Between roughly 1450 and 1750, secular, Inquisitorial, and ecclesiastical courts across continental Europe, the British Isles, and the American colonies tried approximately 110,000 people for the crime of witchcraft, executing around 60,000. All historiography dealing with early modern witchcraft is concerned, on some level, with explaining why this happened. There is no shortage of interpretations: the last thirty years have seen the historical study of witchcraft transformed ‘from an esoteric byway into a regular concern of social, religious and intellectual historians’ who have carried out intensive, often interdisciplinary research in the archives of continental Europe, the British Isles, and the New World.

This mass of research has produced a variety of explanations for the so-called witch craze, including, but not limited to: the acculturation of the masses by the elite; state-building; and mass psychosis. One of the most contentious sets of interpretations concerns the relationship between witch-hunting and gender. Of the thousands of people tried and executed for the crime of witchcraft, 75 to 80 per cent were women. This distinctive feature of early modern witch-hunting aroused little scholarly comment until witchcraft studies entered their ‘golden age’ during the last quarter of the twentieth century; over time, however, the preponderance of women in this grim count has generated a complex, politicised debate over its significance.

Much valuable work illuminates the role of early modern notions of gender in witchcraft prosecutions. Unfortunately, the debate has tended...
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to polarise those scholars, mostly feminists, who argue that patriarchy and misogyny were primary causes of witch-hunting, and those scholars who resist feminist theories and interpretations.6 The female witch has become a site for struggles over historical method and feminist politics, but there is very little room in the research agenda for the male witch, even though men comprised 20 to 25 per cent of the total number of executed witches. What work there is on male witches tends to be limited, for the most part, to enumeration. Rigorous application of gender analysis to the male witch has so far been absent from the historiography.7

The exclusion of male witches from witchcraft historiography is the result of active processes and assumptions. With few exceptions, modern scholars see the witch as essentially female, and are not prepared to recognise male witches as valid historical subjects of the same importance as female witches. It is not that they are unaware of the existence of male witches. Most serious studies, including current surveys, mention male witches; however, the male witch vanishes quickly from view, as he is made invisible by a combination of rhetorical strategies. This exclusion, which inverts the elision of women from traditional history, is not restricted to feminist scholarship. Male scholars participate in the exclusion also – even when they present research that is specifically about male witches.

The debate itself is embedded within a strongly gendered discourse. For instance, it has become practically de rigueur to begin a ‘serious’ discussion of gender and witchcraft by skewering the most extreme examples of feminist interpretation one can find. The usual suspects are Margaret Murray, Andrea Dworkin, Mary Daly, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English.8 Diane Purkiss describes this process as a ‘ritual slaughter’ or rite of distastation designed to keep the academic’s masculine rationality at a safe distance from feminine irrationality and credulity.9 The kind of language that is often used supports her critique: for example, it is surely no accident that Robin Briggs refers in a conceptually insular fashion to ‘the wilder shores of the feminist and witch-cult movements’.10 His description characterises feminists and modern
pagans as irrational and uncivilised Others with whom Briggs does not wish to be identified. Even though he is referring specifically to the extreme positions, it is not a great leap to associate all members of the feminist and pagan movements with ‘wilder shores’, and thus to discredit them by implication. Claims to occupy a middle ground often revolve around a false doxon, the purpose of which is to create an illusion of cautious moderation.

For their part, feminist scholars are eager to point out male academics’ insensitivity to women and to gender issues. H.R. Trevor-Roper, Erik Midelfort, Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas have all been criticised for their interpretations of women as witches and witch-hunting, which implied at certain points that women were at fault. Trevor-Roper, for instance, wrote in a striking passage that

The Devil with his nightly visits, his succubi and incubi, his solemn pact which promised new power to gratify social and personal revenge, became ‘subjective reality’ to hysterical women in a harsh rural world or in artificial communities – in ill-regulated nunneries … or in special regions like the Pays de Labourd, where … the fishermen’s wives were left deserted for months. And because separate persons attached their illusions to the same imaginary pattern, they made that pattern real to others.¹¹

