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Witchcraft:
the formation of belief
- part two

In the previous chapter we examined how motifs drawn from traditional beliefs about spectral night-traveling women informed the construction of learned witch categories in the late Middle Ages. Although the precise manner in which these motifs were utilized differed between authorities, two general mental habits set off fifteenth-century witch-theorists from earlier writers. First, they elided the distinctions between previously discrete sets of beliefs to create a substantially new category (“witch,” variously defined), with which to carry out subsequent analysis. Second, they increasingly insisted upon the objective reality of their conceptions of witchcraft. In this chapter we take up a rather different set of ideas, all of which, from the clerical perspective, revolved around the idea of direct or indirect commerce with the devil: heresy, black magic, and superstition. Nonetheless, here again the processes of assimilation and reification strongly influenced how these concepts impinged upon categories of witchcraft.

Heresy and the diabolic cult

Informed opinion in the late Middle Ages was in unusual agreement that witches, no matter how they were defined, were heretics, and that their activities were the legitimate subjects of inquisitorial inquiry. The history of this consensus has been thoroughly examined, and need not long concern us here. Instead, let us examine how the witch-theorists of the fifteenth century used ideas associated with heresy and heretics to construct their image of witches. This is a problem of several dimensions, involving both the legal and theological approaches to heresy and to magic, and the related but broader question of why heretics were conflated with magicians, malefici, and night-travelers in the first place.
Part of the solution to this problem is related to the idea of the demonic pact. Magic, from a very early point in Christian history, was closely related to idolatry: magicians received their powers in return for their worship of pagan idols, who were, of course, really devils. So Pharaoh’s magicians were able to work their wonders. With paganism dead or dying, demons could, at times, afford to eliminate their now extraneous idols, and insist that they receive service directly in return for their magical gifts. In the endlessly popular story of Theophilus, the devil required the unfortunate man to produce a written pact in which he explicitly repudiated the Christian God. Like Theophilus, a given magician might come by his power either through an explicit pact, or, like the sorcerers of Pharaoh, through some pagan observance in which the devil was not directly named. This distinction, between an open or manifest pact, in which the operator made an explicit bargain with the devil, and a tacit pact, in which the participation of the devil was concealed, was important, but in either case the devil was always involved.

Augustine himself had strongly suggested that any accommodation between man and devil implied some kind of pact and the denial of God. In De Doctrina Christiana, he concludes a lengthy denunciation of various magical and superstitious observances with a passage critical to the medieval understanding of magic:

Therefore all arts pertaining to this kind of trifling or noxious superstition constituted on the basis of a pestiferous association of men and demons as if through a pact of faithless and deceitful friendship should be completely repudiated and avoided by the Christian, “not that the idol is anything,” as the Apostle says, but because “the things which heathens sacrifice they sacrifice to devils, and not to God.”

The practice of magic, then, was very close to apostasy in Augustine’s opinion, as it would be for most churchmen throughout the Middle Ages. There were exceptions, but not many: in Aquinas’s view all magic accomplished through “invocations, conjurations, sacrifices, fumigations, and adorations” implied a pact with the devil and apostasy. Such a stance left a tenuous opening for legitimate natural magic which relied upon the occult properties of heavenly bodies, herbs, and stones, but, as Aquinas noted, even such seemingly legitimate practices all too often simply disguised the presence of demons.

Because magic depended upon a diabolic pact inconsistent with Christian faith, the practice of magic was always potentially heretical, and this identification became more common over time. In 1257, for example, Pope Alexander IV specifically prohibited inquisitors from prosecuting simple sorcery unless it savored of manifest heresy, yet by 1400 the papacy was prepared to admit that manifest heresy was present in virtually all sorcery, and
that the inquisition ought to be involved when it was discovered. \(^6\) Ritual magic, practiced by more or less learned men and involving the explicit invocation of demons, was the first target of the Church’s campaign against magic, because both the practitioners themselves and their errors of faith were more visible than were those of less erudite magicians. In theory, however, all were guilty of similar offenses, and so workers of *maleficia* were increasingly identified as heretics from the thirteenth century onwards. *Maleficia* was classified as a form of heresy in the laws of Frederick II, for example, because it depended upon a pact with demons. \(^7\) Even more influential for churchmen was the common gloss on Exodus 22:18, “You shall not suffer witches [maleficos] to live”:

Understand that witches who work deceptions of the magic art and diabolical illusions are heretics, who should be excommunicated from the company of the faithful, who truly live, until the *maleficium* of their error shall die in them. \(^8\)

Although in the thirteenth century, this biblical injunction was not taken literally, the gloss made clear to every literate cleric that malign magic was heresy and had to be treated accordingly. Hence, by the early fifteenth century, virtually any form of magic, including comparatively benign medicinal spells, could technically be used as evidence of heretical belief.

At the same time, heresy itself acquired new and increasingly sinister connotations. In the late twelfth century, Walter Map warns that the ancient heresy of the Publicans and Paterines has recently won many adherents. These heretics assemble at night and wait for a huge black cat, descending on a rope suspended in mid-air, to appear in their midst. At this time they extinguish all lights and adore the beast with kisses on its feet, anus, and genitals, as a prelude to an indiscriminate orgy. \(^9\) This story gives an early version of the Sabbat, the diabolic assembly which would become closely associated with the late-medieval witch. The Sabbat was an enormously popular and successful piece of slanderous propaganda, which, in its most elaborate form, contained six basic elements: (1) On the appointed night, the sectaries assembled at a remote or concealed site, often flying or riding demonic animals; (2) once there, they summoned the devil in one of his many forms, and worshiped him in disgusting or humiliating ways, most characteristically by the obscene kiss; (3) at the devil’s command, they renounced Christ in graphic fashion, trampling on or otherwise abusing the host; (4) they slaughtered infants or children, who were brought along for this purpose, and put their flesh to some foul and often magical use; (5) they indulged in a high-spirited revel, eating, drinking, and dancing, until the evening’s festivities were concluded with an orgy (6), in which they violated as many sexual conventions as the fertile imagination of the narrator could devise. \(^10\)
As heretics became progressively more demonized, the diabolic cult and the Sabbat became an increasingly important part of the general understanding of what heretics were. When these aspects of heresy came to overshadow doctrinal errors, when a close association with the devil, not specific errors of faith, determined the presence of heresy, the category “heretic” could be disassociated from the persons of “real” heretics. That is, if attendance at the Sabbat, infanticide, and the obscene kiss were the principal determining characteristics of heresy, then the average Waldensian resembled a “heretic” no more than anyone else.  

11 Heretics, magicians, malevolent lamiae, and the bonae res, all belonged to ill-defined categories that shared a close association with demonic power, and so it is unsurprising that their boundaries might blur, and aspects of one spill over into the others.

In an interesting example, Stephen of Bourbon tells of some suspected heretics that he was summoned to investigate.  

12 One of the prisoners confessed that she and many others had assembled at night in a subterranean place, gathered around a basin of water in which a lance had been placed upright, and there summoned Lucifer by his beard. At the adjuration, a huge cat descended the lance, and after a few additional preliminaries, the lights were again extinguished for the promiscuous orgy. Although, in general terms, Stephen corroborates Walter’s account, he is openly skeptical, and suggests that the woman’s entire testimony is based upon a delusion, sent to her in a dream by the devil. “To this error, which arises in sleep,” he continues, “pertsains the error of those women who say that during the night they walk and ride on certain beasts with Diana and Herodias and other persons they call the bonae res.”  

13 At the same time, and for no clear reason, he calls the suspects malefici, illustrating how tangled and intertwined these categories could become, even in the mind of learned inquisitor.

Similarly, around 1435, an anonymous inquisitor wrote a short tract describing his encounter with heretics, which he called The Errors of the Gazarii or of those who are shown to ride on a staff or a broomstick.  

15 Now gazarri is simply an Italianate variant of “Cathars,” as the author surely knew, but what is interesting is that he identifies these heretics in the second place by their magical flight on wooden beams, a mode of locomotion that had, in the past, been a monopoly of the women who went out with the bonae res. Furthermore, this sect had no visible resemblance to conventional Cathars at all. Initiates to the sect were presented to the devil, who appeared either as a black cat, or as a misshapen man. They were required to make a detailed oath of allegiance, consisting of seven points: they swore to keep faith with the master and with the entire society, to recruit as many new members as possible, to reveal none of the society’s secrets even till death, to kill all the children of up to three years of age that they could and to bring the bodies to their meetings, to hasten to
the assembly whenever called, to impede all marriages through magic and maleficium, and, finally, to avenge any injuries done to the sect or its members. At their meetings, or synagoga, the sectaries gave the devil the obscene kiss on the buttocks or anus (depending upon his chosen form) in token of homage, after which they enjoyed a banquet of roasted children. An orgy in darkness followed, in which “one man joins carnally with one woman, or a man with another man, and sometimes father with daughter, son with mother, brother with sister, and every law of nature is violated.” Finally, everyone ritually defecated into a cask in despite of the Eucharist and then returned home. The author learned all of this from the confessions of the sectaries themselves, who were seduced into this evil either by their carnal lusts, their abject poverty, or their fear of powerful enemies.

These were heretics defined not by their intellectual errors but by their membership in a secret society, by their demonolatry, and by their explicit pact with the devil. They won converts not by seductive arguments and preaching, but by the promise of occult powers. Black magic was an integral part of their program. At their meetings, the devil gave each member a variety of magical pharmaceuticals: a flying ointment made from boiled children, a venomous goo which caused death when touched, and powders which caused disease or sterility when scattered in the air. Sometimes the devil even led his followers on field trips to the mountains where each malefactor gathered up a load of ice to drop from the air upon unsuspecting farms. Their oath of allegiance highlighted the importance of magic to the sect, since, for no obvious reason, initiates were required to swear to use their magical powers to “impede” marriage. Nor was it any accident that this is precisely the kind of magic most often associated with village wizards: impotence, sterility, and marital discord were all caused by the magic of envious and hostile sorcerers, whose identities were seldom totally mysterious. In these ways, although in other respects the existence of the sect was a closely guarded secret, magic made the identification of the heretics possible. As the inquisitor comments, the heretics were always careful to appear as good Christians, and that, “those of the sect seem to be better than the other faithful, and they commonly hear mass, and confess often during the year; and they frequently take sacred communion.” Their obsession with malign magic, however, provided a potential weakness in their carefully constructed identities that an inquisitor could exploit.

A similar grounding in popular culture was possible through the assimilation of motifs drawn from traditional beliefs about night flying women and the demonolatrous sect of malefici. An early and interesting example appears around 1436 in the account of a magistrate in the Dauphiné, Claude Tholasan. Tholosan had been involved in a series of trials, which began around 1425 and
would continue for almost twenty years, in which authorities made extensive use of models of witchcraft patterned closely after conceptions of the diabolic cult.\(^{19}\) He reports that he had encountered witches having exactly the same cannibalistic tendencies as more “conventional” heretics. When these witches successfully summoned the devil,

> they place their knees to the ground, and kiss the devil, who commonly appears to them in the form of a man and of many kinds of animals, and they kiss him on the mouth, giving their own body and soul and one of their children, especially their first born, whom they burn and sacrifice; on bended knees they hold it naked under the arms and shoulders and, at last, kill it, and afterwards exhume the remains and with that, and with other things described below, they make a powder.\(^ {20}\)

This powder the witches used as the basic ingredient in their various poisons with which they worked their malign magic.

Tholosan’s witches themselves, however, told a rather different story. They claimed (he says) that they went out at night, usually on Thursday, in the company of devils, and strangled children or visited them with some sickness. From these children they drew out food which they boiled and ate.\(^ {21}\) They would then fly upon brooms smeared with the fat of their victims to a banquet presided over by a devil, where they could eat and drink as much as they wished without ever diminishing anything. But all this, Tholosan tells us, was an illusion of the devil; the reality – although scarcely more plausible – was the conventional diabolic Sabbat. What we seem to have here, then, is a remarkably straightforward instance of a learned magistrate deliberately “making sense” of testimony grounded ultimately in traditional belief by imposing the roughly similar conceptual template provided by accounts of diabolic heresy.

