, general refutation of these things, Sinclair identified atheism as the most serious of the three, and gave two reasons for the growth of atheism in the world. The first was a materialist philosophy that he associated with Hobbes and Spinoza. The second, discussed at much greater length, was 'the absurd Principles of the *Cartesian* Philosophy', which Sinclair also referred to as 'dangerous principles'.[31] Sinclair cited 54 tenets of Cartesian philosophy that were dangerous and tended towards atheism. All were given a theological 'spin' but touched as well on more general philosophical matters. To deal with all 54 is well beyond the scope of this chapter; instead, I will look at the 29th item, 'That there is a world in the Moon', and use this to show the connections that Sinclair was drawing between the new mechanical world view, witches, and atheism.[32]

The term 'a world in the moon' described the belief that the moon was a 'world' in the same sense as the earth, composed of the same matter.[33] Christianised Aristotelianism, by contrast, saw the moon as composed of aether, part of an entirely different reality.[34] But why should a belief in a world in the moon be seen as a threat to a belief in witches, let alone as tending to atheism? To understand this we need

to briefly examine the world view of Christianised Aristotelianism, how it came to be, and the challenges to it.

According to Thomas Kuhn, there were three defining stages in the creation of this world view. The first was Aristotle's cosmology. This saw the universe as a series of spheres circling around a stationary, central earth. The spheres were composed of a non-terrestrial substance, aether. Within them were the stars and the planets (including the moon and the sun), also composed of aether. This was not simply an astronomical scheme, but united non-astronomical elements as well such as Aristotle's physics and laws of motion. For example, the sublunary region was composed of earth, air, water and fire. The tendency of solid objects ('earth') to fall 'down' rather than 'up' was explained by their natural tendency to fall to the centre of the earth, which was the centre of the universe. Later astronomical thought was dedicated to explaining the wayward motion of the planets. It culminated with the writings of Ptolemy in the second century CE, and a theory of 'epicycles'. This held that the planets moved in circles within their spheres: the 'circles within circles' that resulted as the spheres orbited the earth accounted for the movement of the planets. This discussion is necessarily simplified and skips later observations and debate, which did not modify the essential shape of these theories. When Aristotelian and Ptolemaic writings were recovered and studied in western Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth century, these physical theories were united with Christian theology by the scholastic philosophers and theologians. They incorporated God, Christ and the Bible into Christianised Aristotelianism by making God the creator of the spherical universe, and associating the centre of the earth with hell and the spheres with the heavens. Within this universe God was the motive force of all things and the earth was the platform for the almost dualistic conflict between good and evil, God and the Devil.

While this world view was comprehensive and convincing, it was not the only one available to Europeans of the later middle ages, nor was it without internal contradictions and problems. One surviving competitor from antiquity was the atomist cosmology associated with Epicurean and Stoic philosophy. This envisaged the universe as an infinite space populated by individual atoms. These atoms aggregated with one another to form everything in the universe, including the earth and the sun. In this universe, the earth was not at the centre but was merely another body, as was the moon. This theory was associated with atheism in antiquity because by deriving all existence from the interaction between atoms it seemed logically to deny the existence of

the Gods, or at least did away with their necessary involvement in the universe. The internal contradictions arose from attempts to link the theory of epicycles and spheres with observations of the precise movements of the planets. It was to solve the problem of planetary movements that Copernicus in 1543 proposed his sun-centred universe in which the earth moved like one of the planets. In the resulting intellectual ferment in the seventeenth century, heliocentric astronomy became associated with an atomistic – also called 'corpuscular' or 'mechanical' – universe. The best and most famous exponent of this association was René Descartes.[35]

Descartes was born in 1596; in 1619 he had a dream which inspired him to pursue a 'project of reestablishing all human knowledge on firm foundations'.[36] He spent the 1620s and 1630s in his research and began publishing in 1637; he died in 1650. This timespan made him a child of the Copernican age. He was also the beneficiary of the discoveries of the telescope, which, beginning with Galileo in 1608, provided increasing empirical support for Copernican astronomy, and shaped its further development. Galileo's discoveries also gave empirical evidence for the ancient concept of a 'world in the moon'.[37] However, by doing away with the earth as the centre of the universe, Copernicus had logically destroyed the structural integrity of the Christianised Aristotelian synthesis of astronomy, physics and theology. Copernicus himself tried to deny this and to preserve Aristotelian ideas within a heliocentric universe. Subsequent thinkers had either to deny heliocentrism altogether, to follow in Copernicus's footsteps by reconciling conflicting systems of thought, or to create a new, alternative synthesis. Sinclair chose the first option;[38] Descartes pursued the third. His cosmology was corpusculan and heliocentric. All motion in this world – including the movements of the heavenly bodies and the earth – was explained by the mechanical contact of atom on atom, body on body. God's role in the physical world was confined to the creation of the universe and the laws by which it operated. In this universe there was no logical place for witches or witchcraft. Sinclair's explanation of the way in which witches caused their effects – through the intermediary of spirits – would not be credible.

Descartes encountered two problems in having his ideas generally accepted. The first was the opposition of the church. In 1633 Galileo was condemned by the Inquisition for his espousal of Copernican ideas. Descartes responded by not publishing early selections from one of his works, *The World, or a Treatise on Light*, which he had intended to do.[39] This work, which included a heliocentric view of the universe, was

published posthumously in two parts in 1662 and 1664. In 1644 Descartes published his *Principles of Philosophy*, which set out most of his scientific ideas. However, the shadow of self-censorship hung over all his subsequent work, and he never returned to his work on *The World*. Hugh Trevor-Roper believed that self-censorship was the reason why no major scientific thinker attacked witch beliefs, and it probably also accounts for the absence of any such attacks in Scotland.[40]

The second problem was that the synthesis was not sufficiently well-developed to be universally convincing. There were two aspects to this. One was the association with atheism, despite Descartes's claim to have proven the existence of God.[41] At the very least, the reduced role for the deity was disturbing. This was one of the main motivations behind the attempts of Boyle, Glanvill and Sinclair to prove the existence of witches, devils and spirits. The second was the failure of Descartes' work to account properly for empirical observations, necessitating numerous modifications. Despite this, the underlying theory was very powerful, especially his 'conception of the universe as a corpuscular machine governed by a few specified corpuscular laws'.[42] It inspired, survived and competed with Newton's challenge for several decades.

Sinclair's attack on the Cartesian belief in a 'world in the moon' is now understandable. Sinclair was not just a scientist; he was also a practising presbyterian who had willingly suffered dismissal from his university post for his beliefs. Scots presbyterian theology had been suffused since the late sixteenth century with modified Christianised Aristotelian teachings.[43] The idea of a world in the moon was both Copernican and atomistic; it also inspired speculative writings about its possible inhabitants and their putative relationship with God and salvation.[44] It challenged the world view espoused by Sinclair in various ways, not least in suggesting that witches and spirits did not exist. This is also shown by the way in which Stuart Clark treats the heliocentric universe in *Thinking with Demons*. Clark tries to show how various systems of thought that were outside the Christianised Aristotelian tradition, such as neo-platonism and hermetic natural magic, could nonetheless be made to support the world view of the demonologists. But his only reference to heliocentrism says that it was seen as much more of a threat than these other systems.[45] Sinclair would have agreed.

IV

Sinclair, therefore, was justified in his suspicion of the mechanical world views that Continental philosophers were developing, but to

what extent had these theories taken hold in Scotland? Were they sufficiently widespread to have an effect on the thinking of large numbers of the social and educated elite? Might they be influencing people who were in a position to hunt or not hunt witches? There is evidence that the mechanical natural philosophy was making an impact on the thinking of educated Scots, both before and after Sinclair published his book. This can be seen in the education system at home and abroad, and in the links that many Scots had with England and the Royal Society.

There is an older historiographical opinion that the Scottish universities continued to teach an arid Aristotelianism into the eighteenth century. This has been challenged by Christine King in a study that draws upon student notes and graduation theses.[46] King has shown that beginning in the 1660s Aristotelian subject matter was challenged by newer ideas, especially those of Descartes. This was particularly true in physics, which formed the culminating subject of the Arts curriculum. Aristotle was not wholly displaced, especially in logic and in the organisation and conceptualisation of the courses, but in physics, first Cartesianism and then Newtonianism came to dominate.[47] However, this was not achieved without a struggle. Sinclair testifies to a continued debate and resistance in describing one regent at Aberdeen who 'has this year in his publick *Theses*, confuted the chiefest points of the *Cartesian Philosophy*, both *Judiciously*, and *Modestly*'.[48]

The heliocentric view of the universe gained acceptance in conjunction with other aspects of Cartesian philosophy. It was known and studied intermittently at the universities from at least the early seventeenth century, but rejected. In the 1660s it gained acceptance at Aberdeen, Glasgow and St Andrews but lagged at Edinburgh, where it became generally accepted only in the 1680s.[49] Sinclair's implicit rejection of heliocentrism in *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* in 1685 and again in his *Principles of Astronomy*, published in 1688, must be seen, therefore, as an attempt to reverse an accomplished shift in thinking, as was his whole attack on Cartesianism.[50]

The large number of students attending Scots universities in the Restoration period meant that these ideas were spreading to a significant percentage of the educated elite. In the 1660s, the total number of students at the University of Edinburgh may have approached 500.[51] This means that the population of Restoration Scotland contained thousands of men with a university education who had been exposed to the ideas of the new mechanical philosophy. They were not scientists, but they were aware of a new universe of ideas. Many of these men would

be decision-makers in positions of power or influence, and therefore able to act on these ideas.

In addition to studying at home, many Scots travelled and studied abroad during the Restoration era, particularly in the Netherlands. Between 1676 and 1700 there were 419 Scottish students at Leyden alone, of whom 235 were matriculated in the law faculty. From 1661 to 1750, 275 of the 663 candidates admitted to the faculty of advocates (41%) are known to have studied in the Netherlands. Incomplete records mean that the real total must be higher.[52] John Cairns notes that the education that these men were receiving was 'one that emphasised the liberal connections of law with history, philosophy and even the natural sciences'.[53] King also notes the importance of the Netherlands to Scots education.[54] Sinclair, as a former university professor, would have been aware of this trend. Thus when he prefaced his 56 dangerous tenets of Cartesian philosophy by complaining that they 'are owned and maintained publickly abroad, especially in Holland', he was not digressing – he was pointing out one way in which Cartesianism was entering into the minds of Scots.