Here we have irrational women, improperly controlled by men, as the cause of the witch-hunts.¹² This is Trevor-Roper’s most detailed comment on the issue of women as witches. Erik Midelfort, writing about south-western Germany, devoted several pages to a discussion of why ‘witch panics almost always singled out adult women for special attention.’ He focused on demographic explanations, but remarked that ‘women seemed somehow to provoke an intense misogyny at times’ and that scapegoated groups attract to themselves the scapegoating mechanism.¹³

Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas, historians of witchcraft in England, also suggested that it was women’s behaviour that caused
suspicion to fall on them; however, they are criticised more often by feminists for denying a role for male–female conflict in witch-hunting. Thomas, for instance, stated that ‘the idea that witch-prosecutions reflected a war between the sexes must be discounted, not least because the victims and witnesses were themselves as likely to be women as men’.14

Anne Barstow’s views on these historians indicate the potential for polarisation between feminist and non-feminist accounts:

Historians were denying that misogyny and patriarchy are valid historical categories and were refusing to treat women as a recognizable historical group. Reading these works is like reading accounts of the Nazi holocaust in which everyone would agree that the majority of victims were Jewish, but no one would mention anti-Semitism or the history of violent persecution against Jews, thereby implying that it was ‘natural’ for Jews to be victims. Without mention of a tradition of oppression of women, the implication for the sixteenth century is that of course women would be attacked – and that it must somehow have been their fault.15

Although Trevor-Roper, Midelfort, Macfarlane and Thomas were sympathetic generally toward early modern witches, Barstow casts these scholars in the role of Holocaust deniers and, by implication, Nazi sympathisers. She is correct to point out these historians’ tendency to find fault with women’s behaviour; however, her characterisation, like Briggs’ description of feminists, asserts the apostolic authority of her own approach and, it could be argued, suggests that the non-feminist historians are irrational.16

Given the struggle for control over discourse about the female witch, one would expect to see something similar in connection with the male witch, but this is not the case. Male witches serve a useful function as spoilers of the more simplistic ‘witch-hunting as woman-hunting’ interpretations, but otherwise no one says much about them. Most of what is written about male witches stems directly from the conclusions

[ 28 ]
drawn by Alan Macfarlane, Erik Midelfort and William Monter in their early studies of Essex, southwestern Germany and the French-Swiss border region. These conclusions may be summarised as follows: a few men were accused of witchcraft, but they were usually related to a female suspect (Macfarlane); men were accused of witchcraft, sometimes in large numbers, but this happened only when a witch-hunt spiralled into a mass panic and the normal stereotype of the female witch broke down (Midelfort); men were accused of witchcraft, sometimes in large numbers, but this was because they lived in areas that conceptualised witchcraft as heresy (Monter).

Feminist and other scholars alike have quietly, sometimes silently, incorporated Macfarlane’s, Midelfort’s and Monter’s brief remarks into their own interpretations of witchcraft and gender. This commonality is possible because of a tacit agreement that male witches are neither as interesting nor as important as female witches and, furthermore, that they are not ‘proper’ witches. At the extreme, this attitude toward male witches is manifested in their simple erasure from analyses of witchcraft.

An essay by the medievalist Kathleen Biddick illustrates this erasure. In her discussion of Carlo Ginzburg’s book *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath*, she summarises his argument as follows:

For him, Inquisitorial persecution and popular notions of conspiracy are serial phenomena running in a kind of zigzag way from lepers to Jews to women over the fourteenth century. … In his study of the witches’ Sabbath, Ginzburg divided the possibilities for continuity and discontinuity among Jews and women in interesting ways. Jews seem to ‘disappear’ from the European imaginary, and women almost magically take their place [italics added].