As Tholosan’s testimony reveals, the witch’s proclivity for infanticide was an important element of her definition. This was an especially “unthinkable” aspect of her persona but one on which most commentators were in unusual agreement; on the other hand, the precise manner in which the witch’s anthrophagy was understood varied widely. As we have already observed, authors such as Girolamo Visconti, who constructed witchcraft largely on the basis of traditional representations of *lamiae* and *strigae*, logically interpreted the witch’s cannibalism on that basis. Men like Tholosan, however, who viewed witchcraft as a kind of diabolic sect, looked to quite different sources for their understanding of child-murder. For, as Norman Cohn has pointed out, accusations of ritual infanticide had a lengthy history as part of a traditional derogatory stereotype, one which may be used to demonize almost any allegedly subversive group.\(^ {22}\) By the late Middle Ages, heretics had been accused of can-
nibalistic practices for years. As early as the late eleventh century, a Benedictine monk of Chartres described in elaborate detail the disgusting rites of a heretical cult in terms which would have been immediately familiar to witch-hunters four centuries later. When the celebrants had all assembled, he writes, like merry-makers they chanted the names of demons until suddenly they saw descend among them a demon in the likeness of some sort of little beast. As soon as the apparition was visible to everyone, all the lights were forthwith extinguished and each, with the least possible delay, seized the woman who first came to hand, to abuse her without thought of sin.23

If a child was produced during one of these blasphemous coupleings, the heretics murdered it and burned its corpse to ashes. Although this account accords perfectly with other stereotypical relations of the Sabbat, its author uses an accusation of cannibalistic infanticide as much more than simply a useful defamatory topos: here, the cannibalism of the heretics was expressly a diabolic parody of the Eucharist. The heretics carefully gathered the child’s ashes and preserved them “with as great veneration as Christian reverence is wont to guard the body of Christ” and gave them as a viaticum to the dying. Nor was their rite devoid of efficacy, for, as our author relates,

such power of devilish fraud was in these ashes that whoever had been imbued with the aforesaid heresy and had partaken of no matter how small a portion of them was scarcely ever afterward able to direct the course of his thought from this heresy to the path of truth.24

From the ashes of dead children the heretics received their diabolic grace.

With minor variations, fifteenth-century witch-theorists utilized this same motif in their elaboration of the diabolic Sabbat. Peter of Bern reported to Nider that certain malefici in Lausanne cooked and ate their own children, and in Bern, thirteen children were devoured by witches. One female witch in particular testified to practices which vividly recall to mind the description of heretical infanticide reported at Chartres over three centuries before:

We attack unbaptized children, and even baptized ones, especially if they are not guarded with the sign of the cross and with prayers. With our ceremonies we kill infants in their cradles or by the side of their parents, who are then thought to have been smothered or killed by another cause. We secretly steal their bodies from their graves, boil them in a cauldron until their whole flesh is separated from the bones and rendered suckable and drinkable. Of the solid matter we make an ointment which accomplishes our desires, our art, and our transformations; with the liquid or fluid we fill a flask or skin bottle, and he who drinks it, with a few ceremonies, at once understands and is a master of our sect.25
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A captured male witch confirmed this account, testifying that whoever partakes of this abominable potion, "he feels at once within him that he understands and retains the image of our art and the principal rites of this sect." It is not necessary to assume that this similarity between quite disparate sources depended completely upon a well-known stereotype inherited from lurid tales of heresies past; it is equally possible that this is another indication that the categories "witch" and "heretic" occupied very similar conceptual spaces in the minds of clerical authorities. Cannibalism is, of course, a devastating inversion of social norms, and the witch, like the heretic, was constructed to be the embodiment of anti-social vice and deviance: "Hence the inverted witch stereotype includes all manner of sexual perversion, incest, and the ultimate denial of human sociability and commensality – cannibalism." But cannibalism is also a powerful sign, and an indicator of contact with the supernatural: the image of "cannibalism," provides, "a device through which the unthinkable (eating people) gives form to the otherwise inconceivable substance of the relationship to oneself and to the supernatural." For this reason, any discussion of cannibalism in late-medieval Europe evoked disturbingly anomalous images of the eucharistic feast and of diabolical infanticide and anthropophagous orgies. In each case the consumption of human flesh was the sign of an effective relationship with the supernatural, and of participation in a community composed of both corporeal and spiritual beings. It made sense, then, that the most powerful witches described in the *Malleus* were those who, "contrary to the inclinations of human nature, indeed, contrary to the nature of every wild beast . . . , [were] accustomed to greedily devour and eat children of their own kind." Accusations of cannibalism and child-murder, then, became a powerful and evocative symbol in the hands of witch-theorists, a symbol of the witch’s identity with the devil, her spiritual depravity, and her responsibility for a particularly awful form of concrete social harm. More than this, however, because infanticide had become a recognized complement to the denial of the faith, a trait shared by all the diabolized enemies of Christendom, accusations of child-murder served to create (or reinforce) the conceptual links between notions of heresy and witchcraft. When categories are collapsed into symbolic representations of the “demonized other,” it becomes difficult, if not pointless, to distinguish between various “others.”

The effects of this category collapse upon the development of witchcraft become clear when we compare the account of the Sabbat in the *Malleus* with that in its source, Nider’s *Formicarius*. Institoris and Sprenger are in fact surprisingly unfamiliar with the conventional details of the witch’s Sabbat – they seem completely unaware of the prosecutions in France and the Savoy in which the Sabbat occupied such a prominent place – and instead depend almost entirely upon Nider’s account of Swiss witches for their knowledge of their
regular conclaves. As a typical example, they recount the confession of a penitent witch examined by Peter of Bern. The initiate, they say, enters an unoccupied church with the leaders of the diabolical congregation,

and in their presence he denies Christ, his faith, baptism, and the universal Church. Then he pays homage to the magisterulus, that is, the little master, for thus and not otherwise they call the devil . . . Afterwards he drinks from the skin mentioned earlier.32

Their narrative is almost Nider verbatim, but the exception is interesting: in the ellipsis they explain that it makes no difference to the oath of homage whether the devil is actually present at the ceremony. Sometimes the devil is worried that the initiate might be (understandably) alarmed by the real presence of a demon during his abnegation of the faith, and so he simply fails to appear. When this happens, the other witches refer to the devil in absentia in gentle and benign terms as the “little master” to allay fears and suspicion. In either case, the pact is fully valid and binding. This addition is significant, since where Nider clearly felt that the material presence of the devil was a necessary prerequisite for the ceremony, Institoris and Sprenger are prepared to elide him entirely from the proceedings. Because the devil is unnecessary to the Sabbath, in the Malleus the Sabbath is an entirely unnecessary adjunct to witchcraft.

It seems unreasonable to suppose that Institoris and Sprenger were completely ignorant of the alternative constructions of witchcraft current at the time. Both were men of wide experience within the Dominican order, and surely had at least heard oral reports of the diabolic Sabbath so graphically described by their French colleagues. Further, the calculated reservations which circumscribe their own account of the sect of witches suggest a deliberate attempt to step back from Nider’s more restrained notions of witches’ conclaves and devil worship. There are several possible explanations for why the authors should want to do this, beginning with the reciprocal relationship between theoretical notions of witchcraft and the persons actually identified as witches.

When the cult of the devil was the most important element of witchcraft, it was invariably composed of both men and women. In fact, Jacquier made the point explicitly that while the canon Episcopi spoke of women alone deluded by the devil, “In this sect or synagogue of sorcerers, not only women but men also assemble, and what is worse, ecclesiastics and religious, who stand and talk perceptibly with demons.”33 Institoris and Sprenger, on the other hand, were convinced that witchcraft was a vice restricted almost entirely to women, and especially women of the lower class. Clergy, in their view, were never potential witches. Along similar lines, most authors seem to have been
fully aware that heretical communities tended by their very nature to be text-based, and descriptions of heretical cults routinely included references to their texts and writings. Thus, notions of witchcraft centered upon the image of the diabolic cult easily accommodated literate, educated witches. Jacquier, for example, recalled that “around twenty years ago, a certain great baron of France secretly strangled around twenty children, so that he might write a book in honor of the devil with their blood.” Institoris and Sprenger, however, argue that “this kind of superstition [witchcraft] is not practiced in books or by the learned but entirely by the ignorant.” Their conception of witchcraft, in other words, was not centered upon an assemblage of motifs derived from images of heresy, so much as upon actual women. However they defined what witchcraft was, it had to remain consistent with the women whom they had identified as witches in the course of their own witch-hunting experience.

Furthermore, although Institoris and Sprenger may have had a very restricted notion of who were potential witches, their conception of witchcraft was very expansive. Because witchcraft in the Flagellum Haereticorum and theErrores Gazariorum was so tightly focused on the Sabbat and diabolical heresy, these works excluded the plain, garden variety of malefici from consideration. Institoris and Sprenger developed an inherently more useful category through the simple determination that malefica and witch were precisely the same thing. To make this identification, however, they admitted an astonishingly wide array of practices and behaviors: magic of almost any kind, rumors of animal transformation, stories of fairies or changelings, magical flight, the evil eye, all could be interpreted as direct evidence of witchcraft. Because the fascinarii and gazarii were theoretically defined by their participation in a non-existent cult, their identification in practical terms tended to be quite arbitrary. In contrast, Institoris and Sprenger were able to build upon already existing social mechanisms to identify witches “accurately.” Witchcraft in the Malleus was thus much more centered upon the witch herself than were competing notions centered upon the Sabbat. For this reason, the witch in the Malleus always retained her own unique social identity, and did not become submerged into a diabolic collective dominated by the person of the devil.

**Maleficium**

Far more important to witchcraft in the Malleus than notions derived from heresy were ideas associated with maleficium – although what exactly that word meant is difficult to explain. The primary meaning of maleficium had once been “evil deed,” but as early as Tacitus, it had also been used to mean sorcery and malign magic; while maleficus, as a synonym for black magician, was in use by
During the Middle Ages, the term retained both meanings, although in demonological texts and witchcraft treatises *maleficium* usually referred to harmful sorcery, and, more precisely, to its effects—impotence, for example, was a common instance of medieval *maleficium*. Sometimes, however, *maleficium* might also refer to magical practices themselves, as in the often quoted canon *Si per Sortiarias* which stated that *maleficium* may cause impotence. Finally, *maleficium* sometimes denoted the material object in which malign magical force resides; Duns Scotus used the term in this sense when he addressed the question of whether it was licit to cure a person bewitched by finding and destroying the sorcerer's *maleficium*. In all these cases, however, the key notion was harm: unlike *sortilegium* or other forms of divination or magic, *maleficium* was known not by its practitioners' procedures, but by those procedures' unfortunate results. For this reason, the relationship between *maleficium* and other forms of magic was always ambiguous, since a whole series of operations could theoretically be turned to harmful ends.

The range of harmful effects potentially classed as *maleficium* was extensive, but not unlimited. Malign sorcery was blamed for interference with human and animal sexuality (love magic, magically induced impotence, infertility, and abortions), the theft of milk, crops, wine, and other products, harmful weather magic, and, most seriously, for causing death, disease, or bodily infirmity in man and beast. All of these kinds of harm were once again conveniently enumerated in that catalogue of condemned belief, Burchard's *Corrector*. Burchard castigates those women who believed that by their glance or word they could kill young poultry or pigs, or the fetus of any animal; worse were those who believed that through their incantations or enchantments they could transfer their neighbor's milk or honey to themselves. Burchard also railed against the use of ligatures (binding magic, often practiced sympathetically by tying knots in physical objects): women, he says, are accustomed to use ligatures to cause impotence in men; men of the viler sort, however, also make ligatures out of grass or other materials and hide them in trees or at crossroads, so that any illness or injury will be transferred from their animals to those of another which pass by. There were enchanters who claimed to cause destructive storms or to alter the minds of men, women who thought that their magic could ensure another's love, and evil women who gave their husbands or lovers lethal or debilitating potions. These and other kinds of *maleficium* condemned in the *Corrector* are found in other sources scattered throughout the Middle Ages, and they approximate to what we may call the traditional and popular assessment of *maleficium*.

The magical techniques available to do all this were similarly varied. Some, like ligatures and image magic, were almost invariably interpreted as
indicative of *maleficium*. The use of poison, a similarly secretive and horrible kind of harm, was also closely identified in the medieval mind with *maleficium*. Indeed, the words *veneficium* and *maleficium* were frequently synonymous: Gregory of Tours accused Queen Fredegund of both malign sorcery and poisoning, while later witch-theorists would make absolutely no distinction between a witch’s use of poison and what we would consider more properly “magic.” Other magical practices could cause harm or not, since cures that transferred an injury to an unsuspecting third party and most love magic might be judged harmful or beneficial depending entirely upon one’s perspective.

