

WOMEN, WOMBS, AND WITCHCRAFT:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF FERTILITY ON THE EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN
WITCH HUNTS

by

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Morgan Elizabeth Grundy

ABSTRACT

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Advisor: Andrea Wenz, Ph.D.

My thesis is focused on the integration of women's gender roles in reproduction and procreation into elite beliefs of witchcraft as a contributing factor in the targeting of women as witches in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Ancient elite beliefs of women being imperfect and passive evolved into discussions of women's gender and sexuality in medieval and early modern Europe. In turn, these elite beliefs of the female gender become incorporated into the elite early modern beliefs of witchcraft and witches. Elites focused on women's inferiority and weakness as being the reasons that made women more susceptible to witchcraft. These gender beliefs also influenced ideas of female carnality, specifically sexual desires, appetites, and sexual interactions with the Devil, as being the heart of accusing women as witches and influencing the stereotype of the witch.

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INTRODUCTION

Early modern Europe was regarded as a time of fascinating developments. These new developments included the reintroduction of classical ideas and vibrant art of the Renaissance, the discovery of the New World, and the Scientific Revolution.

Unfortunately, under this promising outlook on society, there was much instability and uncertainty in the lives of everyday people. The early modern period experienced lots of social and economic change, which combined with religious and political change, created fear that fueled the witch hunts.¹ Many kingdoms and nation-states were facing religious wars, especially in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation and the Counter Reformation, agricultural crises due to a colder climate, and inflation as a result of wars and famines.² The rise of capitalist economies in early modern cities led to a rise in inequality among social classes due to increasing poverty and rapid urbanization.³ The instability and uncertainty with these events made the people of Europe feel on edge which caused tensions and conflicts within communities. The witch hunts became a scapegoat of all the uncertainty created by the changes in society and, as a result, these hunts became a source of stability that communities clung to in the midst of the chaos.

During the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European witch hunts, it is clear that women were the main targets. But why was this so? What influences were at the heart of women being accused of witchcraft? It is also clear that demonologists seemed to

¹ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (London and New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 163-164.

² Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 163.

³ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 164.

be obsessed with ideas such as the sacrifice of children, the idea of copulation with the Devil, or other sexual and reproductive elements within witchcraft. The *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), in particular, took on ideas of female sexuality and demonized them by implying that female weakness and beliefs about female carnality were the cause of women becoming witches. Other authors of demonologies, such as *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* (1580) and *An Examen of Witches* (1602), were tamer in their approaches to women and witchcraft, but they, too, also still mentioned female weakness and carnality in some form or another. These ideas of female weakness and carnality can be traced back to ancient ideas of women being imperfect, passive, and inferior. But what caused women to be associated with these qualities, and how did these qualities come to link women with witches?

There is one word that links women to witches and witchcraft beliefs: women's role in procreation. Procreation was at the heart of women's expected roles and purpose as mothers, which was influenced by the renewal of classical beliefs and infused with medieval ideologies. While women had the ability to create life and provide the world with the next generation of human beings to improve their communities and continue their family lineage, this ability was, unfortunately, turned into a negative and condemnatory concept in early modern Europe that minimized women and likened them to "vessels" for the purpose of procreation. These cultural attitudes about the concepts of procreation seemed to determine not only the perspectives of women's roles and functions in society but also beliefs of witchcraft and witches in early modern communities. There was growing social anxiety around female sexuality which encouraged more strict social expectations and higher prevalence of double standards.

This anxiety also encouraged growing fears over women's role in the knowledge and control of reproduction. Could the power that women had over the reproductive process—and the anxiety that it caused—have been a contributing factor in the witch hunts? When studying beliefs about the witch and witchcraft, the concept of procreation was clearly incorporated into witchcraft practices and the stereotype of the witch by integrating ancient beliefs of women being imperfect and passive as well as medieval discussions on female sexuality through theology and natural philosophy. This association of imperfection and passivity with women also contributed to the inverse relationship between the ideal woman and the witch. The ideal early modern woman was fertile and highly involved with childbearing and raising children. Elites associated witches with anti-fertility. They could harm children, cause abortions, cause infertility in couples, and could be responsible for infanticide. The concepts of reproduction and procreation were already largely associated with the female gender and sex and the demonologies mentioned, and in one way or another, elites associated witchcraft beliefs with harming children or pregnant women. Based on this understanding, it makes sense that elites targeted women, and women became the main victims in the witch hunts.