This would not be an inaccurate synopsis, except that Biddick has substituted ‘women’ for ‘witches’. Ginzburg, unusually for witchcraft historians, always refers to both male and female witches. His scheme for the shifting targets of persecuting impulses is not ‘lepers to Jews to women’, but ‘lepers-Jews; Jews; Jews–witches’.19
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It is difficult to imagine how Biddick could have missed Ginzburg’s point that witches were, and were understood to be, both male and female. The very first words of the book are: ‘Male and female witches met at night’.20 In the chapter Biddick cites, Ginzburg says at one point that

Like the lepers and Jews, male and female witches are located at the margins of the community; their conspiracy is once again inspired by an external enemy – the enemy par excellence, the Devil. Inquisitors and lay judges will search for physical proof of the pact sealed with the Devil on the bodies of the male and female witches: the stigma that lepers and Jews carried sewn onto their clothing [italics added].21

Finally, on the very page that Biddick cites from that chapter, Ginzburg remarks that ‘For almost a century trials had been held against the sect of anthropophagous male and female witches’,22 Biddick either wilfully or unconsciously eliminated the male witches, who are out in plain sight in Ginzburg’s text. If she did this wilfully, distorting Ginzburg’s argument along the way, it suggests a remarkable degree of arrogance; if her erasure of male witches was unconscious, it indicates that her feminist optics contain a blind spot. Either way, Biddick’s inability to respect Ginzburg’s sense of the term ‘witch’ demonstrates the power of the paradigm of the female witch and the discomfort that scholars feel when confronted with male witches.

More commonly, especially in surveys, male witches are mentioned once or twice and then forgotten, and witches are referred to subsequently as if they were exclusively female. Keith Thomas, for example, draws his readers’ attention to the fact that some witches were men, but then switches to the feminine pronoun: ‘A witch was a person of either sex (but more often female) who could mysteriously injure other people. The damage she might do … could take various forms’.23 Anne Barstow presents a particularly objectionable version of this elision. After explaining that ‘[i]t is through an analysis of the percentage of women and men accused and of the percentage condemned that the gender bias of this persecution emerges’,24 she goes on to say:

[ 30 ]
Given the chaotic state of the records, the temptation to round off the numbers is strong. Yet I found myself carefully retaining each awkward figure, even though this added hours of work for each region I studied. As Joan Ringelheim, researcher of women in the Nazi holocaust, stated of her work, to drop numbers now is to kill these persons twice. Wanting to record every known victim, to ensure that the historical record finally acknowledges her death, I offer the most complete record available at this time [italics added].

Barstow envisions the dead witches as females only, even though she is well aware that thousands of men were also accused of and executed for the crime of witchcraft. According to her own standards, Barstow is killing some witches twice by speaking as if all witches were women.

One could defend Barstow’s indifference toward male witches on the grounds that she is performing the important task of writing women’s history. There is nothing wrong with focusing on women; however, there is something disturbing, on several levels, about an act of historiographical revenge that replicates, by inversion, the past neglect of women as historical subjects. To put the elision of male witches in perspective, one has only to read the words of Johannes Junius, who was executed as a witch in 1628. In a letter smuggled from prison, Junius wrote to his daughter:

Innocent I came to jail, innocent I was tortured, innocent I must die … the executioner [came], and put the thumbscrews on me, both hands bound together, so that the blood ran out at the nails and everywhere, so that for four weeks I could not use my hands … Thereafter they first stripped me, bound my hands behind me, and drew me up in the torture. Then I thought heaven and earth were at an end; eight times did they draw me up and let me fall again, so that I suffered horrible agony.

Junius’s letter illustrates graphically that both male and female witches could experience the same terrors, yet scholars such as Barstow seem to
privilege the suffering of women over that of men. In doing so, they are committing an injustice against certain historical subjects – human beings – solely on the basis of their (male) sex.

As troubling as open exclusions are, they are less problematic than the strategies that ‘declassify’ male witches. Men are discussed in terms that suggest they were essentially different, as witches, from women – and therefore not really witches at all. Sometimes this approach is blunt, as in Barstow’s assertion:

The fact that overall about 20 percent of the accused were male is less an indication that men were associated with witchcraft than it appears. Most of these men were related to women already convicted of sorcery … and thus were not perceived as originators of witchcraft. Of the few who were not related, most had criminal records for other felonies … witchcraft was not the original charge but was added on to make the initial accusation more heinous [original italics].