This shows that it was at least possible that the 'judicial scepticism' of the lawyers towards witches was being influenced by a parallel philosophical scepticism. It is further strengthened by the scientific knowledge displayed by two legal writers on witches. In his *Laws and Customs of Scotland in Matters Criminal*, Sir George Mackenzie devoted a chapter to witchcraft in which he occasionally alluded to scientific knowledge. For example: 'I believe that in the duller Nations a Philosopher drawing Iron with a Loadstone might have run a great risque of being burnt'.[55] Francis Grant in his *Sadducismus Debellatus* (1698), which recorded his speech to the jury in the Bargarran witchcraft case, went much further, making constant allusions to scientific phenomena in an effort to satisfy the jury that the witchcraft charges were credible.[56] At one point he even used the mechanical, atomistic cosmology of the Epicureans as a metaphor to help establish his arguments.[57] While Grant was not a sceptic in 1697–8, he did mysteriously disappear from the fray after he wrote his book. The wider point, however, is that these men were scientifically literate, and expected their audience to be so as well.

Scots intellectual life was also becoming increasingly tied to that of England, and in the realm of philosophy, to the Royal Society in London. In the early years of the Restoration this was fostered by Sir Robert Moray, an expatriate Scot who was both a politician and an important founder of the Royal Society, and by the duke of Lauderdale, the Scottish secretary who managed Scottish politics by shuttling back and forth between Edinburgh and London.[58] This intellectual exchange was facilitated and

increased by James, duke of York's residence in Edinburgh in the years 1679–82.[59] Regents in the Scots universities were quick to incorporate the findings of the Royal Society, published in its *Philosophical Transactions*, into their class lectures. The Scots universities were also quicker to incorporate Newtonian ideas after the publication of the *Principia* in 1687 than were the English universities.[60]

It was this partnership that inspired Sinclair's *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*, together with other scientific investigations of preternatural phenomena. In 1678 Robert Boyle, the most prestigious member of the Royal Society, met Sir George Mackenzie of Tarbat – a member of Lauderdale's entourage – to discuss Tarbat's knowledge of Highland second sight. The result was a virtual research programme into the phenomenon, with the Oxford Philosophical Society, Edward Lhuyd, Samuel Pepys and John Aubrey (in England) and Dr James Garden, Robert Kirk and John Fraser (in Scotland) all interested.[61] While these people were opposed to a pure mechanical philosophy they did show knowledge of it. Indeed, as with Sinclair, knowledge of these ideas was the inspiration behind the attempt to refute them or to limit their radical implications. However, others might well have adopted those radical implications, or least been influenced by them.

V

Sinclair's fears expressed in *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* were thus legitimate. Many Scots had been exposed to the idea of a mechanical, heliocentric universe, and this cosmology did challenge the explanations for witchcraft phenomena. However, no one associated with the 1697–1700 witch-hunt has been shown to have linked their doubts about the evidence to doubts about witch beliefs or to a belief in a mechanical universe. While this may change with further research, what we have now is an intellectual climate that makes it possible that participants were being influenced by these things. This amorphous link can be strengthened by two things: first, a look at statements by three individuals, and second, a link with a theory of intellectual change, Thomas Kuhn's 'paradigm shift'.

While no one in Scotland has left written statements denying the existence of witches prior to 1736, scholars have turned up a few people who have hinted at such beliefs and at a climate of debate on this subject. In 1678 Sir John Clerk refused to serve on a witchcraft commission 'alleging, drily, that he did not feel himself warlock (that is, conjuror) sufficient to be a judge upon such an inquisition'.[62] While

the literal sense of his words indicates only a judicial scepticism about distinguishing between preternatural and natural causes, the sarcasm involved in referring to himself as a warlock may suggest something more. This was originally reported in Fountainhall's *Decisions*, and Fountainhall himself is another example of a judicial sceptic who may have harboured doubts about the existence of witches. He matriculated at Leyden in 1666 and joined the Scottish bar in 1668.[63] He expressed doubts concerning the evidence in a number of witchcraft cases, at one point writing that 'thir confessions made many intelligent sober persons stumble much what faith was to adhibite to them'.[64] Fountainhall was a lord of justiciary during the 1697–1700 witch-hunt, and was probably consulted about the cases.[65]

The third and best example is a letter that the Rev. Robert Knox wrote to his colleague the Rev. William Wyllie about the Pollok witches in 1677. He said that Wyllie 'hath mightily convinced me (I say not that theer are witches, for it is a good time that I was past doubting of yt truth) that these persones … are really such'.[66] The words in brackets show that Knox had once wrestled with a philosophical scepticism concerning witches which led him to doubt their existence. While we cannot know what caused his doubts, he did graduate from the University of Edinburgh in 1668 and thus would have been exposed to the Cartesian physics being taught there.[67] After a time this philosophical scepticism was abandoned, but in its wake it left a gentler 'judicial scepticism' concerning whether or not particular people were actually witches. It was this judicial scepticism that Wyllie had to allay. This expresses the relationship between philosophical and judicial scepticism that I believe to be behind the rejection of evidence in 1697–1700. Philosophical doubts about the existence of witches and witchcraft were strengthening judicial scepticism about evidence that had long existed in Scotland. Furthermore, it is arguable that if Knox had retained his philosophical scepticism concerning the existence of witches he would not have said so in writing. To do so would have been dangerous. People who adopted this argument were called 'witch patrons' and vilified.[68] In 1697 Thomas Aikenhead was executed for blasphemy which tended towards atheism, the very thing that critics believed of those who doubted the existence of witches.[69]

VI

It is also possible to use Thomas Kuhn's theory of 'paradigm shift' in the sciences to understand the process of change in elite witch beliefs in Scotland and Europe, and to apply it to the state of affairs in Scotland in

1697–1700.[70] This argument is predicated upon Stuart Clark's identification of demonology as a rational science. According to Kuhn, a body of ideas which he calls a 'paradigm' informs a scientific community's understanding of its subject matter and guides its research agenda and the questions which it asks of nature. Research within this paradigm constitutes 'normal science'. But a paradigm 'need not and in fact never does, explain all the facts with which it can be confronted'.[71] Therefore, one of the functions of a paradigm is to guide further research. If research turns up too many findings which seem to challenge the paradigm itself, then the science will fall into crisis. This crisis can be resolved by the formulation of a new paradigm. The classic example of this is the shift from a Ptolemaic (earth-centred) to a Copernican (heliocentric) solar system.

Many sciences in the early modern period existed in a pre-paradigmatic state. But I would argue that demonology acquired a paradigm no later than the fifteenth century.[72] That paradigm featured a battle between good and evil, God and the Devil, situated here on earth, in which the Devil used witches to work preternatural evil in a war upon Christian society. However, this paradigm existed within another, more comprehensive one, that of Christianised Aristotelianism. As seen above, this paradigm featured a fusion of Greek science – both astronomy and physics – and Christian theology. Copernicus's theory created a crisis in this wider paradigm, pulling apart astronomy, physics, and especially theology. This led to a crisis in demonology as well.

In Scotland, this crisis began in the 1660s as both heliocentrism and Cartesian physics began to be taught and accepted. But as Kuhn insists, a paradigm cannot be vanquished unless there is another to take its place, and he is very sensitive to the role played by non-empirical factors and human psychology in achieving a paradigm shift.[73] In England and Scotland alike, the sticking point, as seen above, was the fear of atheism. In the context of ideas explored in this chapter, Sinclair expressed this fear best when he confronted head-on the Cartesian claim to prove the existence of God:

> They do not indeed assert, there is no GOD, but rather seem to prove so much, especially by his *Idea*, which is Connatural to all men. This may seem a plausible reason, but when its put to the *Test*, or *Touchston*, it, with others of that kind, are not found sufficient, nor able to convince *Atheists*.[74]

It is probably because of this that men such as Boyle, who did adopt an atomistic view of matter, refused to believe that this excluded the

existence of a spiritual substance. This is probably also why men like Boyle, Glanvill and Sinclair sought to provide an empirical basis for witch beliefs. Empiricism was becoming linked to the emerging new science. Demonology, while it was a rational science, was not an empirical one. If this could be changed, if witchcraft could be shown to exist empirically, then God's role in the world and belief in his existence would be safe. This failed in the end, but it was not clear that it would do so at the time.

Therefore, in order for a new scientific paradigm to take full hold and eliminate witch beliefs, fears of atheism had to be neutralised. It is for this reason that I believe the work of Barbara Shapiro is important. In arguing that empirical ideas were developing simultaneously and interdependently in law, science, and other fields, especially theology, she provides an explanation for how this was achieved. In theology she focuses on the latitudinarians, beginning in the 1650s.[75] Their important contribution was their attempt to show that Christianity rested on rational foundations. If people could come to accept this, then they would no longer need to fear that the decline of witch beliefs was the first step on a slippery slope to atheism. In England this was achieved in conjunction with Newton's new theories of gravity and motion, published in 1687. This reunited celestial and terrestrial mechanics – astronomy and physics – as had been the case in Christianised Aristotelianism. Pope's famous *Essay on Man* (written in 1732–4) showed the completion of the process, presenting a new world view in which science and religion were once again merged in a mutually supporting synthesis.[76] What the latitudinarians did in England was echoed in Scotland by the moderate party in the eighteenth-century kirk. The time lag between the development of the latitudinarians and the moderates helps to account for the time lag between the decline in witch beliefs in England and Scotland, as shown by Ian Bostridge.[77]

According to Kuhn, once a paradigm shift has occurred 'Some old problems may be relegated to another science or declared entirely "unscientific"'.[78] This was to be the fate of demonology and of elite witch beliefs in general. Diseases and mysterious accidents which formed the staple of maleficia and had once engendered vigorous debates over their causes – were they natural or preternatural? – were now assigned only to the natural sphere. The more purely demonological elements were abandoned altogether as unscientific. This included the whole idea of a demonic conspiracy against Christian society. But Kuhn also says that while a state of crisis in a science may persist for a long time, the solution in the form of a paradigm shift occurs quickly. At one point he compares it to a 'gestalt switch'.[79] In Scotland in the

period 1697–1700, this had not yet happened. Demonology was in crisis, but it had not yet succumbed to a new paradigm. I believe that the state of crisis induced by the challenge of the mechanical world view reinforced judicial scepticism of evidence and resulted in the failure of the 1697–1700 witch-hunt.

But when did the shift occur? In England, Bostridge argues that it occurred in the years before and after the Hanoverian succession and he links it to political debate. Witchcraft in the period leading up to 1714 formed part of the factionalising discourse between Whigs and Tories. In the years after this, dismissal of witch beliefs formed part of the new political consensus.[80] I do not want to dismiss the importance of politics in this process; instead I would argue that this is a good example of the interdependence of cause and effect in a complex system which I discussed briefly at the beginning of this chapter. Politics is not an independent variable in human society; it is, to put it poetically, the 'art of the possible'. I would argue, therefore, that the development of a new scientific paradigm, allowing for a dismissal of witch beliefs without a fear of atheism, made a consensus around this dismissal politically possible.