All of this meant that the person of the *maleficus* was correspondingly ill-defined: there was no clear stereotype associated with this word until several were invented at the close of the Middle Ages. In early-medieval texts, *malefici* are found in close company with a varied assortment of sorcerous types: *praecantores, sortilegi, divini, magi, tempestarii, incantores,* and others. All made use of condemned magical operations, but the *malefici* were especially attacked because of the harmful nature of their spells. For the most part, early-medieval sources represent *malefici* as men and women of no great social status and little education, marked out simply by perceptions of magical power and malevolence. Of course, the same person might be regarded as a *maleficus* by some, and as a kindly *herbarius* or *medicus* by others, depending upon their perspective and the result of treatment. Likewise, because magical power did not necessarily depend upon special knowledge, but could result from heredity, disposition, or individual aptitude, anyone with a generally bad reputation could, under the right circumstances, be suspected of causing *maleficium*.

At the same time, though, this emphasis upon magical harm separated conceptions of *malefici* from those of *strigae* and the *bonae res*, and until the late Middle Ages, texts usually kept these categories reasonably distinct. In the ninth century, Hincmar of Rheims took a close look at the various magical practitioners loosely associated with the court of Lothar II, since *maleficium*, he suggested, was endangering the royal marriage. Hincmar gives a thorough catalogue of the magical specialists he encountered – *magi, malefici, arioli, necromantii, hydromantii, incantatores, aruspices, augures, pythonissae,* and *praestigiatores* – but does not include *strigae* in the list; instead, *strigae, lamiae,* and *dusi* he describes elsewhere as beings whose magical attacks afflict the unwary and incautious. The canon *Episcopi* likewise drew a clear line between sorcerers who perpetrated their crimes while fully awake and the women who dreamed that they rode at night. The canon admonishes that

Bishops and their officials must labor with all their strength to uproot thoroughly from their parishes the pernicious art of sorcery and malefic invent
by the devil, and, if they find a man or woman follower of this wickedness, to eject them foully disgraced from their parishes. 45

It is this command which leads the author to explore the beliefs of the night-traveling women, almost as an afterthought. Similarly, none of those writers who subsequently discussed the cannibalistic habits of *lamiae* described them as instances of *maleficium*. 46

By the later Middle Ages, however, like other kinds of magical practitioners, *malefici* were gradually identified as a species of heretic, and, as the heretical component of their alleged practices assumed greater and greater importance in the minds of clerical authorities, the distinctions between different kinds of magical operations gradually collapsed. Although ritual magic dealt with demons directly, all who knew their Aquinas were aware that all magic involved at least an implicit or tacit pact with the devil and had to be similarly condemned. Due to this kind of reasoning, by the fifteenth century, theologians and canonists found little to distinguish *maleficium* from other, more overtly diabolical, sorts of magic. 47 Thus, *malefici* were in turn conflated with the diabolic necromancers of learned traditions on the one hand, and the *bonae res, lamiae*, and the other products of diabolically inspired dreams and illusions on the other.

For example, in the fifteenth century, Fray Lope de Barrientos, bishop of Cuenca, denounced the superstitions of women in his diocese, and especially their belief in

> the women called witches who are said and believed to accompany the Pagan Goddess Diana at night, together with many other women who ride on beasts and travel through many towns and places, and are said to be able to harm animals or make use of them. 48

These women were all perfectly imaginary, and, he adds, “to believe the contrary is to be lacking in common sense.” “Consequently,” he concludes, “women should pay heed to their animals and watch over them, and if they die through lack of care let them not blame it on witches who come through crannies to kill them.” Fray Lope’s account is interesting because the followers of Diana, nocturnal witches, and charges of conventional *maleficia* are combined into a single, well-defined image. There is no reason to think that the bishop was ill-informed about the beliefs he describes or was writing in response to growing fears of heretical, *maleficium*-wielding devil worshipers; rather, it seems much safer to assume that he has accurately described local beliefs as he understood them. If such is indeed the case, Fray Lope had met a version of the *bonae res* who, although traditionally the bearers of good luck, were here also held responsible for certain kinds of misfortune.
Yet there is a difficulty here which harks back to the reason why this particular kind of witch was unacceptable to more traditionally minded clergy. Although Fray Lope’s perfectly rational explanation for the apparent effects of malign magical powers could logically be extended to skepticism about *maleficium* in general, in the late Middle Ages such a view was theologically untenable; but if a witch’s *maleficium* was real, it was reasonable to suppose that she was likewise not merely a delusion. This is precisely the problem that Martin of Arles was unable to face squarely in his discussion of the *broxae*, malign women who were believed to cause storms, damage crops, and kill children, as well as to ride about at night with Diana.49 Quite conventionally, Martin condemned these beliefs as false, and delusions of devil. For the Latin equivalent of *broxae*, however, Martin gave *maleficae et sortilegae*, words which, in another context, he used to refer to women who had quite real powers to work material evils—summoning storms and damaging fields among them.50

Once Martin had accepted that the ability to cause occult harm was part of the image of night-flying women, it became difficult for him to separate them from more substantial *maleficae*. Since, like Fray Lope, Martin insisted that his was an accurate account of popular beliefs he had encountered, it is again reasonable to suppose that this confusion of categories reflected simply the ambiguity inherent in the beliefs of his informants. This is not in itself cause for surprise, since there is no reason to expect that traditional beliefs should be systematized in a way which corresponds to theologically ordered categories. What is surprising, however, is that neither Martin nor Fray Lope completely subordinated their description of peasant belief to readily available orthodox paradigms, but allowed their concern to represent peasant belief realistically to override absolute logical consistency.

This concern to understand accurately the content of popular belief and practice underlies much of the late-medieval witch debate; many late-medieval clerics were unwilling to adopt a stance of “blind skepticism,” and insisted upon examining the logical basis behind the claim that so much of what people said they did was merely diabolically inspired fantasy. As authors began to take common perceptions more seriously, and to accord them a higher epistemological value, educated opinion changed in response and began to consider the possibility that much that had once been dismissed as illusion or fantasy had some more material basis. Once it was admitted that these phenomena were not entirely imaginary, the basis for distinguishing between them and *maleficae* or diabolic heretics promptly disappeared.

An instructive example of this conflation of categories occurs in the *Questio de Strigis* (c. 1470) of the Dominican theologian Jordanes de Bergamo. Jordanes writes that
Among nearly everybody, by strigae or strigones are understood women or men who by night dash either about their homes or over long distances by the power of the devil, who are also said to bewitch children... Women of this kind are accustomed to be called maliarde from the evil deeds that they do; among others they are called herbarie from operations of the same kind, fascinatrices because they bewitch children; in French, fastiners or festurieres; pixidarie, [from their boxes] in which they place unguents; bacularie, because they are borne on sticks by the power of the devil.

Jordanes’ approach to the problem of witchcraft is striking: he distinguishes carefully between a large number of terms, many of them in the vernacular, almost all of which designate various kinds of magicians known for their acts of maleficia. But, he insists that these are all simply specific manifestations of the striga, a witch which he has constructed based upon conventional stereotypes of child-eating monsters. The common understanding of maleficium and of maleficae, then, are all but entirely subsumed into Jordanes’ broader notion of witchcraft, which becomes an umbrella category that by its very nature erases the distinctions previously made.

Jordanes then tries, but ultimately fails, to reconcile the skepticism of the canon Episcopi with the reality of occult harm. Some, he says, believe that by the power of the devil strigae can be changed into cats, and by means of ointments and sticks cross over many places and long distances, and by the power of words and signs the strigae themselves can produce hail and rain and things of this kind, all of which are false and such persons are in danger of weakening their faith.

Yet, Jordanes insists, with the aid of demons witches do kill children, cause storms and do similar things: the illusion to which the canon refers simply masks the intervention of the devil, making the witches believe that they do these things of their own power.

Not all witch-theorists, however, were prepared to admit that malefici were substantially the same as strigae and lamiae, and that the reality of occult harm necessarily implied the reality of “witches”. Girolamo Visconti, for example, wondered whether because Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus agreed that maleficium was real “so were those things that were done at [the witches’ assembly] since all were done by that art and the wiles of the devil.” Ultimately, however, he was forced to admit that there was no clear relationship between the two, and that just because maleficium caused real harm there was no reason to think that magicians went to the witches’ Sabbat or did other such things. The evidence of magic, he thought, was especially tenuous because sterility and impotence were not necessarily the product of maleficium: quite the contrary, both conditions could have perfectly natural causes.
Visconti it was hard enough to prove the linkage between harmful sorcery and some particular misfortune let alone to prove that sorcerers went out at night to the Sabbath.

Witch-theorists who grounded their conceptions of witchcraft in notions of heresy had fewer difficulties incorporating *malefici/ae* into their models, because magic was an accepted indication of heretical depravity. For Nicholas Jacquier the link between *maleficium* and witchcraft was much closer than for Girolamo or Jordanes, since black magic was characteristic of witches and evidence of their pact with Satan. Witches, he writes,

> bring on or procure infirmities, weaknesses, frenzies, marital impediments, death to both people and beasts, abortions and impediments to conception, and the destruction of crops and many worldly goods. Therefore, since the aforesaid *maleficia* are real, and dependent on the invocation and patronage of demons, and the evil fruits of the aforesaid sect and heresy of evil-doing enchanters, it is clear that the aforesaid heretical enchanters are really and not in fantasy conjoined with demons and that they worship and obey them.\(^{55}\)

By eliding in this place the more fantastic notions of the Sabbat, and concentrating upon the admitted link between sorcerer and demon, Jacquier makes Girolamo’s argument much more persuasive: the effects of magic are real, witches are real, and, hence, their pact with the devil is real. Jacquier’s witches, however, use an unusual and quite specific procedure to work their nefarious ends. Rather than employing the traditional hodge-podge of practices attributed to *malefici*, they do their harm with the aid of magical substances given to them by the devil or manufactured under his guidance. Witches secretly introduced these substances, which often combined poisons and venom with the bodies of murdered children, into their victim’s food or drink, as did the other traditional enemies of Christendom – Muslims, lepers, and Jews.\(^{56}\) During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, France had been rocked by rumors of conspiracies involving each of these groups and their plots to poison wells and water-supplies with diabolic powders.\(^{57}\) By emphasizing poison as the agent of *maleficium*, Jacquier and similar authors reinforced their image of an aggressive but insidiously covert antisociety, and, once again, foregrounded the role of the devil.

The net effect of this picture of *maleficium*, though, was to distance Jacquier’s heretics from the image of more conventional *malefici*. Jacquier never claimed that his witches had a monopoly on black magic, and he distinguished between traditional sorts of *malefici* and the heretical *fascinarii*.\(^{58}\) To Jacquier this was perfectly reasonable, because he found the existence of the cult more alarming than its magic, the effectiveness of which was ultimately in the hands of God. The problem, however, was how to identify the *fascinarii*
if harmful sorcery was not a sufficient indicator in itself. Because Jacquier’s construction of witchcraft was so dependent upon motifs which had no apparent basis in popular perceptions of reality, it was difficult to know who was and was not a witch. In part, this is Jacquier’s point: anyone could be a witch, even a respected master of theology such as William Adelmo, prior of St. Germain-en-Laye. But at the same time, the cult’s pervasive secrecy made effective persecution quite difficult.

For witch-theorists who simply equated maleficium with witchcraft, however, the presence of maleficium alone constituted direct evidence of witchcraft. One such scholar was Petrus Mamoris, who was unusual among French authors in that he viewed witchcraft as a kind of baleful occult knowledge more than as a heretical sect. Magical practices, he believed, had arrived in France during the Hundred Years War, carried by the strange foreigners employed as mercenaries by both sides. These men had corrupted some of the French, and taught them sortelegia vel maleficium, which hitherto had been unknown. Some “especially dim persons” continued to disbelieve in magic, while others claimed that it was all an illusion; learned people, however, conversant with scripture, “with firm reason affirm that the said maleficia can be done.” The knowledge of maleficium carried with it membership in the diabolic cult, and implied devil worship and participation at the Sabbat. Mamoris was not particularly interested in this aspect of witchcraft, however, and his perfunctory description of the Sabbat is interesting principally because it indifferently combines so many motifs from so many different traditions. Mamoris writes that witches had confessed that

Some of them are carried at night, or during the day, by a demon to places near and far, and there they can dance and worship the devil, men can have intercourse with women, and demons can replace the women; they can eat and drink in reality or in appearance, cause death and disease to others, that they can enter cellars and drag out the wine and carry it off to distant places, put people to sleep, take children from their mothers’ arms and roast them, divine some events of the future, stir up thunder and hailstorms, strike down and kill with lightning, destroy crops, and perpetrate many other evils with the help of demons.

This is a Sabbat grab-bag, in which diabolic heresy, maleficium, and motifs culled from stories of lamiae and the bonae res are piled indiscriminately one atop the other. Mamoris does not want to exclude anyone through omission, and because the details of the Sabbat are not especially important to him, he can afford to generalize.