In her survey of early modern European women and gender, Merry Wiesner presents a variation of this argument, stating that ‘male suspects were generally relatives of the accused women’ and ‘[t]he men accused in mass panics were generally charged with different types of witchcraft than the women – of harming things in the male domain such as horses or crops rather than killing infants or spoiling bread – and only rarely accused of actions such as night-flying or pacts with the Devil.’ Although Barstow and Wiesner do discuss male witches in general terms, the effect of their description is to eliminate male witches as valid historical subjects by casting them as either mere collateral damage in the persecution of women, or as something completely different from female witches and therefore uninteresting.

William Monter performs a more subtle redirection in his study of male witches in Normandy. This important article is one of the most thorough discussions of male witches, and does much to challenge the notion that early modern witch beliefs and witch-hunting were directed
uniformly against women. Monter provides a wealth of data about male
witches, beginning with the fact that in this ‘unremarkable province’
close to ‘the heart of northern and western Europe’, men comprised the
majority of those tried and executed for witchcraft. What is more, the
proportion of male witches actually rose over time. Finally, Monter’s
research indicates that certain occupational groups – shepherds,
blacksmiths and clerics – were particularly vulnerable to witchcraft
accusations.

Monter’s study of Normandy is exciting because it offers concrete
evidence that early modern beliefs about witches were not necessarily
sex-specific. For example, both men and women were searched for
Devil’s marks, with men ‘as likely as women to display such anaes-
thetic spots.’ However, Monter suggests that ‘it was difficult to accom-
modate beliefs about the orgies at the witches’ sabbath to a
predominantly male population of witches’. Monter does not cite
any statements by the Rouen judges regarding the putative difficulty
of accommodating beliefs about the Sabbath with male witches, and
appears to be making a large assumption based on a relative lack of
questions about the Sabbath, despite the fact that both men and
women confessed to attending it. According to Monter, the lack of
judicial interest in the Sabbath was a means of ‘finessing’ the problem
of men attending these witches’ gatherings; however, it is also pos-
sible that this indicates merely a broader disinterest in this element of
witchcraft. Monter’s assumption that the judges in Rouen were con-
fused by the existence of male witches, even though they were con-
fronted by them in relatively large numbers, suggests that it is Monter,
the modern historian, who has difficulty accommodating male witches
within the paradigm of early modern diabolic witchcraft.

In the end, Monter reclassifies the male witches as heretics, thus
harking back to his 1976 conclusions about regions with large propor-
tions of male witches. The Normandy witches, especially the shep-
herds, were in the habit of using Eucharists to perform magic. Monter
argues that ‘the judges of Rouen inflicted such severe punishments on
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those shepherds … not because they were magicians, but because they profaned the eucharist, the body of Christ. This particular statement concerns the reason for the unusual severity of the Rouen Parlement toward male witches, not the reason for their existence in the first place; however, shortly before he makes this comment, Monter wonders ‘why Normandy put mainly male witches on trial’, then launches directly into his discussion of profaning the Eucharist.

There is some other useful research on male witches, although it tends to be embedded in works focusing on other issues. For example, Eva Labouvie begins her article on men’s roles in witch trials with a brief survey of the witchcraft literature, and takes exception to the ‘unrestrained feminist nature of the arguments in witchcraft scholarship of the 1970s, which was interested only in the role of women as victims in witchcraft trials.’ She concentrates on the differences between the sorts of magic men and women were thought to do, thought each other did, and were accused of; the cases are from the Saarland. She also mentions the many regions of what is now Austria and Switzerland where men were the majority of the accused and lists a number of important works for these regions. Labouvie notes that men were accused of certain kinds of witchcraft, mainly rooted in ‘agricultural everyday reality’ and male areas of responsibility (health and care of children and animals). Whereas women were accused of poisoning and ‘malevolent nurture’, men who used magic aimed to procure opposite effects (Segnerei: ‘blessing’; illness-curing magic, harvest, field and weather magic; professional healing magic) may have been less likely to be suspected of diabolical witchcraft. She ends with the idea that ‘the witchcraft trials that took place involving male village dwellers [in the Saarland] seem to have served in the main to regulate village power relations and conflict within the male sphere of tasks and duties, mainly within male areas of responsibility and activity’. Men were much more likely to accuse women of maleficium and of diabolical magic, even more than women were. Women accused men of diabolical magic, but men did not accuse other men of this; they tended to accuse men of the more traditional forms of male magic. Labouvie’s