It is not, however, clear when this happened in Scotland.[81] So instead, I would like to conclude this chapter with a look at what elite opinion was like once the shift had happened. In 1797, Professor David Hume published his *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland Respecting Crimes*. At the end of volume 1, he discoursed on a crime then extinct, and for which he displayed an 'enlightened' thinker's disgust: witchcraft. Numerous emotional phrases showed Hume's distress at having to write on this 'melancholy and humiliating article'. Although he did not argue or attempt to prove it, his abhorrence was fuelled by his conviction that the crime for which so many people suffered death was an imaginary one, that could not actually be committed. He unhappily concluded that 'it cannot surprise us if men utterly lost sight of reason, and the ordinary rules of justice, in dispensing a part of the law which was founded altogether upon ignorance and terror'.[82] How society had changed, so that Hume could both articulate and publish this opinion, requires further research.

Notes

1 H. Trevor-Roper, 'The European witch-craze of the 16th and 17th centuries', in his *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change* (London, 1967), 168.

2 I would like to thank Elizabeth Elbourne and the department of history at McGill University for giving me the opportunity to teach a course on 'British Cultural History: Witchcraft, Religion and Science in the 17th and

18th Centuries' in the Fall 1998 semester. This was where I first began to explore this issue. A shorter version of this chapter was presented to the Montreal British History Seminar on 20 Nov. 2003. I would like to thank the participants, and in particular Elsbeth Heaman, for their valuable comments.

3 M. Wasser, 'The western witch-hunt of 1697–1700: the last major witch-hunt in Scotland', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002).

4 J. Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England, 1550–1750* (London, 1996), ch. 11: 'Science and the decline of witchcraft'.

5 B. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), 225; B. P. Levack, 'The decline and end of witchcraft prosecutions', in M. Gijswijt-Hofstra, B. P. Levack and R. Porter, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1999), 36.

6 I have found the following sources useful. For Boyle and Glanvill, M. Hunter, 'The discovery of second sight in late 17th-century Scotland', *History Today*, 51:6 (June 2001), 48–53, and the introduction to M. Hunter (ed.), *The Occult Laboratory: Magic, Science, and Second Sight in Late Seventeenth-Century Scotland: the* Secret Commonwealth *and other Texts* (Woodbridge, 2001). For Newton, M. White, *Isaac Newton: the Last Sorcerer* (Reading, Mass., 1997). Sharpe suggests that the 'real' change came with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, not with seventeenth-century science: Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 256. See also R. Porter, 'Witchcraft and magic in Enlightenment, Romantic and Liberal thought', in Gijswijt-Hofstra, Levack and Porter, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, 197–9.

7 C. Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981), 175–7, and B. P. Levack, 'The decline and end of Scottish witch-hunting', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context*, 168–9.

8 Levack, 'The decline and end of Scottish witch-hunting'; Levack, 'The decline and end of witchcraft prosecutions', 7–33.

9 *Ibid*., 13–30.

10 *Ibid*., 33–40.

11 See R. Briggs, '"Many reasons why": witchcraft and the problem of multiple explanation', in J. Barry *et al*. (eds), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* (Cambridge, 1996), especially at p. 53 where he refers to chaos theory. Stephen Jay Gould has also applied evolutionary theory to human cultural evolution with interesting results: see for example 'The creation myths of Cooperstown. Or why the Cardiff Giants are an unbeatable and appropriately named team', *Natural History*, xcviii (Nov. 1989), 14–24.

12 M. Wasser, 'The privy council and the witches: the curtailment of witchcraft prosecutions in Scotland, 1597–1628', *SHR*, 82 (2003), 20–46.

13 For more on these see L. Martin, 'Scottish witchcraft panics re-examined', Chapter 5 above.

14 David Hume, *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland, Respecting Crimes*, 2 vols. (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 1819), i, 581.

15 Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus: or a Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions … with an introduction by Coleman O. Parsons* (Gainesville, FL, 1966), 62.

16 I have used a reprint of the 1685 edition: George Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* (Gainesville, FL, 1969).

17 S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), 94, 185, 211, 214, 264, 299; 151–311 deals with the whole topic of witchcraft and science.
18 Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*.
19 *Ibid*., 12.
20 Glanvill lacks a modern study. For some earlier efforts see W. Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718* (Washington, DC, 1911; repr. New York, 1965), ch. 12, J. I. Cope, *Joseph Glanvill, Anglican Apologist* (St Louis, Miss., 1956), and M. E. Prior, 'Joseph Glanvill, witchcraft, and seventeenth-century science', *Modern Philology*, 30 (1932), 167–93.
21 Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, ii. The preface is unpaginated; I have provided page numbers in lower case Roman numerals for convenience.
22 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 151–3.
23 Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, v, vii.
24 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 297, 305, 569; Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, xiii.
25 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, part I, especially chs. 4–6.
26 Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, xiv.
27 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, ch. 11, especially pp. 168–9.
28 Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, vi.
29 *Ibid*., vi–vii.
30 *Ibid*., iii–v.
31 *Ibid*., vii–xii, xxvi.
32 *Ibid*., xi. The numbers in Sinclair's list reached 56, but 38 and 39 were omitted.
33 M. Nicolson, *A World in the Moon: a Study of the Changing Attitude towards the Moon in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Northampton, Mass.: Smith College Studies in Modern Languages vol. 17 no. 2, 1935–6).
34 In what follows, unless otherwise noted, I am drawing on T. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957).
35 For receptions of Descartes in England, see D. Jesseph, 'Mechanism, scepticism and witchcraft: More and Glanvill on the failures of the Cartesian philosophy', in T. M. Schmaltz (ed.), *Receptions of Descartes: Cartesianism and Anti-Cartesianism in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2005). Regarding atomism and Cartesian physics, there were also discussions and disputes in seventeenth-century 'mechanical' science over the nature of the particles that composed the universe. These have not been addressed here, partly because they are beyond the scope of the chapter, partly because they did not matter much to those laymen who were struggling to understand the new science. See, for example, C. Lüthy, J. E. Murdoch and W. R. Newman, 'Introduction', in C. Lüthy, J. E. Murdoch and W. R. Newman (eds), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Corpuscular Matter Theories* (Leiden, 2001), 18, where it is mentioned that contemporaries viewed many of the disputes as 'for the most part a matter of metaphysics or of religious caution'.
36 René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Related Writings*, (ed.) and trans. D. M. Clarke (London, 1999), xiii.
37 Nicolson, *World in the Moon*, especially 1–4.
38 Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, xi. See also George Sinclair, *The Principles of Astronomy and Navigation* (Edinburgh, 1688), in which he set forth the classic

earth-centred view of astronomy without once mentioning Copernicus – or any other scholar.

39 Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, xvi.

40 Trevor-Roper, 'The European witch-craze', 180–1, and R. L. Harris, 'Janet Douglas and the witches of Pollock: the background of scepticism in Scotland in the 1670s', in S. R. McKenna (ed.), *Selected Essays on Scottish Language and Literature* (Lewiston, NY, 1992). At pp. 97–8, Harris suggests that Sir George Mackenzie was practising a certain self-censorship in not attacking witch-hunting with even greater vigour in his *Laws and Customs of Scotland in Matters Criminal*.

41 See Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, ix.

42 Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, 242.

43 W. I. P. Hazlett (ed.), *Traditions of Theology in Glasgow, 1450–1990* (Edinburgh, 1993), 9–10.

44 M. Campbell, *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1999), 133–43, 151–80, and Nicolson, *World in the Moon*, 36–61. M. Nicolson, *Voyages to the Moon* (New York, 1948), also contains numerous references to an inhabited moon.

45 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 224.

46 J. Scotland, *The History of Scottish Education*, 2 vols. (London, 1969), i, 134, 143; C. M. King, 'Philosophy and Science in the Arts Curriculum of the Scottish Universities in the 17th Century' (University of Edinburgh PhD thesis, 1974).

47 King, 'Philosophy and Science', i–iii, 339–40.

48 Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, xv.

49 King, 'Philosophy and Science', 277–98, especially p. 298.

50 Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, xi; Sinclair, *Principles of Astronomy*. It is possible that Sinclair had experimented with heliocentric views earlier, in 1660: King, 'Philosophy and Science', 286. However King's report of Sinclair's lectures leaves open the possibility that he was rejecting Ptolemy's epicycles but still accepting Aristotle's spherical, earth-centred universe. To solve this problem the manuscript which she uses needs to be re-examined.

51 King, 'Philosophy and Science', 324. One estimate says that 'about 1.5–2 percent of boys in the appropriate age groups were able to attend university' in the early eighteenth century: I. D. Whyte, *Scotland before the Industrial Revolution: an Economic and Social History, c.1050–c.1750* (London, 1995), 248.

52 R. Feenstra, 'Scottish-Dutch legal relations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', in T. C. Smout (ed.), *Scotland and Europe, 1200–1850* (Edinburgh, 1986), 130–3.

53 J. W. Cairns, 'Importing our lawyers from Holland: Netherlands influences on Scots law and lawyers in the eighteenth century', in G. G. Simpson (ed.), *Scotland and the Low Countries, 1124–1994* (East Linton, 1996), 151.

54 King, 'Philosophy and Science', 334–8.

55 Sir George Mackenzie, *Laws and Customs of Scotland in Matters Criminal* (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 1699), 44.

56 Francis Grant, *Sadducismus Debellatus* (London, 1698), cited and discussed in Wasser, 'Western witch-hunt', 158–9, 160.

57 Grant, *Sadducismus Debellatus*, 51.

58 A. Robertson, *The Life of Sir Robert Moray: Soldier, Statesman and Man of Science (1608–1673)* (London, 1922); Hunter (ed.), *The Occult Laboratory*, 2, 19, 173–5,

177, 180. For Lauderdale's interest in demonic possession see B. P. Levack, 'Demonic possession in early modern Scotland', Chapter 7 above.

59 H. Ouston, 'York in Edinburgh: James VII and the patronage of learning in Scotland, 1679–1688', in J. Dwyer *et al.* (eds), *New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, n.d. [1982]).

60 King, 'Philosophy and Science', 277–98.

61 Hunter, 'The discovery of second sight', 48–53, and Hunter (ed.), *The Occult Laboratory*.

62 W. Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (London, 1885), 268.

63 *Dictionary of National Biography*, xi, 637.

64 *Journals of Sir John Lauder, Lord Fountainhall*, (ed.) D. Crawford (SHS, 1900), xxxix. Unfortunately I have not yet been able to consult either his *Decisions* or his manuscripts.

65 G. Brunton and D. Haig, *An Historical Account of the Senators of the College of Justice* (Edinburgh, 1832), 442–3, and NAS, high court of justiciary, books of adjournal, JC3/1, fo. 66.