But was all this real or was it simply an illusion? For Mamoris, it seems a difficult question. One of the strangest things about the Flagellum Malefico-
rum is a long passage appearing almost halfway through the treatise. Here, contrary to all expectation, Mamoris asserts that the Sabbat and all of its trappings are imaginary, that everything witches are said to do — their devil worship, their feasts and orgies, their nocturnal flight, and their visits to wine cellars — are merely phantoms sent into the minds of old women by the power of the devil. He then proceeds calmly and, from our perspective, rationally, to answer the objections to his startling claim. If witches confess to these things, one should reply that “the number of fools is infinite,” and that confession itself does not make a thing true. If witnesses claim many times to have observed the Sabbat, Mamoris invokes the devil’s power to deceive the senses. If men claim that witches have robbed their cellars, and that wine has truly disappeared, Mamoris advises them to blame instead poorly sealed and leaky casks. And, finally, if people point to innumerable injuries caused daily through witchcraft, Mamoris responds that all of this comes not from witches but from natural causes, and that a child gets sick, a cow dies, cancer afflicts the face, a storm destroys crops and kills people . . . and the devil puts the illusions of all these things into their fantasies, with the result that they think that they have done the things that they saw in the illusions, and on that account such persons manifestly cannot be accused of those crimes, nor can they be discovered to have made a pact with the devil in silence or secret. Yet, after this refutation of arguments in favor of the reality of witches, Mamoris changes his mind: as his discussion of maleficium progresses, he arrives at the physical existence of magical paraphernalia — “the powders, liquors, hairs, nails, toads, and similar things” — through which witches did their magic. The combination of the undeniable presence of such objects, manifest real harm, and the unambiguous testimony of witches and their victims alike overcomes his skepticism, and he now concludes that “they really are guilty of witchcraft, of which they are accused, and they should be subjected to legal punishment. This odd train of thought provides an unusually transparent illustration of the lines that separated different kinds of late-medieval witch-beliefs. First, Mamoris’ argument shows the importance of definitions, for if Mamoris had thought of “witchcraft” in terms of separable, discrete parts, as did Visconti and Nicholas of Cusa, then his analysis of the reality of the Sabbat would not have led necessarily to his questioning of the reality of maleficium. Nor would an admission that one element of the whole was real have determined the real existence of the rest. Second, unlike Ulrich Molitor, Mamoris was unable simply to dismiss an increasingly formidable mass of circumstantial evidence by an appeal to the devil’s powers. At some point he found the weight of empir-
ical evidence and testimony too great to be denied. It was this precise conjunction of category definition with analytical perceptions of reality that made this image of witchcraft so persuasive.

But if a witch is understood to be exactly the same thing as a maleficus, and if maleficium is direct evidence of the witch, the question then becomes how to define maleficium. Mamorii’s approach was straightforward: maleficium proceeded from materially harmful magic. Magic, he informs his reader, comes in thirty varieties, all inventions of the devil. Maleficium, however, can result only from nine types that cause injuries at the prompting of demons. These Mamorii categorizes by the procedures or operations through which they supposedly work: fascinatio (by glance), incantation (by spoken word), breviaria (by brief inscriptions), ligatura (by knots and weaving), veneficium (by poison), caractaria (by pouring molten lead into cold water and then either inspecting the resulting mass with an eye toward divination, or using it for image magic), imaginaria (by manipulating images of wax, metal, or stone), mandragora (by use of the mandrake root as a kind of charm), and praestigium (in which the devil appears in the sight, hearing, or interior senses of the operator in order to reveal the future). There are other kinds of magic, too—necromancy, the notary art, astrology, and all kinds of divination—and these also require the cooperation of the devil, though not necessarily membership in the sect of witches. Mamorii does not distinguish between learned magic and maleficium: a witch might as easily be an educated sorcerer as an illiterate village wizard. While some witches tied knots or mutilated dolls, and others drew magic circles and used herbs and stones to compel demons to respond to their commands, all were witches just the same.

Institoris and Sprenger chose a quite different path. Their more traditional enumeration of learned magical practices comprises fourteen different types, divided into three headings depending upon the operator’s degree of complicity with the devil. The most condemned magic involved the open invocation of the devil, and included praestigium, geomancy, necromancy, false prophecy, and other kinds of divination. None of these, however, were properly witchcraft:

Although all of these are done through the express invocation of demons, yet none is comparable to the maleficia of witches, since they are never directly intended for the harm of men, animals, or the fruits of the earth.

Learned magicians used their magic to obtain some “private good” and not, like witches, solely to cause injury.

Institoris and Sprenger did not mean to imply that witchcraft could be distinguished by intentionality (except insofar as everything that witches do is motivated by malice), but rather that the magic of illiterate female witches
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was of an altogether different kind from the learned sorcery of male magicians. The authors understood the *maleficium* of witches theoretically as the maleficent effect of demonic power; but they conceived of *maleficium* practically as a discursive process, operating within localized communal bounds. *Maleficium* was seldom simply a matter of a witch, out of pure malice, causing hail to fall on random farms. Instead, magical harm grew out of, and was inseparable from, certain kinds of social relations and the person of the witch herself. *Maleficium* began almost invariably with hostility between acquaintances. Witches were not strangers or anonymous monsters, they were neighbors, lovers, and relatives. Nor did they cause injuries capriciously or randomly, but because they felt injured or aggrieved; witchcraft stemmed directly from the personal motivation of the witch—her jealousies, hatreds, loves, and fears. Her *maleficium* took the form most appropriate to circumstances: spinsters prevented brides from consummating their unions, barren old women caused abortions, and paupers made the wealthy poor. When Institoris and Sprenger write that it is beyond the devil’s power to produce something out of nothing, they simply repeat what every peasant already knew: that they lived in a world of limited resources, where one person’s success turned upon another person’s failure—when a witch’s crops flourished and her butter churns were full, a neighbor inevitably suffered.

In the *Malleus*, witchcraft sometimes begins when a person who is conscious of his good fortune, but not yet secure in his enjoyment of it, links an injury with the malicious jealousy of others. Thus a “very wealthy man” who loses forty cattle in a single year blames the hostility of witches. Likewise, Institoris and Sprenger tell us, witches habitually kill only the “best horses and the fattest cattle” of the region. Because of their poverty, beggars were always suspected of witchcraft, and the authors conscientiously warned their readers to refuse any alms to suspected witches, because such charity was all too often repaid with witchcraft.

More often, however, witchcraft begins when envy or jealousy combines with a sense of personal insult or injury. Unsatisfactory love affairs provide fertile ground for this combination of feelings: it comes as no surprise, then, that Institoris finds that, when men abandoned their lovers, they, or their new loves, become frequent targets of *maleficium*. A count of Westreich, for example, who left his mistress to marry a noblewoman, became impotent for three years, because the spurned lady had sought out a witch to work her revenge. Even worse, a young man of Ravensburg “lost his virile member” when he wished to forsake his girlfriend. In still other cases, witchcraft followed upon quarrels over money, vandalism, or slander. Witches were naturally sensitive about their reputations, and strongly disliked people drawing attention to their illicit pursuits. To call
a known witch to her face was thus an invitation to disaster. Animosity itself, of course, did not create witchcraft. *Maleficium* could exist only when misfortune struck in a way that encouraged a supernatural explanation, such that a victim began to examine the recent past through the lens provided by traditional beliefs. Sometimes the presence of *maleficium* was identified merely by the speed with which misfortune struck. The rich cattle rancher assured Institoris that witchcraft was doubtless to blame for the death of his animals, since his neighbor had suffered no loss, and “when [livestock] died from disease or some other infirmity, they did not succumb suddenly, but gradually and one at a time.” Maleficium was particularly suspected when an injury could be associated with the hostile intent of a specific person reasonably supposed to be a witch. Really notorious witches could be blamed even when no animosity was apparent. A merchant of Speyer, for instance, testified that while out walking in the fields, he saw a woman a long way off. His servants identified her as a witch, and urged the man to cross himself, but the merchant arrogantly declined. Scarcely had he finished speaking, when he felt a severe pain in his left foot, so that he could scarcely move, demonstrating conclusively the guilt of the suspect.

A more usual procedure, however, was for the witch to identify herself through some ambiguously worded threat which, although ignored at the time, would assume ominous significance in retrospect. Institoris and Sprenger relate that when another merchant of Speyer refused to lower his price for a certain woman, she became angry, and left, threatening that “soon you will wish you had agreed.” Indeed he did, for no sooner had the man turned around than his mouth stretched hideously all the way back to his ears, a deformity that remained with him for some considerable time. In another case, a priest, hastening across a bridge, rudely pushed an old woman into the mud. As he passed, she called out that he would not cross with impunity. The priest little heeded her words until he tried to rise from his bed that night, and found himself paralyzed below the waist. From that moment, “on account of her abusive words,” he always suspected that the old woman had bewitched him.

On the basis of such narratives, Institoris and Sprenger show that there was an intimate connection between personal animosity, threats, and witchcraft, that *maleficium* emerges out of a particular kind of hostile discourse, with its own rules and logical structures. Unfortunately, this observational acumen was not matched by the sophistication of their explanatory apparatus: why witches were so ready to incite the suspicions of their neighbors was difficult to say. Since the authors thought *maleficium* real, they could not admit the possibility that perceptions of magical harm arose only during – and because of – these exchanges. Instead, as they so often did, Institoris and Sprenger looked to the nebulous presence of the devil to explain otherwise refractory phe-
nomena. Witches, they advised prospective judges, have a very peculiar characteristic:

they stir up people against them, either by harmful words or deeds, as, for example, to borrow some small thing, or to inflict some kind of damage to a garden, and similar to this, so that they receive a pretext and reveal themselves in word or in deed; which exposure they have to make at the urging of demons, so that the sins of the judges may be thus aggravated as long as they remain unpunished.85

Witches reveal themselves so that lazy or skeptical judges will receive their due in hell, an irrational course of action, explicable only by the callous supervision of the devil. This analysis, as inherently implausible at it seems, was doubly useful, because it drew a concrete connection between definite accusations of witchcraft and rumors and malicious gossip. Because the witch’s maleficium was firmly grounded in her social relations, wise judges should immediately seek to discover whether a consistent pattern of animosities in a suspect’s personal history suggested her guilt. Judges should ask the accused, “why the common people fear her,” “whether she knows that she is defamed and that she is hated,” and “why she had threatened that person, saying, ‘you shall not pass with impunity.’”86

The strength of the construction of witchcraft elaborated in the Malleus is that it is based upon and congruent with the narrative paradigms through which evaluations of witchcraft and the identification of witches were made on the local level. In these narratives, the various threads that comprise maleficium are woven together to determine the identity of witches beyond doubt. In the Malleus, Institoris and Sprenger raise these explanatory mechanisms to the level of learned discourse, integrating them (however uncomfortably) with a more theologically sophisticated conception of the world. In essence, the authors provide their audience with a window onto the discursive field in which their informants constructed witchcraft themselves.

As an example, let us take a fairly lengthy but otherwise typical story from Institoris’ experiences in Innsbruck. An “honest married woman” had deposed that she had an arbor behind her house, adjacent to her neighbor’s garden. One day she saw that a path had been beaten from the garden to the arbor, causing significant damage. As she stood, surveying the ruin, the neighbor suddenly appeared and asked whether she was suspected. The woman naturally thought her neighbor responsible, but she was frightened to say so on account of her mala fama. The woman therefore answered only that “The steps in the grass indicate the damage”—a vague reply, although its meaning was no doubt clear enough.87 But however well advised, her caution was insufficient, for
Then [my neighbor] was offended, perhaps because I did not wish to entangle myself with her by litigious words for her pleasure. She left with a murmur. And although I could hear the words she uttered, I could not understand them. Indeed, after a few days, a monstrous disease struck me with pains in the stomach.

The disease grew out of a quarrel marked by a singularly ambiguous verbal exchange. Neither party made her meanings clear, and both seem to have attached great importance to the opacity of their utterances. The matron tried to hide her suspicions by avoiding any direct accusation, and testifies implausibly that the very innocence of her response inspired her neighbor’s subsequent indignation. The suspected witch, in her turn, walked away mumbling, and this, to the matron, was the threat: the incomprehensibility of the words invoked the danger of witchcraft.