[34]
The study suggests some intriguing avenues of investigation, especially with respect to the intersection of witchcraft accusations with gender roles; however, the overall point of the article has to do more with male participation in witch trials as accusers than with male witches.

Robin Briggs and Willem de Blécourt both have published studies that include and comment on male witches. However, Briggs concentrates on refuting the theory that witch-hunting was woman-hunting, and has little to say about male witches as witches; in his book chapter ‘Men against women: the gendering of witchcraft’, he focuses on female witches and accusers, and male witches play a minor role. In his important article ‘The making of the female witch: Reflections on witchcraft and gender in the early modern period’, de Blécourt has interesting things to say about male witches in the Netherlands, including the idea that there existed both male and female witch stereotypes. He raises the question of why ‘the making of the male witch is as neglected as his female counterpart’, but is, in this particular study, concerned primarily with the female witch. Despite his knowledge that ‘in some areas men were also at risk to be socially constructed as witches’, de Blécourt dismisses male witches by stating that ‘their witchcraft was usually of a different, less malevolent kind and hardly susceptible to prosecution.’

Stuart Clark’s interpretation of demonological views of gender and witchcraft offers the most striking instance of the invisibility of male witches. Demonological literature is a major source for the assumption that witch-hunting was primarily about persecuting women. Some researchers blame witchcraft treatises, particularly the infamous Malleus maleficarum of 1487, for the gender bias of witch-hunts that targeted women more often than men. Gerhild Scholz Williams, for example, has written: ‘Kramer’s Malleus Maleficarum gave the starting signal to a discourse on witchcraft and women that gathered momentum in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and realized its full destructive potential between the years 1580 and 1630.’ Sigrid Brauner took a similar view in her study of the construction of the witch-image in early modern Germany, arguing that the Malleus maleficarum...
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represented ‘a watershed in the history of the witch hunts’ because it marked the first time that a work on witchcraft as heresy argued that most witches were women. Implicit in both of these formulations is the view that the *Malleus* was a typical demonological work: fundamentally misogynist and responsible for the high percentage of female victims of witch trials.

In his studies of early modern demonology, Stuart Clark questions both the woman-hunting argument and the attribution of blame to demonologists. He points out that if witch-hunting was indeed a function of misogyny, then ‘we ought … to find woman-hating in abundance in those who most actively supported it. The problem is that we do not.’ According to Clark, ‘early modern demonologists showed little interest either in exploring the gender basis of witchcraft or in using it to denigrate women.’ They expressed negative attitudes toward women, but these were not unusual for the time and place. This is not to say that they were not misogynists – they were – but most witchcraft theorists were not much concerned with the subject of women as witches. Drawing on a cultural heritage of ideas about women, including Aristotle’s views about women as imperfect men, and the clerical misogyny of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the authors of demonological treatises took women’s ‘greater propensity to demonism’ for granted, and ‘felt no need to elaborate on it or indulge in additional woman-hating to back it up.’ As Clark argues, the femininity of the witch was ‘more of a presupposition than a problem’ for witchcraft theorists.