66 Knox to Wyllie, 27 Feb. 1677, in Robert Law, *Memorialls, or the Memorable things that Fell out within this island of Brittain from 1638 to 1684*, (ed.) C. K. Sharpe (Edinburgh, 1818), lxxiv, cited in Harris, 'Janet Douglas and the witches of Pollock', 105.

67 H. Scott (ed.), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae: the Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation*, 8 vols. (2nd edn, 1914–28), iii, 453–4.

68 Mackenzie, *Laws and Customs*, 42, where he referred to 'Weirus, that great Patron of Witch craft'.

69 M. Hunter, '"Aikenhead the atheist": the context and consequences of articulate irreligion in the late seventeenth century', in M. Hunter and D. Wootton (eds), *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1992).

70 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, Ill., 1962).

71 *Ibid.*, 18.

72 In this discussion I am drawing upon both Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, and B. P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (3rd edn, London, 2006), ch. 2.

73 See also Trevor-Roper, 'The European witch-craze', 172, 177–82.

74 Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*, ix.

75 Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, ch. 3.

76 Porter, 'Witchcraft and magic', 202–4.

77 A. L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Scottish Church, 1688–1843: the Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh, 1973); I. Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformations, c.1650–c.1750* (Oxford, 1997), 184–91.

78 Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 102.

79 *Ibid.*, 121–2, 149.

80 Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformations*, especially ch. 6.

81 There has been, however, some scholarship on the survival of popular witch-beliefs in Scotland. See E. J. Cowan and L. Henderson, 'The last of the witches? The survival of Scottish witch belief', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context*, and L. Henderson, The survival of witchcraft prosecutions and witch belief in south-west Scotland', *SHR*, 85 (2006), 52–74.

82 Hume, *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland*, i, 579.

10

‘Charms against Witchcraft’: Magic and Mischief in Museum Collections

Hugh Cheape

This study examines the important charms and amulets collection in the National Museums of Scotland, particularly for their ‘charms against witchcraft’, to offer examples of artefacts said to have been used in witchcraft and exemplifying references in the written evidence of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by surviving material culture. It is suggested that these familiar groupings also give off messages which may in selected instances reveal more about the history of latterday collecting than of witchcraft, and more about the predilections and preoccupations of folklorists. This is not to deny that some of these artefacts have much to tell us at least by inference about the material culture and traditions of witchcraft in the early modern period, or to ignore the texture and colour that they lend to the written evidence. The museum record is here characterised as ‘magic and mischief in museum collections’ to offer a challenge to accepted wisdom and to suggest that, without careful exercise of analysis and interpretation, the value of these objects as historical evidence in such a complex subject may often be low.

Museum collections are built up through a process that is within its own terms methodical and rational and will generally be presented as a process of planned and orderly accumulation. Parameters are set by practical and pragmatic constraints and by scholarly fashions as well as by market and sale-room caprice, and also legacies and bequests, the latter conditions intrinsically difficult to pre-empt. Collecting in spite of curatorial aspirations and collecting policies may never be a precise science and has rarely been ‘in the round’ or as all-encompassing as might be required to capture the fullest possible range of evidence for most subjects; this however is always a problem at the heart of narrative history. Preconceived orders and taxonomies may provide

satisfactory and necessary intellectual and epistemological base-lines but objects such as charms and amulets exemplify the shortcomings, and often failings, of these processes.[1]

I

Charms and amulets may be objectively observed in a range of artefacts, most evident and familiar in museum collections and usually occupying discrete areas of exhibitions and displays, which have been grouped under a label such as 'witchcraft' or 'charms against witchcraft'. Such groupings for display are designed to illustrate concepts such as 'folk belief' and witchcraft (or the history of witchcraft), the groupings reflecting the ways in which these artefacts are classified and organised in their respective museum. There may not be interpretation or historical narrative beyond the anecdotal, partly because the museum of today must avoid the 'book on the wall' treatment, and aesthetic and design sensibilities would aim to avoid losing what is almost inevitably a small object amongst a mass of labels and print; the fashion would be to let the object speak for itself. But in the present fashion for 'heritage', there is a tendency for the visitor to come away with a sense of folksy imagery and odd cultural attributes from a presentation which, for the historian, may have blatantly exploited stereotypes of Scotland's past.

The provenance of what can be described as amuletic objects, sometimes deduced, sometimes assumed, describes a generally held belief in their protective and curative properties.[2] It is suggested here that, certainly by the late nineteenth century, pieces of stone of certain character and qualities might be described (moving from the specific instance and without further research) as a 'curing stone' or a protection against witchcraft. Hearsay flourished and the reputation of such objects grew and expanded over time. An account of a pierced stone disc was included in the account of the parish of Crossmichael in 1845, sent to the parish minister by Joseph Train (1779–1852), the Ayrshire-born exciseman and admiring correspondent of Sir Walter Scott. Train wrote:

> There have been found, at different times, near the same place, several round flat stones, each of five or six inches in diameter, perforated artificially in the centre. Even within the memory of some persons yet alive, these perforated stones were used in Galloway to counteract the supposed effects of witchcraft, particularly in horses and black-cattle. … One of these perforated stones, as black and

> glossy as polished ebony, is also in my possession. It was recently found in the ruins of an old byre where it had evidently been placed for the protection of the cattle.[3]

George Fraser Black (1866–1948), Assistant Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in the early 1890s, published in 1892 a long article which remains the only adequate or extended account of the material culture of Scottish charms and amulets. Black added Train's inferences to the Museum's record with the information that in Kirkcudbrightshire 'perforated stone discs of shale … were believed to be capable of preserving horses and cattle from the effects of witchcraft'. Thus a single anecdote could be translated into an anthropological near-truth. However several examples of perforated stones evidently used as amulets were acquired for the collections of the National Museums and generally described as 'witch stones', the inference being in the Museums' records that this was the term used to describe them by their original owners and in their original contexts [e.g. NMS NO 12]. By the late nineteenth century, then, assumptions were being made about perforated stones, even examples retrieved from the soil or from archaeological strata; they had been kept, it was said, to ward off nightmares, these being caused by a 'wicked hag or ogress'.[4] A possible source of this intriguing notion may have been the lexical curiosity included by the Secession minister, Rev. John Jamieson (1759–1838), a cleric with a keen eye for antiquities, in his *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* where we find:

> *Mare-stane* – A rough river stone, resembling a hatchet in shape, which has been worn down by collision or friction so as to admit of a cord being fixed round it, Angus. This is hung up in a stable to prevent the horses being ridden by the hag called *the mare*.[5]

II

Typically and as in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland these groups of artefacts and 'charms against witchcraft' are very diverse. They include gems and semi-precious stones, crystals on their own and in medieval reliquaries or reconstructed into forms of jewellery (popular still for 'powers' credited to them in natural medicine and 'alternative therapies'), fossil material and natural 'curiosities', prehistoric objects discovered contemporaneously, brooches, for example in circular or heart-shaped form, and written and printed texts. It is important to

distinguish the context in which this material can be evidenced, both before the antiquarian phase beginning *c.*1780, and thereafter and through into the twentieth century. From a range of sources it can be seen that these artefacts were a recognised element in medieval *Materia Medica* and that they continued to have an important social and cultural role through the period of development of the medical sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[6] To generalise, charms and amulets were the instruments or agents of what may now be described as 'folk medicine'. However, as talismanic, sometimes fetishist objects such as 'charms against witchcraft', they were also appropriated by discourses on folklore and folk belief and are now more likely to be classed thus in museum collections. This too frequently results in loss of context, most frustratingly of information on other medicinal, homeopathic and sympathetic elements such as spoken formulae and symbolic behaviour which can be located in other sources. The records of church courts, particularly in the seventeenth century, describe objects of stone, metal, wood and textile being used in healing procedures and rituals and we might suggest that such objects may be exemplified today among the charms and amulets in the National Museums' collection.[7] The growth of interest in this material, as one aspect of an interest in witchcraft, in the course of the nineteenth century meanwhile seemed to prompt too ready deduction in their assessment and interpretation and a consequent neglect of enquiry. But the present phase of witchcraft research offers copious evidence for a better contextualisation and interpretation of such material. The documentation of witch trials and confessions often describes amuletic objects such as are to be seen in museum collections today.

Prehistoric objects, recovered in the past as chance finds during cultivation or building work, have included flint arrowheads and spindle whorls. These might deliberately be kept in a safe place by their finders (in most instances which have been acquired subsequently by the Museums as records of provenance show) or in some cases described as being carried on the person to protect against dangers more sensed or assumed by collectors perhaps than real or intelligible. Depending on the circumstances of acquisition and the source of information, an amuletic usage may be more easily inferred. Arrowheads in this order of things were customarily termed 'elf-bolts' or 'fairy arrows' and considered to be the tiny missiles by which sickness and death were induced in animals. As such they were referred to at an early date, as in the responses to the questionnaires circulated by Robert Wodrow (1679–1734) and Edward Lhuyd (1659/60?–1709), in witch trials, and by Rev. Robert Kirk of

Aberfoyle in his 'Secret Commonwealth' (1691) with a realism born of recognition or personal experience: 'these arrows that fly in the dark' and 'a barbed arrow-head flung like a dairt with great force'.[8] The assumption was that fairies or elves were preternatural beings who should be considered as generally hostile and malevolent. Antiquaries and collectors in the nineteenth century were sufficiently schooled in their art to recognise Neolithic arrowheads as 'elf bolts' or 'fairy arrows' and an arrowhead presented to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in 1939, which had belonged to the collector Lady John Scott of Spottiswoode, had been mounted in a gilt casing and had even been painted with the Gaelic phrase *Saighead Sithe* (for 'Fairy Arrow') [NMS NO 76]. Other examples, similarly mounted but without gratuitous antiquarian naming, survive such as an impressive example mounted to hang on a watch-chain of horsehair and worn by an Ayrshire farmer as a good-luck token in the early twentieth century [NMS K.2000.552] (Fig. 10.1). Spindle whorls were described as 'adder stones' which were used by the snakes themselves when moulting, so it was supposed, to slough off their skins. The irony in this belief was suggested by Sir Arthur Mitchell in his Rhind Lectures in 1876 when he pointed out that these discovered items might still be part of the experience and material culture of the region and localities in which they were found. The examples of these which he gave to the National Museums therefore came from a context in which they were still used as charms or specifically protective and curative devices. In his descriptions of the relict material culture of the Northern and Western Isles, he wondered at the knowledge of the practical application of spindle whorls being lost:

> Being of stone, they do not rot away like spindles, and they are often turned up in diggings about deserted townships. By those who so find them they are treated with superstitious respect and care, being regarded as charms, and known under the name of *Adder Stones* … In the course of a few generations, it thus appears, not only that all knowledge of the use of the whorl may be lost, but that there may grow round the object itself a religious belief in its supernatural origin and qualities.[9]