The matron’s agonies, we are told, were extreme, and her cries disturbed the whole neighborhood. Many people came to comfort her, among them a clay-worker who was having an adulterous affair with the hostile neighbor, whom the narrator now identifies for the first time unambiguously as a witch. The clay-worker offered to help her find out whether her illness was, indeed, caused by witchcraft, and performed an interesting experiment. He placed a bowl of water over the woman’s body and poured molten lead into the water. When the image had hardened, he examined it, and pronounced that witchcraft was present:

“Look,” he said, “this infirmity has happened to you through maleficium, and one part of the instruments of maleficium has been hidden under the threshold of the door of your house. Let us go, then, and when they have been removed, you will feel better.”

When the threshold was examined, they discovered a wax image pierced with two needles, and little bags containing bones, seeds, and other things. When these were duly burned, the woman felt better, though not fully recovered, because there remained some other instruments of witchcraft that could not be found. When the woman asked the clay-worker how he knew to look under the threshold, he replied that his lover, the witch, had revealed it to him in an unguarded moment.

No single part of this story actually proves that the neighbor was responsible for the matron’s illness. Logical “proof,” however, is not the objective. The narrative builds gradually upon the themes of the quarrel, “murmured” words, and the neighbor’s evil reputation, so that when the sudden onset of illness raises the specter of maleficium, the reader is prepared for the crucial identification of “neighbor and witch.” The narrative process arrives simulta-
neously at a determination of *malefica* and *maleficium*: the witch is joined inseparably to her witchcraft. Yet the narrative is actually divided into two quite distinct parts. The first describes the verbal exchange between the woman and her neighbor, and concludes with the illness. The actual casting of the spell happens “off camera,” and brings the witch’s active part in the story to a close. The remainder of the story recounts the discoveries that prove the illness to be the result of sorcery.

That the narrative genre is important to Institoris and Sprenger’s understanding of witchcraft makes sense, for it is only in narratives that the witch and her witchcraft are firmly joined. In narratives the actual identification of the witch and of her *maleficium* (which, as a matter of actual experience are two quite different things, linked only by conjecture or occult knowledge) become two moments in an ongoing process of considerable explanatory and evidentiary power. This, of course, is why people like the clay-worker were invaluable: they confirmed suspicions and removed doubt in a conceptual arena where everything was chronically ambiguous, and ambiguity itself was threatening and dangerous.

In the *Malleus*, narratives of this type, and the structures of thought that went into them, are critical to the formal determination of a witch’s guilt. As was customary, Institoris and Sprenger judged heretics sufficiently suspect to justify torture, imprisonment, and death if they were found “manifestly taken in heresy,” but in the case of witches the paradigmatic expression of this degree of suspicion was provided by the posited link between a woman’s ill-will or a quarrel and a subsequent injury. If the injury followed immediately, as in the case of the unfortunate merchant of Speyer, the evidence was direct; if the injury followed only after the lapse of some time, as with the matron of Innsbruck, the evidence was indirect and slightly less damning. To make this determination of guilt, the inquisitors advised asking the suspect such questions as “why did you say that he would never have a day of health and so it happened?” or “why she was seen in the fields or in the stable touching the cattle?” or “why when she had one or two cows did she have more milk than her neighbors with four or six?” Inconsistent responses or answers that conflicted with other testimony or physical evidence indicated the need to proceed to torture. Yet, if the suspect would not confess, the stories that sufficed to put her to torture were also sufficient in themselves to convict her of witchcraft. Simply being called a witch was not enough; rather, the alleged witch had to be linked directly to some specific injury.

Recited as a dry list, the possible ways in which a woman could be caught in the “manifest heresy” of witchcraft seem ridiculously tenuous. Direct evidence of guilt might consist of the witch using threatening words, such as “you will soon know what is going to happen to you,” or touching a person or beast...
with her hands, or even being seen in a dream prior to some affliction. Nonetheless, just as these minor performances provided the necessary clues by which a witch’s identity was revealed within a narrative context, so they provided the learned inquisitor with the grounds for “vehement suspicion of heresy,” sufficient to justify that the witch be given over to the “torture and the squalor of prison” for up to a year, and, if confirmed by multiple witnesses, to consign her to the flames.

In this, Institoris and Sprenger differed substantially from other fifteenth-century witch-theorists: although the pact may have provided the theoretical basis for the witch’s heresy, and for her exceptional status among heretics, it was essentially moot in their courtroom. Instead, it was the connection between the witch and her *maleficium* that constituted their radically revised standard for “manifest heresy.” A woman accused of causing an illness by touch was, for them, every bit as guilty of heresy as was a man who received communion and consolation from heretics, and showed them “reverent love.” For this reason, Institoris and Sprenger need not require proof that a witch had attended the Sabbat or delivered the obscene kiss, because they had made the symbolic markers of heresy dependent upon the evidence they found so readily at hand.

Superstition

However well a tautological relationship between the witch and her witchcraft might work in stories, as a logical argument it left much to be desired. For this reason, it is also a convenient illustration of the tension in the *Malleus* between the witch of narrative examples – which, as we have seen, is vitally important to the authors’ argument – and the witch of theory. In effect, Institoris and Sprenger were confronted by category confusion of their own making. On the one hand, their theory was plain: the witch was defined by her pact with the devil. “Witch,” in this sense, was a rigidly bounded, undifferentiated category, and so the authors consistently argue that all witches are essentially alike, despite appearances to the contrary. Yet at the same time, they endorsed a narrative-based conception of witchcraft, in which the category *malefica* was graduated, covering a wide range of individually different witches. In daily life, as in their narratives, the question “Is so-and-so a witch?” was not answered with reference to some absolutely defining parameter, but by comparison with an abstract ideal, an imagined prototype of “witch.” Hence, people could either be witches, not witches, or somewhere in between.

In one sense, this category confusion was essential to Institoris and Sprenger’s argument, since they used the differentiated and evaluative con-
ception of witchcraft which they found operative at the local level to fill the
otherwise empty set created by their more rigid, theoretical category.
Nonetheless, since effective persecution of witches required both a satisfac-
tory definition and widespread acceptance that this definition was fundamen-
tally valid, Institoris and Sprenger were forced to reconcile the two. This was
difficult because the rigid bounding parameters of the theologically defined
witch did not correspond in any meaningful way to the shifting, ambiguous
edges of village witchcraft. To order this intractable boundary, the authors
looked to the larger category of superstition.

Because the Church regarded all forms of magic as, at bottom, supersti-
tious observances, notions of maleficium and superstitio had long been inter-
twined. Superstition, according to the authorities, consisted of “religion
observed in an excessive way, that is, religion practiced in a manner or under
circumstances that are evil or defective.” Superstition, in other words, was
bad religion, usually manifested in either of two closely related errors. First,
all unauthorized, erroneous, or excessive devotions to God were classified as
superstition. It was, for example, improper and superstitious to sacrifice live
animals to God after the manner of the pagans. Second, all observances,
whether in the correct form or not, were superstitious if they did not have
the proper God as their object: any prayer to Diana, indeed any recognition
of Diana’s divinity, was thus superstitious. The devil created both kinds of
superstition to undermine the true faith; hence, anything accomplished
through them was done by his power and, ultimately, in his name.

This last point was very important, because here superstition and magic
converged. Demons desired various kinds of stones, plants, songs, and rites,
not because of any intrinsic quality that they might possess, but because they
were spiritual signs which signified divine honors. As Martin of Arles explained
in his treatise on superstition, witches employed various rites and apparatus
in their magic to encourage demons to respond. Magicians might either
realize that they were in fact offering divine service to demons, or they might
be ignorant of the real nature of their procedures, but in either case a pact
with demons was involved. Martin further maintained that “a pact [with the
devil] is implicit in all superstitious observances, whose effect ought not to be
reasonably expected from God or from nature.” There was, in this sense, no
important distinction between magic per se and gathering medicinal herbs on
the night of St. John’s feast: both were superstitious and both a diabolic pact.
Definitions of superstition differed from definitions of maleficium in this
respect; for while the latter was basically a descriptive category which corre-
sponded to what victims perceived, the former was defined in purely theo-
retical terms and could include an almost limitless number of very different
behaviors and practices. To most people, there was a considerable difference
between a *malefica* and a woman who gave her cow holy water to drink. Not so to the careful theologian: since holy water should not be consumed, any effect anticipated from this procedure could not come from God. Nor could it come from nature, since only the benediction separated holy water from normal water. The woman was, therefore, invoking the devil in exactly the same way as did magicians and witches.¹⁰²

Reasoning thus, clerics often condemned superstition and magic in the same breath. In 1402, for example, Jean Gerson abominated learned magic and rustic superstition in identical terms, writing that

> It is necessary for me to lament passionately the pestiferous superstitions of magicians and the foolishness of old women who practice *sortilegium*, who profess to effect cures by certain accursed rites.¹⁰³

Those guilty of magical practices, he argued, were to be burned by the secular authorities, since all were equally guilty of apostasy through their pact with Satan.

Although Institoris and Sprenger could certainly understand Gerson’s point, they could not accept that witches, whose crimes were immeasurably more awful, were substantially equivalent to other kinds of magicians. Magicians, they thought, belonged to several fairly distinct types: first, there were witches, illiterate women who had given themselves body and soul to the devil; then, there were learned magicians, who might or might not have an explicit pact with the devil, but who did not belong to the sect of the witches; finally, there were *superstitiosi*, who were usually guilty of only a tacit pact with Satan. Complicating matters still further, there were also many people who used the legitimate rites of the Church to achieve the same effects as magicians. *Maleficae, superstitiosi*, and devout Catholics all used similar practices to achieve similar results, though they differed absolutely in the sources of their power and in their relationship to that power.

In the *Malleus*, the *superstitiosi* occupy the ambiguous ground between out-and-out witches and the lawful practitioners of useful divine observances, where their presence permits the authors to reserve the label “witch” exclusively for those most commonly accepted as such. Take, as an example, the magical theft of milk, butter, wine, or other agricultural products from one’s neighbors. Nider, Mamoris, and Institoris and Sprenger all refer to this magic unambiguously as *maleficium*, and hence strongly imply that its practitioners were witches.¹⁰⁴ The situation was not, however, quite this simple. This particular kind of magic might, or might not, entail an explicit pact with the devil. Institoris and Sprenger had heard of a man who could produce witch-butter by making strange motions while standing in a stream, but, because this *magus*
did not behave “as witches are accustomed to do,” Institoris and Sprenger decided that he probably held a tacit and not an explicit pact with the devil.\textsuperscript{105} In this case, they proposed instead that the \textit{maleficium} of the \textit{magus} was more akin to the magic of certain \textit{superstitiosi}, who made off with wine in a similar manner, than to the crimes of witches.\textsuperscript{106}

This distinction was neither arbitrary nor unreasonable. In the first place, it allowed Institoris and Sprenger to avoid having to argue that all superstitious magical practices were equivalent to witchcraft. In the second place, it allowed them to argue that not just anyone could be a witch. By distinguishing between superstitious magic and witchcraft on the basis of gender and perceptions of social deviance, Institoris and Sprenger aligned their own construction of witchcraft with that of popular usage, in which ascriptions of witchcraft commonly depended upon both the potential capacity for preternatural harm and a particular kind of social valuation. In other words, they were prepared, as other demonologists were not, to tolerate a certain amount of surreptitious traffic with the devil, provided one’s résumé did not resemble that of a witch in other respects.