Of course, this does not mean that misogyny had nothing to do with the association of witchcraft with women. But Clark suggests that this association operated at a fundamental conceptual level that went deeper than the social or material surface of early modern culture. He argues that a conceptual affinity between witchcraft and women made it ‘literally unthinkable … that witches should be male.’ This affinity derived, he argues, from the binary structure of early modern European thinking, which classified everything according to a dual symbolic system. Within this system, the male/female polarity was a primary, hierarchically weighted form of
symbolic differentiation. In a nutshell, men were ‘symbolically associated
with a range of other positive items and categories, and women with their
negative counterparts.’ Rationality, for instance, a ‘positive’ trait associated
with men, had its ‘negative’ counterpart, irrationality – which was associ-
ated with women. These polarised associations were not necessarily antag-
onistic; they were often complementary. Nevertheless, women were seen,
he argues, as fundamentally negative opposites to men in all their physical,
intellectual, emotional, and spiritual attributes.48

Witches, and witchcraft, were thought of as wholly negative, as
inversions of everything good. According to Clark, their negative, inver-
sionary ‘position’ within the binary cognitive framework of early
modern Europe placed them, by definition, on the female side of the
male/female polarity. Clark argues:

At a demonological level … witches were female because the rep-
resentational system governing them required for its coherence a
general correlation between such primary oppositions as
good/evil, order/disorder, soul/body, and male/female; they were
females who, by behaviour inspired by the master of inversion, the
Devil, inverted the polarized attributes accorded to the genders in
later medieval and early modern learned culture; and of these sub-
versives, they were thought to be the most extreme and the most
dangerous.49

Clark’s structuralist thesis works well as an explanation of why
witchcraft was generally linked with women; however, it does not
explain why demonological treatises, like witchcraft accusations,
include male witches. If the conceptual correlation between witches
and women was as strong as Clark suggests, then it is very difficult to
explain why early modern writers about witchcraft seemed to have no
trouble imagining, discussing, and fearing male witches. Why, if the
link was so clear and logical, were there any male witches at all?50
Clark’s assertion that the binary structure made it unthinkable that
witches should be male simply does not correspond to the frequent
references to male witches in the demonological treatises, as we demonstrate in chapter four.

Why are historians so reluctant to take male witches seriously in their analyses of gender and witchcraft? In the case of some feminist scholars, the answer is probably relatively simple: they do not consider the persecution of men to be as important as the oppression of women, and the male witch does not carry the same symbolic power for them as the female witch does. Furthermore, paying too much attention to male witches might diminish the role and significance of women in early modern witchcraft historiography. For other scholars, the male witch might represent an unwelcome link between the modern academic and the irrational. Excluding the male witch from witchcraft historiography betrays a need to distance the modern (male) academic from a witch-figure that has been constructed over time as a symbol of superstition, femininity and powerlessness. The male witch threatens this image by confusing the tidy links between femininity and witchcraft; he also threatens the self-image of the academic, who needs to represent the witch as his Other.51 Yet others might simply be afraid of addressing the issue in print, given the assiduous polemics conducted in the commercial witchabilia industry.

We need to overcome this tendency to polarise, and to reconceptualise the nature of interlacing gendered oppositions in both modern and early modern culture. The male witch provides a means of exposing our assumptions and developing more nuanced understandings of the relationship between masculinity, femininity and witchcraft.

Notes

1 Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 25. Estimates of the number of trials and executions vary, and figures such as Levack’s represent a combination of hard data and ‘allowances’ for missing records. Levack’s numbers have been accepted as reasonable, if conservative, by the general community of scholars working on this topic.
2 Robin Briggs, “‘Many reasons why’: Witchcraft and the problem of multiple explanation”, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 49–63: 49.


5 See e.g. Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze*.

6 We do not mean to suggest that feminist (or non-feminist) interpretations are uniform. There is considerable range in feminist analyses, from simplistic readings of witchcraft trials as the result of unmediated male hatred of women, to sensitive and nuanced work on women’s ideas about witchcraft as they related to women’s identities. We have not commented in depth on most of these studies because they have little or nothing to say about male witches, though they have important things to say about female witches: see e.g. Dolan, ‘Witchcraft and the threat of the familiar’; Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1987); Purkiss, *The Witch in History*; Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*; Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999 [1997]); Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

7 One of only a few exceptions is the excellent article by Eva Labouvie, ‘Männer im Hexenprozess: Zur Sozialanthropologie eines “männlichen” Verständnisses von Magie und Hexerei’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 16 (1990), 56–78.