Some items, by virtue of being pursued by a zealous antiquary, might have attracted more information than might have been available in the normal course of present-day archaeological inquiry. A glass bead from a burial mound at Crossmichael, Kirkcudbrightshire, purchased for the

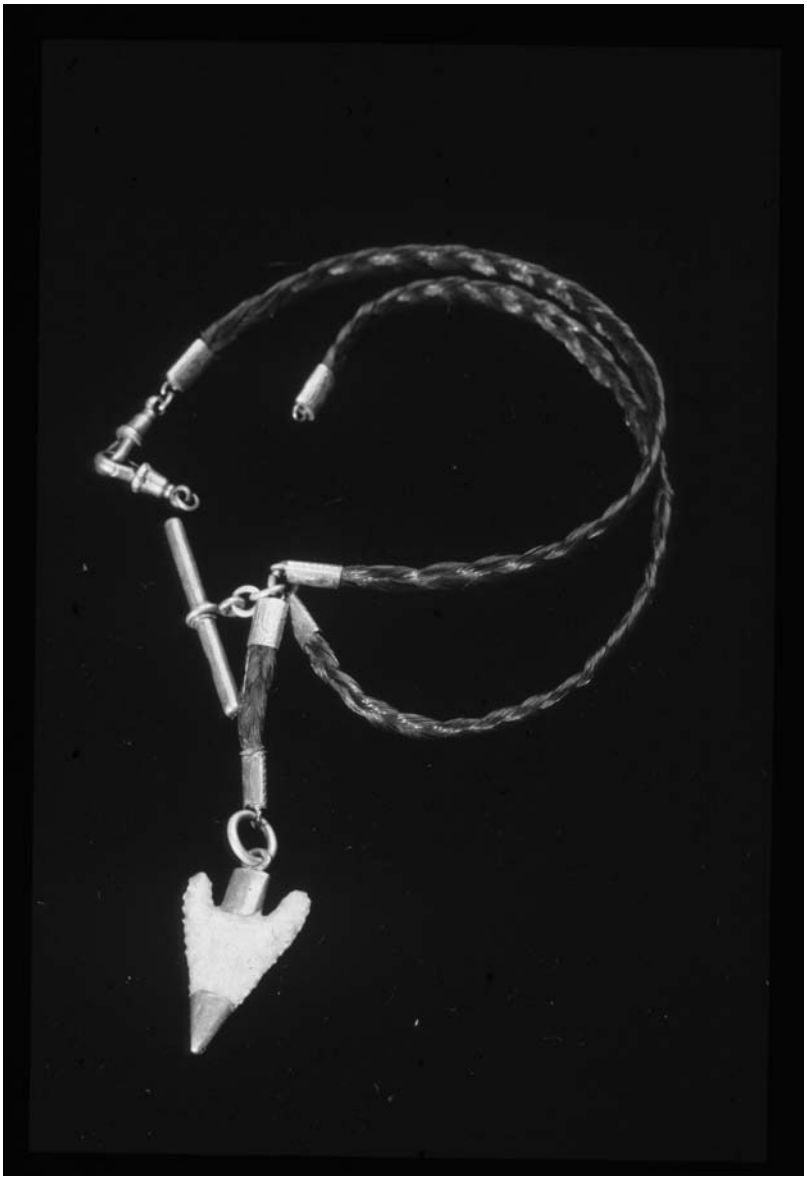

Figure 10.1 'Elf-arrow': neolithic arrowhead mounted as a charm to hang on a watch-chain woven from horsehair and worn by an Ayrshire farmer as a good luck token, acquired by the National Museums Scotland in 2000. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

national collections in 1933 and described as such and of Roman Iron Age background, happily also emerges from Joseph Train's notes in the Crossmichael parish account (cited above) and we can reasonably accept that it had belonged to him [NMS FJ 124]. This tells another and perhaps more seductive story:

> In the farm of Hallferne was found lately, near the large moat, a beautiful Druidical amulet, such as the country people call an *adder* bead. It is of a circular form, nearly an inch in diameter, and is composed of a pale-coloured glassy substance, having on the surface all round a waving stripe of yellow. Popular credulity having, in olden times, derived the origin of the 'quht stane of cristal' from a mysterious combination of serpents, its virtues were considered universal, whether as an antidote, palliative or cure.[10]

III

The charms and amulets collection in the National Museums, in which these objects are curated, is outstanding in Scotland and important in international terms. The earliest object categorised as such was a not untypical curiosity acquired by one of the founder members of the Society of Antiquaries and donated to the Society's Museum in 1784. It has to reflect, perhaps to us paradoxically, one among many aspects of the contemporary and 'enlightenment' pursuit of 'rational inquiry'. It is a flat oblong stone, like a piece of slate, approximately 10 × 7 cm., notched on the sides and pierced with two holes, and described as being formerly used as a cure for diseases in Islay [NMS NO 1] (Fig. 10.2).[11] The provenance unfortunately is no more detailed than this although research might well throw up further contextual information. Here we have a piece of natural material which has attracted curiosity, has been worked and adopted into a social context where it may well have been applied with prayer and incantation – some formula of words – as a cure. This might have been part of the stock-in-trade of a charmer, one of those, male or female, who inevitably drew the ire and admonition of kirk sessions throughout Scotland. Charming as an aspect of folk healing was widespread throughout Scotland and cases examined before church courts and kirk sessions in the post-Reformation period often give detailed accounts of the combination of ritual, objects and words. It is reasonable to speculate that this stone might have been used by an individual whom the church courts would have labelled as a 'charmer'. Such formulae of words can be seen *in extenso* as published

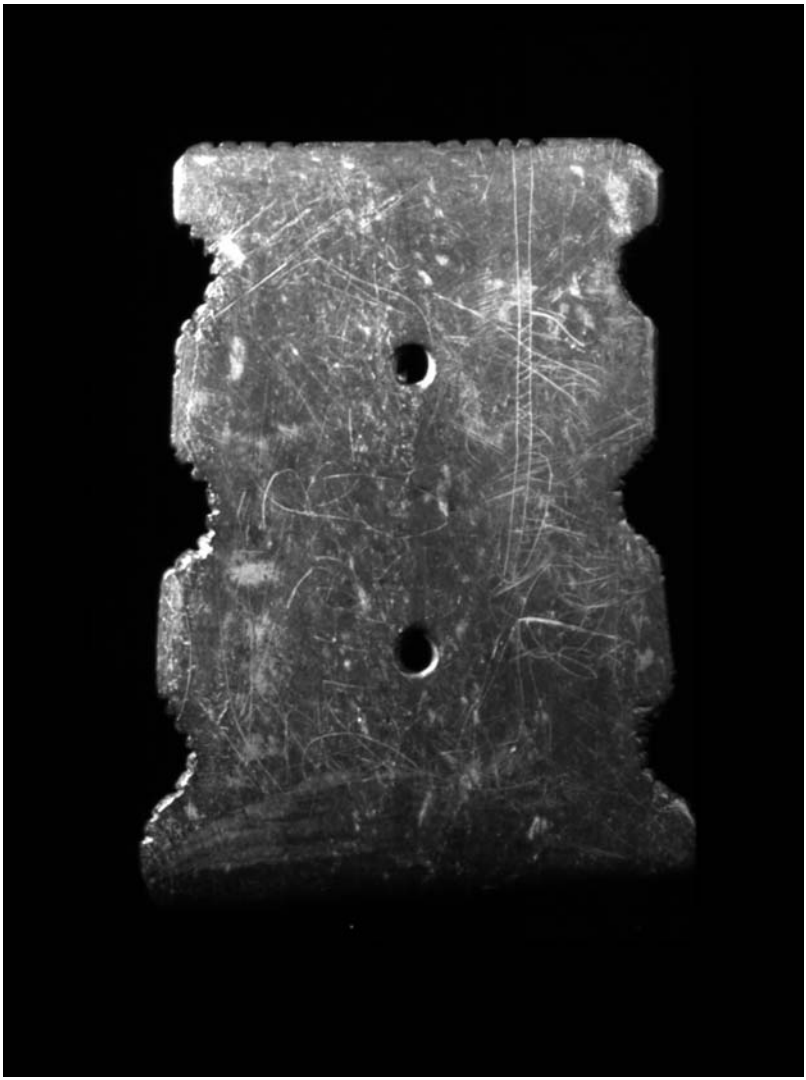

Figure 10.2 Slate plaque from Islay, probably used by a charmer in healing rituals, acquired by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1784. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

by Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912) in the massive collection of *Carmina Gadelica*. His collection and editorial methods have of course now been scrutinised and questioned, yet sufficient other examples

have been recorded to corroborate the fundamentals of his work. In June 1705 the Kirk Session of Kilbride in Arran, while censuring a parishioner, Mary Stewart, for using charms for healing, recorded in their Minutes the words which she used for curing migraines and 'distempers in the head'. They lectured to her that all charms were the Devil's invention, 'let the words be never so good':

Togidh Criosd do chnamhan mar thog Muire a lamhan,
nar thuireadh golann faoi nemh mar chruinnigh corp a chuimigh.
Togidh Peadar, togidh Pòl, togidh Micheal, togidh Eoin,
togidh Molais is Molinn cnamhan do chinn suas as an fheòil.
['Christ will raise your bones as Mary raised her hands
when she raised her wail of lamentation towards heaven....
Peter will raise, Paul will raise, Michael will raise, John will raise,
Molaise and Moling will raise the bones of your head up out of the flesh.'][12]

Significant probably as an indication of the directions of contemporary antiquarian interest in rational inquiry, the next item in this collection does not appear for another 42 years. In January 1827, Sir Walter Scott called on James Skene of Rubislaw, advocate, geologist and honorary

Figure 10.3 Calf's heart stuck with pins, donated to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland by Sir Walter Scott in 1827. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

curator of the Society's Museum, and gave him, as he records in his Journal, 'for the Antiquarian Society a heart, apparently human, stuck full of pins', an object which turned out to be the heart of a calf [NMS NO 22] (Fig. 10.3). Sir Walter was, not surprisingly, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, having been elected in 1796 at the age of 25, but he was never in his lifetime a significant contributor to the collections. Not only was he a keen collector himself and engaged in acquiring 'gabions' for his Romantic fantasy at Abbotsford, but he appears paradoxically not to have been particularly committed to the Society probably because of his dislike of the Earl of Buchan, its founder and sponsor. Buchan, according to Scott, was one of the supreme bores of their age, along with Sir John Sinclair. It may be that Scott was repelled by the calf's heart as a macabre object and, if he shared some of the emotions of his literary creations, would have shrunk from giving a home to it under his own roof-tree. Within two years his own *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* had appeared and the brief story of the heart was concluded:

> About two years since, as they were taking down the walls of a building formerly used as a feeding-house for cattle, in the town of Dalkeith, there was found below the threshold-stone the withered heart of some animal stuck full of many scores of pins – a counter-charm, according to tradition, against the operations of witchcraft on the cattle which are kept within. Among the almost innumerable droves of bullocks which come down every year from the Highlands for the south, there is scarce one but has a curious knot upon his tail, which is also a precaution lest an evil eye or an evil spell may do the animal harm.[13]

The third donation in this collection, given to the Museum in 1829, is in its own way equally sensational. This was 'Barbreck's Bone', now displayed in the Museum of Scotland, a small slab of ivory which was said to cure all degrees of madness in Argyllshire [NMS NO 2]. Frustratingly, no more information came with this object or from its lairdly donor, Frederick Campbell – frustrating because the appearance of 'Barbreck's Bone' suggests, as in the case of some other charms, particularly the crystal gems, a previous embodiment as part of a reliquary of the pre-Reformation church in the Highlands. When these were subsequently remodelled or dismantled or destroyed, parts of such reliquaries might pass on as saintly-inspired charms.