Institoris and Sprenger employ the concept of superstition in a similar way when they consider the problem of magical healers. Appearances could be deceiving: just as \textit{maleficium} did not necessarily mean that one was a witch, so the use of apparently benign magic did not necessarily mean that one was not. Inconveniently, witches came in three quite different classes:

- those who cause injuries but do not have the power to cure;
- those who cure but who, from some singular pact entered into with the devil, do not injure;
- and those who both cure and cause injuries.\textsuperscript{107}

The most powerful, and hence the most dangerous, witches were those who could do both kinds of magic, and of these the most feared were the cannibal witches, who ate newborn children, for these possessed the full panoply of diabolic powers.\textsuperscript{108}

In their own way, however, healing witches were just as bad as more obvious \textit{maleficae}, despite their more benign appearance, since their power was likewise derived from a explicit pact with the devil and their objectives were every bit as hostile. Healing witches sought, in effect, to exchange physical injuries for spiritual ones: by offering effective but diabolical remedies for the \textit{maleficium} caused by their sisters, such witches entangled their victims in superstitious practices. Germany, the authors mournfully relate, was so overrun with these witches that one could be found everywhere every couple of miles.\textsuperscript{109} They add that the unscrupulous count of Reichshofen actually made a tidy profit taxing the patrons of his local witch, and one of the authors had
seen personally vast crowds of poor folk come from miles around, even in the
dead of winter, to the village of Einigen to visit a celebrated witch-doctor
named Hengst. “Without doubt,” they comment bitterly, “so great a concourse
of poor folk had never gone to any of the shrines of the Blessed Virgin either
at Aachen or at Einsiedeln, such as went to that *superstitiosus.*”

But was Hengst a witch? Their use of the word *superstitiosus* seems to
imply not. But why? Witchcraft could be undone in a number of different
ways, and by diverse kinds of persons. In the worst and most obvious case, the
healer simply transferred the injury from the bewitched patient to another
victim, not really curing anything at all. Such a remedy was seemingly little
different from open *maleficium,* and, although not absolute proof of witchcraft,
the authors leave little doubt that malign healers of this sort should be treated
like more conventional witches. A more difficult problem was posed by healers
who employed techniques that were certainly superstitious, but that might not
constitute witchcraft. Some healers, for example, undid *maleficia* through the
express invocation of demons, a clearly unlawful procedure, though to Insti-
toris and Sprenger rather less criminal than methods of the first sort. Hengst
was an example of this class of magician, and he, and those like him, stood on
the absolute edge of real witchcraft, to be identified by the authors as *malefici*
one moment, and as *superstitiosi* or *sortilegi* the next. Finally, there were healers
who used superstitious remedies but who did not invoke the devil and were
not “manifest witches.” These men were the least guilty, despite the probabil-
ity that they worked through a tacit pact with the devil. As an example, Insti-
toris and Sprenger describe a witch-doctor who poured molten lead into water
to diagnose *maleficium,* and employed incantations to effect a cure. The healer
was said to attribute his success to God and to Saturn’s planetary influence
over lead and magic – all good and orthodox as far as it went – but, since the
power by which the *maleficium* was removed was unclear, it was likely that a
tacit pact with the devil was still required.

As far as Institoris and Sprenger were concerned, the use of a given
supernatural agency was itself morally charged – laudable if the agent were
God or his representative, sinful if the devil or his minion. To those less sen-
sitized to the nuances of a theologically determined world, preternatural or
supernatural power was morally ambiguous, relatively good or bad depending
upon its effects, in other words a benign healer was separated from an evil
witch by good intentions, intentions that could seem quite different to differ-
et people at different times. The ease with which a healer could slide across
the boundary into witchcraft is illustrated in a narrative Institoris heard while
at Innsbruck. An honest matron told him that in her youth she had been the
servant of a woman who had taken ill with severe pains in the head. One
day, a woman arrived at the door who claimed to able to cure the affliction.
As the maid watched, the woman performed a ceremony in which water rose in a vessel, contra naturam. Because of this, and “considering that the pain in the lady’s head was in no way mitigated by these things,” the maid unwisely called the performance superstitious. The irate healer then responded with an unusual variant on the damming threats of a witch: “You will know in three days whether they are superstitious or not.” In due course, the maid was afflicted with wracking pains of her own, which were assuaged only when her mistress’s husband found the instruments of maleficium hidden over a tavern door.

For the most part, this is a conventional tale of witchcraft. What sets it apart is the speed and the manner with which benign healing is transformed, first into “superstition” and then into maleficium. For the narrator, magic was divided into three distinct conceptual fields based upon effects. Had the witch’s healing performance brought immediate relief, it would have been benign; having failed, it is, perhaps, superstition; but when injury followed upon the witch’s threats it is revealed as maleficium. Effects, not theology, mattered to the actors in this narrative, just as they did to Institoris.

In the Malleus, the technical distinction between a witch and a superstitiosa depends upon this subjective perception of the magical practitioner’s intentions and the effects of his or her magic. In the author’s learned model of witchcraft, the boundary between superstitiosa and malefica corresponds closely to the tenuous line that separates benign healers from evil witches in daily life. Superstition thus provides Institoris and Sprenger with a tool with which to smooth the rough edges of witchcraft’s boundaries, in this case by creating a space for people who looked like witches, and were potentially witches, but whom, at a given moment, it was inconvenient or inappropriate to call witches. In a similar way, superstition helped to define an important and related category, the lawful remedial and preventative observances of the Church.

To Institoris and Sprenger, the power of God was the logical and necessary counterpart to the power of the devil. Where the witch wielded the powerfully destructive forces of evil, good Christians could turn to the equally impressive arsenal of the Church. In many respects, the witch’s diabolic magic in the Malleus seems the mirror image of the priest’s divine power. For both, supernatural power is mediated almost entirely through human agents, and is made to serve explicitly human ends. For both, this power is controlled and directed through the manipulation of material objects, sacramentals and the host in one case, the instruments of maleficium in the other. Finally, in both, the line between their characteristic practices and superstition was perilously thin: just as superstitiosi could do many of the same things as witches and still not be witches, so too could they mimic the rites of orthodox Christians, while
yet invoking the devil. This apparent similarity between the observances of the Church and the witch’s magic was, of course, no accident. Throughout the Middle Ages, the rituals of the Church provided models for popular magical practices, and vice versa. This was especially true for Institoris and Sprenger, whose understanding of the way divine power was mediated and directed for human benefit yielded the paradigm for the witch’s employment of the powers of the devil in the *Malleus*. Their expansive view of the powers of witchcraft went hand in hand with their liberal endorsement of countervailing Christian observances.

From this perspective, the purpose of the *Malleus* appears almost as much a justification of popular Christian ritual as a condemnation of witchcraft, although, to the authors, these probably amounted to much the same the thing. While many of their clerical colleagues, however, began to look askance upon the thriving “economy of the sacred” that had grown up outside effective clerical control, to reform-minded clerics, superstition was, as Stuart Clark writes, “a cultural weapon,” used to condemn popular belief,

> a form of proscription in terms of which many of the routine material practices of pre-industrial rural cultures, together with the categories and beliefs that shaped ordinary people’s experience, were denounced as valueless.\textsuperscript{115}

The authors of the *Malleus*, on the other hand, use notions of superstition to validate and authorize the conceptual horizons of their informants, and to defend a broad range of popular “magical” procedures by fixing a narrow limit upon those practices that were not allowed.

To begin with, Institoris and Sprenger maintained that sacramentals provided the most consistently reliable protection against witchcraft. Strictly speaking, sacramentals are blessed objects – commonly water, salt, wax, and herbs – conducive to divine grace and inimical to the devil.\textsuperscript{116} Unlike true sacraments, they have no mechanical efficacy, being dependent upon the spiritual disposition of the user. Like the host, sacramentals provided a material point of intersection between the sacred and the profane, and access to supernatural power, and so like the host were employed to produce a variety of desired effects: to ensure the fertility of fields and animals, to extinguish fires, to repel storms, to cure illness – in short, to undo the harm wrought by destructive forces in all areas of human endeavor.\textsuperscript{117} Disagreements arose, however, over the extent to which sacramentals could be legitimately employed as apotropaic measures, and over the requisite degree of clerical control. Because they were material objects that could be employed without immediate clerical supervision, sacramentals were obviously vulnerable to abuse; their use was especially suspect when adapted to the models provided
by non-Christian magical operations. Many clerics, such as Johannes Nider and Institoris and Sprenger, did not object: so long as the charms and talismans with which people festooned their livestock conformed to the rules for proper Christian ritual, they were perfectly orthodox, even if, to untrained observers, these rules might seem arbitrary, since such operations looked completely mechanical. The temptation to extend the use of such powerful objects to performances other than those fully acceptable to the Church was irresistible. Unfortunately, the moment that happened, the operation changed diametrically in character, from Christian devotional observance to diabolic superstition.

Like most demonologists, Institoris and Sprenger liberally endorsed the use of sacramentals to counter the baleful effects of witchcraft. They recommended that all good people irrigate their thresholds with holy water, burn candles of blessed wax, scatter blessed herbs over cattle, and wear charms inscribed with holy words as protection against witches. To determine whether a given usage was lawful or superstitious, Institoris and Sprenger first examined the question of efficacy. For them, as for most other late-medieval clerics, there was really no such thing as an “empty” superstition, since ritual invocations of supernatural power did indeed produce material effects – the real question was who or what was causing them? Superstitions were called “vanities” only because the ritual itself could not produce the desired effect: they communicated and mediated, but did not intrinsically possess, occult power. Under many circumstances, the efficacy of a given procedure alone could indicate whether it was lawful. For example, the authors tell of a bewitched cow that was cured when adorned with written Christian charms, as proof that such procedures are acceptable to God. Because efficacy implied divine approval, it was very difficult for Institoris and Sprenger to condemn an effective observance, provided that reference was made only to God and the legitimate rituals of the Church.

Such an approach was theologically justifiable, but inherently permissive since it placed no restrictions upon the uses to which God’s power might legitimately be put. Compare, for example, Institoris and Sprenger’s view of superstition with that of Martin of Arles. Martin was offended by a custom of his local church, in which during times of severe drought all the people – both clerici and coloni – would assemble before the shrine of St. Peter, and then, as Martin adds, “with great devotion,” would take his image down to the river with singing and with praise. But then, some of them make a request of the image, saying, “St. Peter, help us, who have been obliged by necessity to do this, to get rain for us from God.” And this is
repeated twice and three times. And when the image fails to respond to any of these requests, they cry out, “let the image of blessed Peter be submerged, if he does not obtain for us, from almighty God, the favor demanded for the need which is threatening us!”

The statue was then submerged amid jocular debates about Peter’s merits and worth, a procedure that was said to infallibly bring rain within twenty-four hours. Martin subjected this custom to lengthy analysis in the light of traditional theological authorities and concluded that “to submerge the image of blessed Peter does not pertain to the glory of God, by which the Lord is praised in his saints, but to his blame and injury.” Consequently, he condemned the rite as superstitious and blasphemous. In this context, the efficacy of the rite was irrelevant: one ought not to dunk St. Peter regardless of whether rains might result.

Institoris and Sprenger would probably have arrived at a similar conclusion, but through a quite different process. Where Martin chose an unacceptable superstitious usage for his test case, in the Malleus the most detailed discussion of the theory of superstition involved a practice that the authors ultimately endorse: the “most ancient” custom of exposing relics or the sacrament to avert oncoming storms. In their opinion, any rite or observance that is not superstitious is acceptable. Moreover, since witchcraft is such a terrible threat, any acceptable measure providing some degree of protection against the power of the devil should be seized upon at once, especially in this particular case, when the power of the sacrament and of relics to calm the weather was well attested both by common report and by the expert testimony of witches.

A rite was acceptable, then, if it did not violate any of the five rules for valid religious observances. First, the practice had to have as its chief aim the glorification of God (though, to the inquisitors, virtually any nonabusive use of the sacrament seemed to fulfill this condition). Second, if the practice pertained to abstinence or bodily discipline, it had to be consistent with virtue and the doctrines of the Church. Third, the practice had to be in accordance with the recognized and traditional procedures of a given church or with “general custom.” Fourth, the practice had to have some natural relation with the sought-after effect (though, again, in the opinion of the authors, any kind of remedial, curative, or protective effect could reasonably be expected of sacraments or the relics of saints). Finally, the practice should give no occasion for scandal or error among the uneducated, and here the authors advise the officiants merely to exercise caution and common sense. Since use of the consecrated host to avert storms was found to fulfill all five requirements, the authors therefore pronounced the custom entirely legitimate and not superstitious in the least degree.
On this basis, Institoris and Sprenger did not hesitate to commend those women who gave the whole of Sunday’s milk production to the poor, saying that by such means their cows gave “a greater abundance of milk and were preserved from witchcraft.” Above reproach, too, are those who wear prayers and charms written in Latin, even if unable to understand them; in this case it is enough, the authors say, if the patient turns his thoughts to general notions of divine goodness. And they advise that the practices of peasants who weave a cross from the leaves consecrated on Palm Sunday and place it in their fields to ward off hail should be judged in a similar manner. In each case, the authors approve of apotropaic and remedial observances provided a sincere appeal to divine power is made without any obvious breach of the rules.

At times this line could be perilously thin. As one possible remedy for maleficium, Institoris and Sprenger describe a rustic antidote to bewitched butter:

Again, there are certain women who, when they think that they cannot finish churning their butter, as they are accustomed to do in oblong vessels made for this purpose, then, if they can quickly get some butter from the house of the suspected witch, they make three pieces or morsels from that butter, and, with an invocation to the most holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, throw those pieces into the churn, and so all the witchcraft is put to flight.