8 On Margaret Murray, see our Introduction. Andrea Dworkin is best known in the context of witchcraft studies for her claim that nine million women were burned as witches: see *Woman-Hating* (New York: Dutton, 1974). Ehrenreich and English are known for their theory that witch-hunting was a systematic attempt by male doctors to eradicate women’s medicine, especially midwifery: *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1973; London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1973).


11 Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze*, 120.
There can be no doubt that in early modern Europe, male honour, potency and social credit were based on ability to control ‘their’ women, and that whoredom, adultery and the like were often seen as perilously close to witchcraft – not least because of the implications of love magic. See Susan Dewar Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); Barbara Brown, *Good Wives*; Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), esp. p. 66. However, this does not mean that widespread anxiety over uncontrolled women necessarily furnishes us with a general theory of witchcraft accusations. 


This statement could be read another way, namely, that Barstow views non-feminist male historians as rational in a pejorative sense. This would be consistent with certain feminist theories about the link between (negative) rationality and patriarchy, as well as with interpretations of the Nazi Holocaust as a product of modernisation and rationalism. Unfortunately, Barstow does not offer a discussion of her views on rationality and Nazism. We infer, however, from her tone and her use elsewhere of expressions such as ‘orgy of hatred’ (*ibid.*, 54) that she interprets witch-hunting as irrational; her close association of the ‘witch craze’ with the Nazi Holocaust would therefore make the latter a product of irrationality also. For brief but useful discussions of Holocaust historiography, see Saul Friedländer, ‘The extermination of the European Jews in historiography: Fifty years later’ and Omer Bartov, ‘German soldiers and the Holocaust: Historiography, research and implications’, *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, ed. Omer Bartov (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 79–91 and 162–184.

18 Kathleen Biddick, ‘The Devil’s anal eye: Inquisitorial optics and ethnographic authority’, The Shock of Medievalism (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 105–134: 131. Biddick’s remarks about witchcraft are based almost entirely on a rather selective reading of the Malleus maleficarum, not, as far as we can tell, on any independent study of archival material. She has some interesting things to say about the construction of ethnographic authority by Inquisitors and modern microhistorians; however, she offers no comment on her own reading practices or justification for altering the sense of Ginzburg’s arguments.

19 Ginzburg, Ecstasies, 71.

20 Ibid., 1.

21 Ibid., 72.

22 Ibid., 76.

23 Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 519.


25 Ibid., 22. Given that Barstow’s work is a synthesis of others’ research, and seems to have involved no additional archival research whatsoever, her comment about the state of the records is misleading and self-important. Purkiss remarks that the appropriation of the Holocaust by radical feminists shows that ‘the narrative of the Holocaust has become the paradigmatic narrative for understanding atrocity in the late twentieth century’, something which, as she points out, is ‘deeply problematic’ as both history and politics. See The Witch in History, 16–17. Despite her clear aim to ‘debunk’ the Burning Times myth of a women’s holocaust, Purkiss fails to mention male witches.


27 Barstow, Witchcraze, 24.


37 Labouvie, ‘Männer im Hexenprozess’, 58: ‘die uneingeschränkt feminis-tisch argumentierende Hexendiskussion der 70er Jahre, die ausschliesslich Wert auf die Perspektive der Opferrolle von Frauen in Hexenprozessen legt’.


40 Briggs, Witches and Neighbors, 257–286.

41 de Blécourt, ‘The making of the female witch’, 298.

42 Ibid., 293.


45 Clark, Thinking With Demons, 112.

46 Ibid., 117.

47 Ibid., 130.

48 Ibid., 119–123.

49 Ibid., 33.

50 Malcolm Gaskill poses the same question in his article ‘The Devil in the shape of a man’.

51 We have drawn on Diane Purkiss’s analysis of modern academics’ relationship to witches, The Witch in History, esp. 60–67.