An outstanding example of such a medieval charm is the so-called 'Glenorchy Charmstone' consisting of a ridged or 'hog-backed' crystal mounted, probably in the seventeenth century, in an engraved silver

setting set with pieces of coral [NMS NO 118]. This is assumed to be the jewel described in an Inventar of Geir in the 'Black Book of Taymouth' in 1640 as 'ane stone of the quantitie of half a hen's eg sett in silver, being flat at the ane end and round at the uther end lyke a peir, quhilk Sir Coline Campbell first Laird of Glenvrqhuy woir quhen he faught in battell at the Rhodes against the Turks, he being one of the Knychtis of the Rhodes'.[14] Since Sir Colin Campbell was laird of Glenorchy between 1432 and 1480, this also locates the charm in a perfectly credible pre-Reformation context. An example from further north, the so-called 'Keppoch Charmstone', taken to Australia in 1854 by a Lochaber emigrant, was more sensitively researched by Rev. Dr Alexander Stewart who published the Gaelic formula used for saining water to give to sufferers. This invoked St Bride, the Twelve Apostles, the Virgin Mary and the Trinity, and 'all the shining angels'.[15] An impressive selection of rock crystal charms is held in the National Museums' collections, each of which comes with its particular tradition of curative powers. Most have been or still are finely mounted on a chain, exemplifying the well-documented belief that water into which the crystal was dipped bestowed healing and protection against witchcraft for man and beast [e.g. NMS H.NO 15–16, H.NO 72, H.NO 81, H.NO 108, H.NO 112]. Such items might amount to a vital element of successful cattle husbandry, such as the 'Stone of Ardvoirlich' or *Clach Dearg* which was held in great repute in the district as a charmstone for curing diseases of cattle (Fig. 10.7).[16]

Collecting and making collections was now a fashion and preoccupation of the first urban nation in the modern world. It inherited its interest and traditions however from earlier 'museum' collections amassed in the treasuries of the medieval church and in princely collections of jewels and art. These gave rise to the concept of the private collection and to cult status and new symbols of power. Power was invested in things. They gave rise too to the compelling attraction of the supernaturally miraculous and the naturally astonishing. Who could resist a fragment of the 'true cross' and a unicorn's horn – the carved narwhal tusk seemed to have been a common denominator of 'cabinets of curiosities'. A neat judgement on these collections might be 'a deft selection of daft things', and the maritime exploration of the sixteenth century enlarged the horizons of the cult of collecting and expanded the quotients of the natural versus the man-made. A dark side of collecting is usually evident in the *Wunderkammer*, the 'chamber of wonder', in, in the first place, a fascination with the occult transferred from reliquaries for example, and secondly in a fearful assumption of magical contacts between all manifestations. In different times these

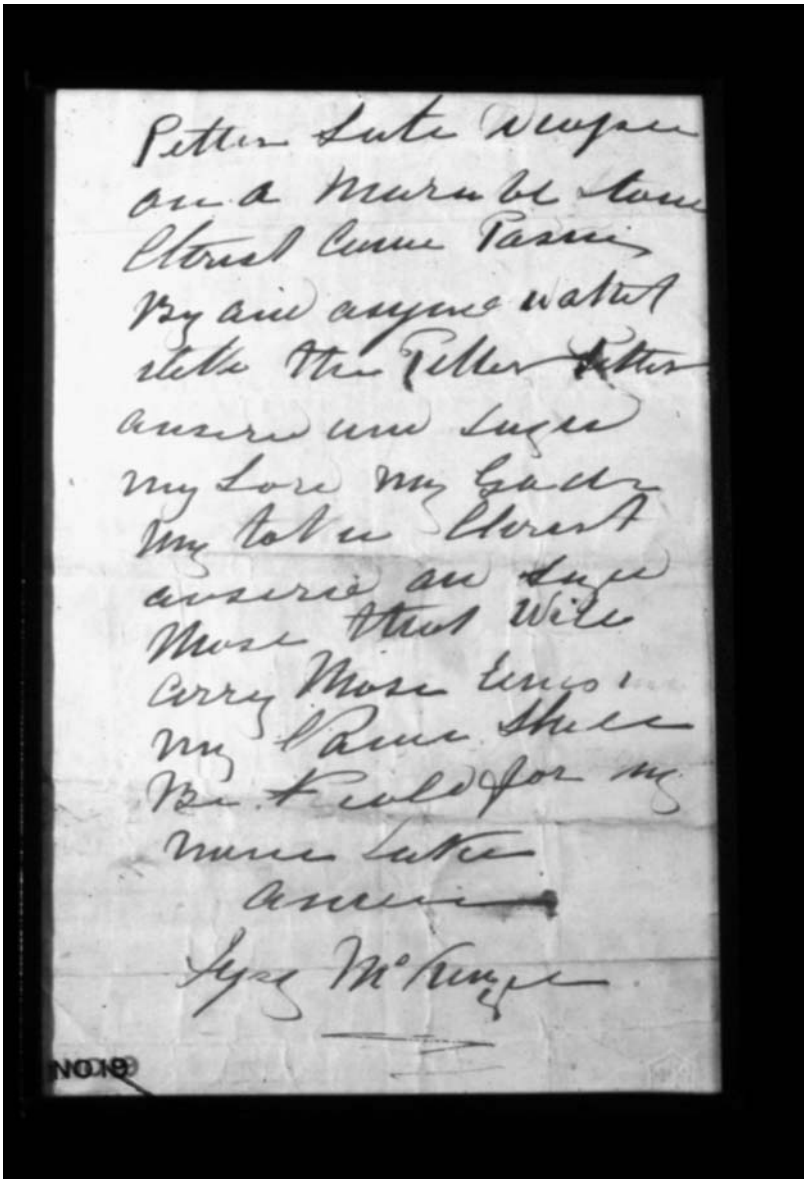

Figure 10.4 Written charm against toothache, made and sold in 1855 by Kate Macaulay, a so-called professional witch at Kishorn, Lochcarron. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

were variously explained and interpreted and a pseudo-science of witchcraft was seen as one way in which these might be articulated or manipulated. This was another aspect of the power of things, that they might be artefacts of terrible provenance and capable of ungodly evils if released from their cabinets.

These concepts came to be largely abandoned in the rational investigation of the eighteenth century and the Renaissance 'cabinets of curiosities' added to the collections of objects amassed to represent and symbolise the sum of human knowledge. It was in this context that the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland was founded in 1780 and, although objects were collected and studied essentially for private purposes, the intentions of the learned society were public and honourable. The purpose of collecting was to assemble a comprehensive view of the material culture of Scotland with objects 'illuminating certain aspects of the Nation's history'.

The agrarian and industrial revolutions had created a new economic order and the past was receding rapidly and becoming a 'foreign country'. But Scott had shown for Scotland that the past (or a past) could be understood and imaginatively reconstructed. Never before the nineteenth century had a society examined its past in such detail and with such enthusiasm as can be seen in its art and literature. Historical novels and antiquarian research showed how the past could be discovered or invented, Scott's novels in particular offering models of historical understanding. A strong vein of historicism created new narratives of the past, naturally strongly coloured by contemporary views and ultimately, in too many cases, selling themselves more on style than on content. A perceived severance from the past tended to throw it into sharper relief and to make the collecting of the past more compelling and fascinating.

Collecting and its presentation in museums, both private and public, served both to demonstrate the advances of Victorian society and to distance the citizens of the nineteenth century from the past. The impulse given to museums, collection and display by the Great Exhibition in 1851 introduced a new phase in which their purpose was to educate and enlighten the new urban masses of industrialised society. At the same time literature and copious museum collections demonstrate a fascination with material artefacts. Society took great pleasure from measuring the present against the cultural practices and products of the past and this form of curiosity about the past and of self-examination or reflexivity can be best assessed in the journals of the emerging disciplines of archaeology, anthropology and folklife and folklore studies. The process of defining 'charms against witchcraft'

appears to emerge with the human sciences in the second half of the nineteenth century and can be measured with the development of archaeology, physical and social anthropology, ethnology and folklore.[17] Much of the intellectual underpinning of these new disciplines depended on notions of race and racial characteristics and attributes. The Folklore Society was founded in 1878 for the study of popular culture and traditional life.