This custom, the authors decided, was probably superstitious, since there was no natural reason why the butter had to come from the witch. At the same time, it was the mildest form of superstition, a case of opposing “vanity with vanity.” That it was no worse is surprising, since the authors have just pointed out that witches often borrow dairy products as a prelude to maleficium. From the perspective of the “witch,” these erstwhile witch curers might well have seemed guilty of witchcraft themselves. Yet Institoris and Sprenger all but give this procedure their blessing. It would be better, of course, if three random pieces of butter were used instead of those superstitiously linked to the witch, in which case the women would “remain irreproachable although not to be commended,” because holy water or some other sacramental would be a more appropriate weapon against witchcraft. Their phrase is curious: since the procedure was “irreproachable” one must assume that it derived its power from God, and must logically also be pleasing to God, else he would not have lent it his support. Why then would such a practice not be commendable?

I suspect that there were several reasons why Institoris and Sprenger were less than completely happy with even a revised variant of this rite. First, the element of sympathetic magic – in this case a matter of “pump-priming” the stubborn churn with butter – must have been uncomfortably obvious to ritual-sensitive clerics. Second, the narrow line that the authors drew between
divine and diabolic power became more tenuous and more seemingly arbitrary the closer one got to it. This butter charm represents the far limit of legitimate “religious” observances, immediately beyond which lay the realms of demonic power. Out on this margin, the differences between the two have become essentially negligible: different butter-charm variants employed alternatively agents of God and the devil, but employed them to exactly the same ends and in exactly the same ways. By authorizing these procedures, Institoris and Sprenger have come very close to validating the view of some of their informants: that God and the devil are simply alternative sources of occult power, not the slightest bit different in kind. Finally, and probably most disturbing to the authors, viewed in the best possible light the butter charm was a kind of exorcism intended to drive destructive demonic powers from the bewitched churn. It was, however, an exorcism totally divorced from clerical control and supervision. By advising that sacramentals be used in the place of butter, Institoris and Sprenger defuse most of these issues: at the same time, the element of sympathetic magic is lost, the line between diabolic and divine power is defined, while the necessary mediative role of the Church is restored.

Given, though, the many reasons why the butter charm should be condemned, a more interesting question may be why it was not. Institoris and Sprenger were unique, insofar as I am aware, among fifteenth-century witch-theorists, in the importance and value that they ascribed to popular remedies against maleficium. Most of their colleagues encouraged the liberal use of sacramentals as preventative measures, but advised extreme caution when it came to undoing the effects of a witch’s magic. Petrus Mamorius was both more optimistic about the efficacy of conventionally orthodox remedies, and more insistent upon the necessity for clerical mediation of divine power. For Mamorius, the most effective way to bear off the harmful effects of maleficium was through the normal usages of the Church: alms, prayer, the confession of sins, and communion. Since the power of the devil could be overcome only by the power of God, the bewitched were best served by appealing to God’s mercy in approved and conventional ways. He advised priests to counsel couples whose love had turned to hatred through witchcraft, since “they should conquer by faith... the enemy who endeavors to trouble them.” Folk remedies of all sorts he condemned as “vain superstitions which ought to be shunned just like maleficia.” The only exception to this rule was that he, like Nider, allowed that when the instruments of maleficium were discovered, it was licit to destroy them in hope of breaking the spell.

This was an interesting exception. Since the instrument of maleficium was only a sign indicating the witch’s complicity with the devil’s design, if a spell was broken when it was destroyed it could only be through the devil’s own power. Finding and removing an instrument of maleficium was thus technically...
a “vanity,” in as much as the action held no intrinsic power. Most clerics took a dim view of such practices for this reason. Gerson, for example, explicitly condemned the destruction of the signs of witchcraft, as a kind of complicity with the devil little different from *maleficium*. Nonetheless, various other authorities approved of this procedure. Especially notable was Duns Scotus, whom Institoris and Sprenger claim whole-heartedly approved of the destruction of the instruments of *maleficia*.

because by destroying them he does not assent to the works of the devil, but rather believes that [the devil] is able and willing to torment him while such a sign endures, because, according to his pact, [the devil] lends his support to this torment only while that sign endures.

This notion of sign, *signum*, was extremely important, for it supplied a common thread running through all types of magical operation. Sacramental observances, witchcraft, and “vain” superstitions all depended upon signs of one type or another to communicate and mediate supernatural power. Duns Scotus was, of course, speaking primarily of the destruction of magical apparatus concealed under thresholds and the like, as were Nider and Mamorius. When Institoris and Sprenger, however, explained to their readers what Duns Scotus meant by “sign,” they chose a positively perverse example. They reported that when a cow’s supply of milk had been depleted by witchcraft, some women would hang a pail of milk over a fire and beat it while uttering superstitious words. The devil then transmitted the blows to the witch responsible. Similarly, people might drag the intestines of an animal killed by witchcraft through the streets and into their homes, and then burn them in the fire, believing that “just as the intestines grow hot and burn, so the intestines of the witch are tortured with pain and heat.” To Institoris and Sprenger, the bewitched cow’s milk and the dying animal’s intestines were both “signs” of witchcraft, and like sacramental and diabolic *signa* they could be exploited in a mechanical way. Satan, like God, was contractually obligated by his pact to behave predictably. Exactly how all this was relevant to Duns Scotus’ argument remained unclear; their point, however, was that folk-remedies that did not explicitly call upon the devil, that did not involve the participation of witches, and that had the discovery or remedy of witchcraft as their aim could be tolerated even though they were clearly superstitious and implicitly dependent upon the active participation of the devil.

With this surprising conclusion, Institoris and Sprenger have again made inventive use of the category of superstition, this time to distinguish tolerable “vanities” from condemned sorcery and witchcraft. Again, the authors have used notions of superstition to define an ambiguous middle ground between legitimate magic and witchcraft. “Vanities” were not necessarily to be encour-
aged, and certainly were not meritorious, but they were tolerable, and were definitely not maleficia.

Conclusion

The image of witches and witchcraft in the *Malleus* is perhaps best understood as a representation of a contested reality. Institoris and Sprenger were merely two of many scholars, clerics, and magistrates who found traditional conceptions of a world that was almost witch-free unacceptable in the light of contemporary evidence, and their representation of witchcraft was simply one of several such models that competed for attention and influence towards the end of the fifteenth century. Their model is notable, however, in that, more successfully than most of their competitors, they reconcile the demands of experience, reason, and theologically determined truth. Their understanding of witchcraft contains features which mark it distinctively as the product of their own experience: a sensitivity to popular narrative discourse, strangely combined with an almost complete lack of understanding of the differences between oral genres; a view that supernatural powers are in a sense balanced, the power of the devil being set against the even greater power of sacramentals and the Church; a corresponding acceptance of a remarkably wide range of popular remedies against witchcraft; and especially their insistence that witchcraft is linked inextricably with the female sex. Most of the notions about witchcraft in the *Malleus* can be understood as the product of minds which – although theologically learned and aware – have a view of the world that in many respects comes extremely close to that of their informants. The incessant emphasis upon the feminine nature of witchcraft, however, requires a somewhat different explanation, and this will be the subject of our final chapter.

Notes

1 Technically, heresy consisted of an error of belief persistently and perniciously held. Thus, Robert Grosseteste defined heresy as “an opinion chosen by human perception contrary to holy Scripture, publicly held and obstinately defended.” Cited in Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 4; see also Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, eds., *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 1–4. Apostasy was a subspecies of heresy, in which one abandoned the faith and put some false belief in its place (Bernard of Como, *Haeretica Pravitas* (Lucerne: 1584), 14); offering any form of adoration or honor to the devil, for example, constituted apostasy.


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6 Alexander IV, *Quod super Nonnullis*, in Hansen, *Quellen*, 1; and see Peters, 85–181.
7 Peters, 160.
8 “‘Maleficos non pateris vivere.’ Maleficos qui praestigiis magicae artis et diabolicis figmentis agunt, haereticos intellige, qui a consortio fidelium qui vere vivunt, excommunicandi sunt, donec maleficium erroris in eis moriatur.” *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria* (facsimile reprint of editio princeps, Adolf Rusch, 1480/81; Turnholt: Brepols, 1992).
9 Walter Map, pt. 1, c. 30, p. 57.
10 The origins of all this are obscure, and the subject of considerable scholarly disagreement. See Ginzburg, “Deciphering the Sabbath,” 121–37; Muchembled, “Satanic Myths,” 139–60; and Robert Rowland, “‘Fantastical and Devilishe Persons’: European Witch-beliefs in Comparative Perspective,” same volume, 161–90.
12 Étienne de Bourbon, 367.
13 “Ad hanc ludificacionem, que fit in sompniis, pertinet error illarum mulierum que dicunt se nocturnis horis cum Diana et Herodiade et aliis personis, quas bonas res vocant, ambulare, et super quasdam bestias equitare.” Ibid., 368.
14 Similar blurring of categories had occurred long before: Gregory the Great, for example, used the *lamia* as a symbolic representation of both sorcerers and heretics, a metaphor, taken perhaps more literally than Gregory intended, which remained popular among late-medieval witch-theorists. *Moralia in Job*, 34. See also Mamoris, 33.
16 “simul carnaliter coniunguntur solus cum sola vel solus cum solo, et aliquando pater cum filia, filius cum matre, frater cum sorore, et equo ordine nature minime observato.” *Errores Gazatorum*, 290.
17 The devil gives each initiate a compact written in his or her own blood after he receives the oath of allegiance. Ibid., 296–8.
18 “quod illi de secta inter ceteros fideles videntur esse meliores et communiter audiunt missam sepe in anno confitentes; et multociens capiunt sacram eucharistiam.” Ibid., 298.
21 “Sic quod credunt ire corporali de nocte, maxime diebus jovis et sabbati, in comitiva dyabolorum, ad suffocandum pueros et infirmitates incussiendum; extrahentes sagimen a pueros quos decoquent et comedunt.” Ibid., 357.
22 Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, 1–18.
23 Wakefield and Evans, 78–9. For a discussion of the historicity of the account, see Lambert, 9–16.
Wakefield and Evans, 78–9.

25 “Nam infantibus nonulm baptisatis insidiamur: vel eciam baptisatis, præsertim si signo crucis non munintur, et orationibus, hos in cunabulis, vel ad latera iacentis parentum, ceremoniis nostris occidimus, quos postquam putantur oppressi esse, vel alioinde mortui de tumulis clam furto repelsumus, in caldari decoquimus, quos postquam putatis fuerit, additis paucis cerimonialibus, statim conscius efficitur et magister nostrae sectae.” Nider, Formicarius, 5.3; 203.

26 “Postremo de utre bibit supradicto: quo facto, statim se in interioribus sentit imagines nostrae artis concipere et retinere, ac principales ritus huius sectae.” Ibid.


29 “Sunt autem he que contra humane nature inclinationem imo omnium ferarum lypina tantummodo excepta] proper speciei infantes vorant et comedere solent.” Malleus, pt. 2, qu. 1, ch. 2, p. 96. Institoris and Spenger are quoting Nider’s description of the witches of Lausane, although they characteristically omit Nider’s immediately preceding remark, that both sexes were included among these witches: “quidam Malefici vtriusque sexus.” Formicarius, 5.3, p. 202.

30 For the frequency with which heretics were accused of infanticide, see Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, 92–4; Briggs, Witches and Neighbors, 32.

31 This conceptual similarity, rather than any common bond with the devil, may explain the thinking of the author of one late-medieval devotional treatise who condemned “wyches & heretykes” together in one breath: “Accursed are alle palet dysteroin in be moderys wombe ony chylld, or slene wyth drynkys, or wyth oþere craftes, after be tym þey have lyif, or puttyng here chylldren to be fyls eyres. And all wyches, & heretykes, & lollardys, & alle palet beleuyn on here heresy.” Arthur Brandeis, ed., Jacob’s Well (Early English Text Society, O.S. 115, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1900), 59.

32 “et ibidem abnegare coram eis Christum, eius fidem, et uniueralem ecclesiam. Deinde omagium praestare magisterulo, id est, paruo magistro, ita enim Dæmonem et non aliter vocant... Sequitur postremo, de utre bibit supradicto [quo facto statim se in interioribus sentit imagines nostrae artis concipere et retinere super principales ritus huius sectae].” Malleus, pt. 2, qu. 1, ch. 2, 98; Formicarius, 5.3; 203.

33 “In hac autem fascinariorum secta siue Synagoga, conueniunt non solum mulieres, sed viri, et quod deterius est, etiam Ecclesiastici et Religiosi, qui stant et loquuntur cum Daemonibus perceptibiliter.” Jacquier, 41.

34 “a viginti annis citra, quendam Magnum Baronem in Galliis clam iugulasse circiter viginti pueros, ut de eorum sanguine quendam librum scriberet in obsequium Dæmonum.” Ibid., 116. Jacquier may refer to Gilles de Rais.

35 “hac genus superstitionis non libris aut a doctis sed omnino ab imperitus practicatur.” Malleus, pt. 2, qu. 1, p. 91.


37 Both Gratian and Ivo of Chartres included the canon in their collections: “Si per sor-tarrias atque maleficas, occulta sed nunquam injusto Dei judicio permittente et diabolo praeparante, concubitus non sequitur.” Ivo of Chartres, Decretum, 8.194, Patrologia Latina 161. See also Peters, 75.

39 Burchard of Worms, *Corrector, Patrologia Latina*, 140, 973.
41 Summaries of medieval popular and clerical perceptions of harmful magic may be found in Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 47–72, and Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, 147–63.
43 Flint, 62–4.
44 Hincmar of Rheims, *De Divortio Lotharii et Tethbergae*, *Patrologia Latina* 125, 717, 718–19.
46 William of Paris, John of Salisbury, and Gervaise of Tilbury each discuss night-flying women and malevolent sorcerers, but each also keeps these categories quite distinct.
47 See Peters, 168; Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, 225–9, although Cohn exaggerates the separation between these categories considerably.
49 Martin of Arles, 362.
51 “Apud fere omnes per strigas sive strigones intelliguntur mulieres aut viri, qui de nocte sive domos aut per longa spatione virtute demonis discurrunt, qui etiam parvulos fascinare dicuntur . . . Huissmodi mulieres malariade nuncupari solent a malis, quas operantur; apud alios vero herbarie a consililibus effectibus, fascinatrixe quia pueros infascinant; gallice fastineres ou festurieres; pisecondarie, quia a baculo feruntur virtute demonis.” Jordane de Bergamo, *Quaestio de Strigis*, in Hansen, *Quellen*, 196.
53 “maleficia sunt uera . . . ergo et ea que in tali ludo fiunt uera: quia omnia ista fiunt arte et uersutia demonis.” Visconti, a iiii.
58 For example, he writes that “all malefici commonly, and especially the heretical fascinari, are betrayers, accustomed to lying in the perpetration of black magic” (“Omnes enim malefici communiter, praesertim haereticii fascinarii sunt proditores et fictionumus assueti in maleficiorum perpetratione”). Jacquier, 93.
59 See *Ibid.*, 27. Jacquier writes that Guillaume Edeline was captured with other sectaries and confessed to his heresy in 1453. In the cathedral at Evreux he publicly admitted that he had gone to the Sabbath, worshiped the devil in the form of a goat, denied God, and done other horrible things. Jacquier, who says that he knew the man well, was especially impressed that the devil had suggested that William preach that his sect was illusory in order to deceive the people.
Mamoris, 6.

“quidam quasi hebetes opinabantur talia maleficia nihil esse: alii asserebant huiusmodi delusiones phantasticas tantum... alii autem docti magis, qui scripturas et Gentilium et Christicolarum legerent, dicta maleficia fieri posse firma ratione astruebant.” Ibid., 6–7. See also 12–13, “Sed contra eos experientia multorum est, et multa dicta Scripturae canonicalae, et auctoritates Sanctorum Doctorum,” etc.

“[Ex istis et alii multis pro certo tenendum est], quod deportantur aliqui nocte, vel die a daemone, ad loca remota atque propinqua, et ibi choreas facere possunt, daemonom adorare, homines cum multieribus coire, et daemones eas supponere, comedere et bibere vere vel apparent, mortem et infirmitates super aliquos inducere, causas intrare, vinum trahere, et ad remota loca portare possunt, soprire homines, pueros a lateribas [sic] matrum abstrahere et assare, diuinare de futuris euentibus aliquibus, tonitura et grandines excitare, ictu fulguris percutere et occidere, segetes destruire, et plura alia mala perpetrare auxilio daemonum.” Mamoris, 42.

Ibid., 37–8.

“Dicendum est quod stultorum infinitus est numerus.” Ibid., 38.

“et quod puer infirmetur, pecus moriatur, cancer vultum inficiat, et tempestas segetes destruat, occidat homines... horum omnium phantasmata daemnon phantasiis talium obicit, ex quibus se ludicant fecisse quod per phantasma viderunt, neque propriter ista possunt tales personae manifeste illorum facinorum argui neque pactum cum daemone habuisse tacite vel occulte depradandi.” Ibid., 39.

“[Hoc replicatur quod tales homines vel mulieres dicunt, se talia mala supradicta fecisse, que realiter euenerunt per pulueres, liquores, pilos, ungues, rubetas, vel per simulacra quae ad illos reposita inueniuntur. Ex omnibus istis supradictis pure confitentur se fecisse mala, super quibus interrogati sunt testes asserentes hoc idem realiter esse verum, et est vox communis quod haec mala feecerunt, et mala illa in re esse reperiuntur, et instrumenta maleflicorum reseruata ab illis in secretis suis inueniuntur. Ex quibus omnibus colligitur] quod rei sunt maleflicorum de quibus accusantur, et legalibus poenis sunt adiiciendi.” Ibid., 39. The passage is difficult to explain, since Mamoris had earlier made his belief in witchcraft perfectly clear.

That point may have come on the heels of William Adeline’s tearful confession at Evreux. Mamoris recounts the story of “Guillelmu de Lure alias Hamelin” in his conclusion, and as an explicit refutation of the canon Episcopi (ibid., 67–8) Like Jacquier, he says that he was personally acquainted with William, and saw and spoke with him often. But if William’s confession was, indeed, a turning point in Mamoris’ understanding of witchcraft, it is curious that he does not follow that model more closely, and emphasize the notion of the diabolic cult. William Adeline’s confession and the inquisitorial process against him of Bishop William of Evreux is in Hansen, Quellen, 467–72.

“idcirco communi nomine maleficium nominatur et vtentes communi vocabulo malefici dicuntur: eo quod ad maleficiendum daebola eos per illas artes inducet.” Mamoris, 51.

Ibid., 50–1. Mamoris remarks that image magic is especially common among those who wish to cause bodily harm.

Mamoris is certainly referring to learned magicians when he writes that “ut malefici credunt quod in herbis et lapidis sit virtus quae possunt daemones compelli ad respondendum his a quibus inuocant.” Ibid., 40.

Malleus, pt. 1, qu. 16, pp. 77–8. Their scheme is adapted from Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 2–2, qu. 95, art. 3.

“Licet he omnes per expressam demonum inuocationem fiant, nulla tamen est comparatio ad maleficia maleficarum cum ad nullum nocumentum hominum iumentorum et terre frugum tendunt directe.” Malleus, pt. 1, qu. 16, pp. 79–80.


For example, Institoris claimed that Innsbruck teemed with witches because there were so many men who had seduced and abandoned women. *Ibid.*, pt. 2, qu. 1, ch. 12, p. 136.


“Ibid.”, pt. 3, qu. 6, p. 201. Jacquier, incidently, although he gave no reasons, agreed with this assessment; he says that witches often made a point of warning their victims of the injuries that they were about to suffer, and sometimes even fixed the date when these trials would end. Jacquier, 42.


“Ecce inquit ex maleficio hec vobis contigit infirmitas, et subter limen hostii dominus tua pars instrumentorum maleficii continetur. Accedamus ergo et illis amicii cognouit, Unde dum adulteram pro- cahat et mihi vicinam agnou.” *Ibid*. Although if he knew that the instruments of *maleficium* were there in the first place, the experiment with the lead makes no sense. It is possible that this detail owes much to Institoris’ prompting, since otherwise his witness was making use of diabolic countermagic.


“Item interrogat. Item et quare dixisti quod nunquam deberet habere sanum diem et ulla factum est?... Item. cur visa fuerit in campis vel in stabulo cum iumentum tangendo... Item. quod cum habeat unam vaccam aut duas quod plus abundat lacte quod vicine habentes quator aut sex.” *Ibid.*, pt. 3, qu. 6, p. 201.
praetulisse non autem eo nocendi alicio, et tamen nihilominus sunt indicia varia quae sunt sufficientia te ad exponendum questionibus et tormentis.” Ibid., pt. 3, qu. 15, p. 211.

95 “Et talia cum sint varia videlicet aliquando per verba solum contumeliosa, dicendo, tu senties in breni [sic: brevi] que tibi euuent vel similia in effectu, vel per tactum solum, tangendo hominem aut bestiam manibus, aut per visum tantum se manifestando nocturno vel diurno tempore, certis dormientibus in cubilibus, et hoc vbi homines aut iumenta nituntur maleficari.” Ibid., pt. 3, qu. 19, p. 222.


97 Ibid., pt. 3, qu. 19, p. 222.


102 See Gerson, *De Erroribus*, 79.

103 “Incidit ut conquerer de superstitionibus pestiferis magicorum et stultitiae vetularum sortilegarum quae per quosdam ritus maledictos mederi patientibus pollicentur.” Ibid., 77.

104 Nider writes that both Staedelin and his teacher, Scavius, carried off up one third of a neighboring field’s produce for their use, *Formicarius*, 5.4, p. 206. Mamorius tells of a maleficus who cured a nobleman’s skepticism by teaching him how to magically steal wine (8). Institoris and Sprenger remarked that so common was this curse in Germany that “not the smallest farmstead is found where women do not mutually inflict the loss of milk in their cows” (“sic denique nec minima reperitur villula vbi mulieres mutuo vaccas inficere lac eas priuare”), *Malleus*, pt. 2, qu. 1, ch. 14, p. 142.

105 “vt malefici facere solent.” *Malleus*, pt. 2, qu. 1, ch. 14, p. 143. The authors apparently mean that the man did not explicitly call upon the aid of the devil, but merely performed a ritual gesture.

106 Ibid., 143.

107 “[in genere triplices apparent malefice vt in prima parte tractatus tactum est. Scilicet] ledentes sed curare non valentes curantes et ex aliquo singulari pacto cum demone inito non ledentes, ledentes et curantes,” Ibid., pt. 2, qu. 1, ch. 2, p. 95.

108 They could raise hailstorms and bring down lightning; children whom they did not devour they offered to the devil or killed in other ways; they covertly cast toddlers into water, drove horses mad, and flew through the air. They bewitched judges so that they would not prosecute them, and could magically resist the persuasive power of torture. They could cause fear in their enemies, seemed to know future events, changed the minds of men to inordinate love or hatred, and caused impotence, abortion, and other impediments to procreation. “In brief, they know how to procure all the plagues as have been mentioned before which other witches know only incompletely” (“et breviter omnia vt praemissum est pestifera que alie malefice sparsim procurare sciant”). Ibid., 96.


110 “Quod sine dubio ad qucumque loca beatissime virginiis siue aquisgrani siue ad heremi-
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...tis tantus pauperum concursus non existit sicut ad eundem superstitiosum hominem."


116 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1, qu. 84, art. 1.


120 Martin of Arles, 352–8.


125 Or, as Institoris and Sprenger put it, “the transport of reliquaries or sacraments for calming the weather does not seem to militate against this rule” (“deportatio sacramenti vel reliquarum ad auram sedandam non videtur contra hanc regulam militare”). *Ibid.*, pt. 2, qu. 2, ch. 7, p. 181.

126 These rules were taken from Nider, and, ultimately, from Aquinas, who, however, had phrased them more flexibly. See Nider, *Præceptorium*, 1, 11, dd.; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2–2, qu. 93, art. 2. The progressive elaboration of Aquinas’s strictures, making them more detailed and more rigid, tended to imply that any usage that did not transgress the rules was valid. The net effect of this change was that it became increasingly possible to justify doubtful usages through a narrow interpretation of the rules.


128 Provided, of course, that the charms contained no unknown names or other suspect characters, and that their efficacy was left in the hands of God. *Ibid.*, pt. 2, qu. 2, ch. 6, p. 173.


130 “Præterea sunt certe maliores que dum sentiunt quod in coagulando butirum nil per- ficient, sicut in vasis oblongis ad hoc aptis laborare solent, tunc si subito ex suspicte...


132 Mamoris, 36–7, 58–9. He concludes his discussion of remedies quite simply: “And therefore, for such *maleficia*, let us have recourse with sincere faith to Christ, to the blessed Virgin, to the saints, and to the prayers and exorcisms of the Church” (“Ad Christum igitur et ad beatam virginem, et ad sanctos, et ad preces et exorcismos Ecclesiae in talibus maleficis cum sinceritate fidei recursum habeamus”).


136 Gerson, *De Erroribus*, 84–5.


139 “sicint intestine calesiunt et ardent, ita intestine malefice calore et doloribus cruciantur.” *Ibid.*, 158. Similar types of sympathetic magic are well known from modern Europe: in nineteenth-century France, a common way to detect a witch was to boil the innards of a dead animal. See Devlin, 111.