The number of donations of charms and amulets increased dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century and objects associated with or with attributes of witchcraft appeared particularly in the closing two decades. Examples are the 'witch's stone', a holed stone, formerly used in Roxburghshire as a charm against witchcraft [NMS NO 12], a written charm to cure toothache, purchased from a so-called professional witch at Kishorn, Lochcarron [NMS NO 18] (Fig. 10.4) and another example from Garve [NMS NO 19], a perforated stone hung in a cow byre at Cumbernauld to protect cattle from being bewitched [NMS NO 21] and several more of this type and background, and many river-washed stones and pebbles with generalised attributes as protective charms or association with so-called 'witches'.[18] It is clearly no

Figure 10.5 Water-worn and perforated stone or 'Mare Stone', hung on the bed of a fisherwoman in Stonehaven as a protection against nightmares, *c*.1885–1890. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

Figure 10.6 So-called 'Witch's Cursing Bone' from Glen Shira, Loch Fyneside, acquired by the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in 1943. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

coincidence that charms and amulets are associated with the safekeeping and productivity of livestock. Another protective device is a silver sixpence of George II (1757) from Pitsligo which was reputed to be put in the milk cog on first milking after calving to prevent witches stealing the milk [NMS NO 47]. More specifically attributed objects are the 'Witch's Cursing Bone' belonging to a 'witch' in Glen Shira, Loch Fyneside, passing through two pairs of hands before coming to the National Museum in 1943 [NMS NO 78] (Fig. 10.6), and two rowan wood crosses from Banffshire, bound with knotless red thread and worn within the lining of the clothes as a protection against witches [NMS NO 46 and 51]; what is perhaps not immediately evident in the record is that these latter items were made for the collections by the donor himself. Another enigmatic object is the 'Witch's Rope' [NMS NO 119] which is also connected with the charming away of the 'substance' of milk, a process for which there is fulsome evidence in seventeenth-century sources. What is questionable about its attribution is the mid-twentieth century source in which this is described:

> The witch usually operated by the method known as 'drawing the tether'. While tugging at a hair rope made by taking a hair from the

Figure 10.7 Watercolour painting of the *Clach Dearg* by James Drummond RSA (1817–1877), showing a rock crystal sphere mounted in a setting of four silver bands with a ring for suspension, Society of Antiquaries Manuscripts 384. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

> tail of every cow within reach and twisting them together, she muttered an incantation … the witch according to tradition had the power to draw all the milk from a neighbour's cow to her own pail.[19]

Recent acquisitions for the national collections were amulets that had belonged to a Perthshire family, the Murray Threiplands of Fingask. These included a 'charm' of three agate beads strung with a gold-mounted hardstone talisman, a string of amber beads (Fig. 10.8) and a snakeskin charm and talisman [NMS K.2001.851–853]. Labels showed that these items had been lent by the family to the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888. The sumptuous published account of the exhibition, *Scottish National Memorials*, enlarges considerably if perhaps not authoritatively on what is known about these pieces. The three agate beads were explained with: 'The number three was supposed to possess mystical value in the practices of sorcery and witchcraft', and a group of flint arrowheads was glossed with the comment: 'In accordance with their supernatural origin so was their mystical value, and no charm was so effective against the machinations of evil spirits and the spells of witches.'[20]

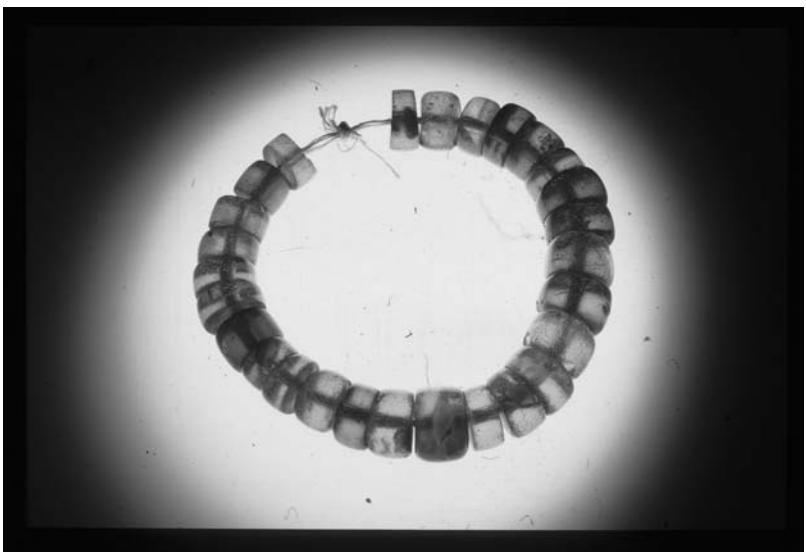

Figure 10.8 String of 27 amber beads used as an amulet. These so-called 'lammer beads' were highly regarded for their protective powers, especially among fishing communities, and were displayed and imaginatively described in the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

IV

What then of the witches themselves? Were they too being 'reconstructed' in the late nineteenth century? They are ill-defined in the museum records with few or no names of individuals or circumstantial evidence. Objects such as 'Maggie Lang's Snuff Mill' are too rare [NMS A.1905.1008 & A]. This curious object in the form of a small wooden cylinder, turned from the solid and with a tapered pestle formed as a lid for grinding tobacco leaves into a fine powder within the cylinder, has been enshrined in a museum collection for its association rather than attributed powers. Snuff mills were common enough but Margaret Lang was one of the Bargarran witches burnt at Paisley in 1697.[21] The letter attached to the snuff mill offers insight into nineteenth-century ideas, interests and attitudes, and is printed as an Appendix below. The writer, John Mitchell, was a Paisley man, co-author (with John Dickie, whom he mentions) of *The Philosophy of Witchcraft* (Paisley, 1839).

From time to time, witches come into sharp relief in unrelated sources, summoned up to fulfil the needs of new narratives of the past or to realise fears and fantasies. Some of the assumptions and condescensions of this era make chilling reading. An Orkney character of the 1890s, Annie Harper of Rendall parish, was a well-known and generally well-loved member of the community whose dress and 'gyaun-aboot' way of life were her memorial. But a photograph of her was published in 1901 in a collection 'Scottish Village Characters' with the following outrageous and unsubstantiated caption:

> The Village Witch of the Orkneys. She exercises a certain power and terror over her neighbours for the islanders are still very superstitious … And witchcraft is still so devoutly believed in, that love-lorn maidens come to ask the spaewife what shall betide them in the future, while evil happenings are freely attributed to her by others. And it was such a woman as this who, within memory of those still living, were ducked in ponds to test their supernatural power.[22]

Closer to the ground, attitudes were generally more kindly although objective comment is difficult to discern. G. K. Chesterton warned against the uncritical and ignorant belief in anything and everything as a corollary of a failure to believe in God, which makes the synopsis of Rev. John Gregorson Campbell (1836–1891) more useful and appealing. He was minister of Tiree from 1860, collector of folktales and tra-

ditional material, and author of a 'Witchcraft' collection published posthumously in 1902, in which he concluded that 'there is little repulsive or horrible in their character'. What could witches do, he asked? To which he supplied a ready and informed answer, no doubt to humour his readers:

> What could they not do? The classes of action however ascribed to them are not numerous. They could take the milk from their neighbours' cattle, bring fish to their own coasts, make fishermen successful, go to sea for fish themselves and bring home creelfulls, raise storms, sink ships, drown those who offended them. … It was in the name of the devil, and against the name of the Trinity, they set about their cantrips, but a knowledge of the necessary charms, and a courage to use them, seem to have been all that was requisite. Those having the reputation of being witches were (and are, for a few still survive) usually old women, destitute of friends and means of support, and naturally ready to eke out a miserable livelihood by working on the fears or the simplicity of their more prosperous neighbours.[23]

It may be no coincidence that the flow of donations of witchcraft charms reduced as welfare legislation and provision increased in the twentieth century.[24] New classes of professional practitioners might outlaw old-fashioned ways although science and reason would not curb the imagination. The art of healing continued to elude the science of definition and remained mobile on a spectrum of physiology to folk-belief.[25] Belief in witches has outlasted the earlier hunting of witches and in the nineteenth century 'most of the essentials of witch belief were present as they had always been'.[26] The same continuity has also brought us the artefacts associated with them but the evidence, as we have seen, is fractured.[27]

V

As a class, therefore, these objects are as much by-products of succeeding eras of museum collecting and of contemporary, often narrow artefact study as they are of chance finds or the accident of survival. Such objects, collected as archaic or exotic survivals, were (and still are) exhibited with a miscellany of artefacts or within a particular group of artefacts for comparison and contrast; thus the museum itself forms the way in which we perceive and judge objects. Location in the museum profoundly influences and modifies the way in which we perceive these objects, arguably to their detriment. Research suggests that the

objects' names may be partly or wholly unreliable. Publishers accept or connive at this process when, for the purposes of marketing a book, they include token references to material culture with an illustration or two of charms and amulets from museum collections; too often these appear to be randomly selected for their curiosity value and physical form and little attempt is made to explore the material culture otherwise in the text.

These objects and their display hold a mirror to their respective ages of collection, more so arguably than to the history, in the strict sense, of witches and witchcraft. Insights provided by these objects go beyond materials and supposed social contexts and take us into attitudes, preoccupations and even fears of the finders' own generation, backed up by sometimes spurious scholarship as well as by literature.[28] Museum displays may be constructed with the bona fide intention of educating and entertaining but the generally artificial grouping of these charms against witchcraft is deceptive and by and large unfortunately misleading. Viewed under glass in a display case, frisson is more immediate than enlightenment and myths are reinforced rather than dispelled.

Appendix

Manuscript letter accompanying NMS A.1905.1008 & A
Paisley 19th June 1854

Dear Sir

It is long since I should have given you an account of how I procured *Maggie Lang's Snuff Mill*. You will have it now however, and I will state to you nothing but plain facts. While my friend Mr John Dickie and I were canvasing for the Philosophy of Witchcraft an acquaintance of mine told me that a descendant of *Maggie Lang's* resided in the Parish of Erskine, and that he had a *snuff mill* that belonged to her when she was living and had been in the possession of the family ever since her death. Next day I went to the parish of Erskine and called on the person who had the relic of a woman whose name is celebrated over the whole country. I told him my errand, and he took me into the house and showed me the *Snuff Mill*. I was proud to see it, and after talking with him for some time about his ancestors, I told him that I was going to publish a work on Witchcraft he seemed surprised at it, and told me that if I was going to write about his great grandmother that I was to take the *Snuff Mill* home with me; I did so with pleasure, and it has been in my possession ever since, till I handed it to you. My friend Mr John Dickie – now dead – who assisted me in getting up the work, took it to London with him where he resided

some time, but when he came back to his native place it was handed back to me. My friend John Dickie wrote the Phrenological department of the work; he had lectured on that subject in all the towns and villages of the west, and I was always along with him. We had a merry year of it. We had never less than 30 heads of eminent men along with us which were exhibited in the lecture rooms every night. I will tell you more about it again. In the meantime I remain

Yours truly

John Mitchell
A. Roxburgh Esq
Paisley

Notes

1 See for evolving schemes of classification A. S. Bell (ed.), *The Scottish Antiquarian Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1981), 74, 147, 149.
2 These are discussed in H. Cheape, 'Charms and amulets', in L. Henderson (ed.), *Fantastical Imaginations: the Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture* (East Linton, forthcoming); see also H. Cheape, 'Lead hearts and runes of protection', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 18 (2006), 149–55.
3 'Communication from Joseph Train Esq, Castle Douglas', in Rev. John Whitson, Parish of Crossmichael, *New Statistical Account (Kirkcudbrightshire)*, iv (1845), 196. Another of Train's traditions is recounted in E. J. Cowan and L. Henderson, 'The last of the witches? The survival of Scottish witch belief', in J. Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), 215.
4 G. F. Black, 'Scottish charms and amulets', *PSAS*, 27 (1892–3), 433–526, at p. 456.
5 J. Jamieson, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, 4 vols., (ed.) J. Longmuir and D. Donaldson (Paisley, 1879–82), iii, 232, s.v. MARE-STANE.
6 See for example J. Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Oxford, 1922; repr. New York, 1976).
7 J. Miller, 'Devices and directions: folk healing aspects of witchcraft practice in seventeenth-century Scotland', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*; these are also explored in Cheape, 'Charms and amulets'. On charmers see also O. Davies, 'A comparative perspective on Scottish cunning-folk and charmers', Chapter 8 above.
8 A. Lang (ed.), *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies by Robert Kirk* (Stirling, 1933), 69, 76; Rev. J. Fraser, 'Notes on the superstitions, customs etc. of the Highlanders, 1702', *Analecta Scotica*, i (Edinburgh, 1834), 119; Black, 'Scottish charms and amulets', 462–8.
9 A. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present* (Edinburgh, 1880), 6.
10 'Communication from Joseph Train', 196.
11 *Catalogue of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland* (new edn, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 1892), 371.

12 J. A. Balfour (ed.), *The Book of Arran* (Arran Society of Glasgow, 1910), 294–5; see also evidence for charmers curing disease and supplying antidotes to witchcraft in Miller, 'Devices and directions', 91, 95–8, 104–5.
13 *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, 2 vols., (ed.) D. Douglas (Edinburgh, 1891), i, 350; Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (London, 1884), 273.
14 *The Black Book of Taymouth, with Other Papers from the Breadalbane Charter Room*, C. Innes (ed.) (Bannatyne Club, 1855), 346–7; cf. A. Macquarrie, *Scotland and the Crusades, 1095–1560* (Edinburgh, 1985), 93–5.
15 A. Stewart, 'Notice of a Highland charm-stone', *PSAS*, 24 (1889–90), 157–60, at pp. 157–8.
16 For documentation of the 'Lee Penny' being used in this way, see Davies, 'A comparative perspective on Scottish cunning-folk and charmers'.
17 This process is examined in R. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: a History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford, 1999), 132–50.
18 Such items are familiar in other museum collections; see for example R. W. Reid, *Illustrated Catalogue of the Anthropological Museum, Marischal College, University of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen, 1912), 50. Six 'witch stones' formerly belonging to the 'famous Ross-shire Witch' are in the collections of Inverness Museum (Catalogue no. 00/480). The 'Ross-shire witch' was Isabella Hay, on whom see J. Brims, 'The Ross-shire witchcraft case of 1822', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 5 (1989), 87–91.
19 F. M. McNeill, *The Silver Bough*, vol. i: *Scottish Folk-lore and Folk-belief* (Glasgow, 1957), 145.
20 J. Paton (ed.), *Scottish National Memorials: a Record of the Historical and Archaeological Collections in the Bishop's Castle, Glasgow, 1888* (Glasgow International Exhibition, 1890), 338, 340.
21 For the Bargarran witchcraft case see B. P. Levack, 'Demonic possession in early modern Scotland', Chapter 7 above, and references there cited.
22 Cited in '100 years ago in Country Life', *Country Life*, 4 Oct. 2001, 89.
23 R. Black (ed.), *The Gaelic Otherworld: John Gregorson Campbell's Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands* (Edinburgh, 2005), 173–4. Cf. L. Henderson, 'Witch-hunting and witch belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*', Chapter 4 above.
24 Some of the processes at work here are analysed for England by O. Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999), ch. 6.
25 A number of reports from general practitioners in the Highlands and Islands made sympathetic reference to traditional practices employed at childbirth: W. L. Mackenzie, *Scottish Mothers and Children, being a report on the physical welfare of mothers and children, Scotland* (Dunfermline: The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, 1917).
26 Cowan and Henderson, 'The last of the witches?', 215.
27 See for example H. Cheape, 'Cupping', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 10 (1996–7), 135–9.
28 This is analysed in some depth in Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*.

Further Reading

The standard work on Scottish witchcraft remains Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981), which has been reprinted more than once (most recently in 2000). It is complemented by four recent books. Stuart Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-Hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560–1710* (East Linton, 2002), looks at all aspects of witch-hunting within the framework of a regional study, and stresses the role of the church. P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton, 2001), focuses on magical practice in the period up to about 1597. Its tendency to treat witchcraft confessions and accusations as transparent accounts of real events has been criticised by several reviews, notably that in *Scottish Historical Review*, 82 (2003), 303–7, but this book has valuable material on a number of individual cases. It is followed by P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Abundance Of Witches: the Great Scottish Witch-Hunt* (Stroud, 2005), a more circumspect study of the period 1658–62 largely assembled from short narratives of individual cases. The fourth recent book is Julian Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), a predecessor of the present book. This includes a bibliographical essay discussing works that had appeared since Larner's classic study in 1981. There is also a more detailed review of the revival of Scottish witchcraft studies: Stuart Macdonald, '*Enemies of God* revisited: recent publications on Scottish witch-hunting', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 23 (2003), 65–84. This includes a full bibliography of publications from 1992 to 2002. The revival of scholarly interest signalled by these recent works has continued, and what follows is a survey of work done in the field since about 2002.

One significant work to appear recently is not a book but an online resource: Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller and Louise Yeoman, 'The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, 1563–1736' (www.shc.ed.ac.uk/ witches/, archived Jan. 2003, updated Nov. 2003). This consists of a database of all known witchcraft cases during the period when witchcraft was a secular criminal offence, with interactive online search forms and supporting material.

There have been a few studies of elite belief. The beliefs of the early Reformers, and their limited grasp of what went on in Scottish communities at the time of the passage of the witchcraft act in 1563, are the subject of Julian Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft act', *Church History*,

74 (2005), 39–67. This is complemented by a study of the single most prominent Reformer, John Knox, which points out his numerous contacts with witchcraft and particular interest in necromancy, but also the influence on him of folkloric narratives that could not facilitate witch-hunting: Julian Goodare, 'John Knox on demonology and witchcraft', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 96 (2005), 221–45. For Scotland's most prominent demonologist, King James, there is a new edition of his *Daemonologie* (1597) in King James VI & I, *Selected Writings*, (eds) Neil Rhodes, Jennifer Richards and Joseph Marshall (Aldershot, 2003). Keely Fisher, 'Eldritch comic verse in older Scots', in Sally Mapstone (ed.), *Older Scots Literature* (Edinburgh, 2005), includes a detailed study of a sixteenth-century parody of necromancy.

Recent studies of folk belief have concentrated on fairies and their relationship with witchcraft. Emma Wilby, 'The witch's familiar and the fairy in early modern England and Scotland', *Folklore*, 111 (2000), 283–305, notes points of similarity between English familiars and Scottish fairies; the two concepts are combined in Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Brighton, 2005). Some caveats on the concept of 'elfshot' are offered by Alaric Hall, 'Getting shot of elves: healing, witchcraft and fairies in the Scottish witchcraft trials', *Folklore*, 116 (2005), 19–36. P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, 'Witchcraft and magic in eighteenth-century Scotland', in Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt (eds), *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, 2004), 81–99, reviews a number of magical practices. Lizanne Henderson, 'The survival of witchcraft prosecutions and witch belief in South West Scotland', *Scottish Historical Review*, 85 (2006), 54–76, provides details from a regional study. A number of topics connected to witchcraft are discussed in Lizanne Henderson (ed.), *Fantastical Imaginations: the Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture* (East Linton, 2006, forthcoming).

Fresh light on a famous case of witchcraft and demonic possession is offered by Hugh McLachlan (ed.), *The Kirk, Satan and Salem: a History of the Witches of Renfrewshire* (Glasgow, 2006), an edition of documents on the Paisley witchcraft panic of 1697. On this see also Hugh McLachlan and Kim Swales, 'The bewitchment of Christian Shaw: a reassessment of the famous Paisley witchcraft case of 1697', in Yvonne G. Brown and Rona Ferguson (eds), *Twisted Sisters: Women, Crime and Deviance in Scotland since 1400* (East Linton, 2002), 54–83. This volume contains other chapters of interest, notably Gordon DesBrisay, 'Twisted by definition? Women under godly discipline in seventeenth-century Scottish towns', 137–55. Kirk sessions and their quest for godly discipline formed the

background to many witchcraft prosecutions. Godly discipline is the subject of Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, Conn., 2002). Although this book has little specifically on witchcraft it provides essential context for the subject. Another approach to contextualising witchcraft is taken by Lauren Martin, 'Witchcraft and family: what can witchcraft documents tell us about early modern Scottish family life?', *Scottish Tradition*, 27 (2002), 7–22, which moves out from the witchcraft trials themselves to the domestic context in which beliefs were held and accusations made.

There are a number of publications on witch-hunting. The much-repeated idea that special procedures were used for witch-hunting in the 1590s is criticised by Julian Goodare, 'The framework for Scottish witch-hunting in the 1590s', *Scottish Historical Review*, 81 (2002), 240–50. Michael Wasser, 'The privy council and the witches: the curtailment of witchcraft prosecutions in Scotland, 1597–1628', *Scottish Historical Review,* 82 (2003), 20–46, provides an important complement to the study of witchcraft panics by showing how prosecutions were restrained between the panics of 1597 and 1628–30. For the prosecutions of the 1640s there is John R. Young, 'The Scottish parliament and witch-hunting in Scotland under the covenanters', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 26 (2006), 53–66. Julian Goodare, 'Men and the witch-hunt in Scotland', in Alison Rowlands and Jenni Grundy (eds), *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe* (forthcoming), argues that there was more than one 'witchcraft stereotype' and that some male witches were conceived as having distinct roles; it also discusses men as witch-hunters. Torture is a much-discussed and complex issue: how often were witchcraft suspects tortured, and did sleep deprivation (the most common form of coercion) function as torture or count legally as torture? The issue is surveyed by Stuart Macdonald, 'Torture and the Scottish witch-hunt: a re-examination', *Scottish Tradition*, 27 (2002), 95–114. This is complemented by a study of judicial torture more generally: Brian P. Levack, 'Judicial torture in Scotland during the age of Mackenzie', *Stair Society Miscellany*, iv (2002), 185–98.

Further procedural issues are addressed by two important editions of texts: 'The trial of Geillis Johnstone for witchcraft, 1614', (eds) Michael B. Wasser and Louise A. Yeoman, and 'Witchcraft commissions from the register of commissions of the privy council of Scotland, 1630–1642', (ed.) Louise A. Yeoman, both in *Scottish History Society Miscellany*, xiii (2004), 83–145, 223–65. These editions also range more widely, providing fascinating material on popular beliefs and ritual practices, as well as the attitudes of clerical and legal elites to witchcraft.

Index

Asterisks denote persons accused of being witches. Numbers in **bold** denote illustrations.*