In this thesis, I will focus on the cultural and social norms of women's roles in procreation and its relationship to elite beliefs on gender and witchcraft which was a major contributing factor in the targeting of women as witches in the early modern witch hunts. Specifically, I will focus on the evolution of elite's beliefs of women in regards to their sex and gender and their expected roles as mothers being incorporated into the witch hunts and the targeting of women as witches. Starting with the analysis of gender, ancient scholars determined that the sexual differences between men and women were key to

understanding the world they lived in and how nature operated in the world. Sex difference focused on the physical bodies of men and women and the biological processes that differentiated men and women. At the time, gender was explored through the concepts of biological processes such as reproduction and other functions of the body. This argument rests on the combination of a theological understanding and natural philosophical understanding of women, witches, and witchcraft.

Before I further discuss the historiography, I would like to address the terminology that I will present in the chapters regarding the terms “reproduction” and “procreation.” Although both terms are generally used interchangeably, for the sake of this thesis, the term “procreation” will be used when discussing the intentional creation of new life in regards to family formation and continuation of family lineage. The term “reproduction” will be used as a neutral term for describing biological expectations of the process of creating offspring and continuing humankind as a species. The emphasis on procreation rather than reproduction illustrates the importance in early modern Europe of the family and the importance of gender roles in their contribution to the maintenance of family lineages. The concept of reproduction deals with the biological processes of continuing a species rather than the idea of family itself.

I also want to bring attention to the definitions and terminology of the words “sex” and “gender” as they will be used in my research. Again, these words can sometimes be used interchangeably depending on the research and historian who is conducting the research, but there will be a clear distinction between these two terms as I present my work. When I refer to gender, I am referring to the sex difference based on social and cultural differences, and how people identified themselves. When I refer to

sex, I refer to the biological differences between those born with female genitalia and male genitalia. There were some people who were born as hermaphrodites, but this was a small minority of the population, and for this research, I will be focusing on individuals born solely of the male and female sex.

As we explore ancient and medieval influences on understandings of women, one way to explain how early modern society perceived and constructed female gender beliefs is by exploring the evolution of the concepts of sex difference, sexuality, and gender from the ancient world to the medieval world. These concepts of sex and gender influenced many aspects of life and the elite belief that women were expected to uphold specific behaviors that were seen as appropriate to a woman's nature. These concepts of gender were influenced by medicine and natural philosophy that were eventually integrated into society. In the late-1980s to mid-1990s, historians focused on the concepts of reproduction as a part of gender and sexuality. These historians are Joan Cadden, Danielle Jacquart, and Claude Thomasset. In *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset discuss medieval sexuality based on the function of reproduction and its discourse during the time period.⁴ Joan Cadden in her work *Sex Differences in the Middle Ages* addresses sexuality within sex differences between men and women by examining the origins and evolution of these differences throughout the medieval period. Once she addresses the evolution of these differences, Cadden goes on to address how these sex differences integrated themselves into scientific

⁴ Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 2.

and medical concepts within social and religious contexts.⁵ Cadden, Jacquart, and Thomasset set the tone for how elites understood women in relation to medicine and natural philosophy. To understand a little about this natural philosophical perspective of women, Joyce Salisbury provides a brief look into the concepts of masculinity and femininity and how it played out in society through natural philosophical beliefs. Joyce Salisbury provides an understanding of beliefs about male and female sexuality while arguing that masculinity and femininity had been blurred by historians taking a non-gendered approach to the primary texts in her article “Gendered Sexuality.”⁶ These texts included works from Isidore of Seville (560-636), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) to analyze the evolution of sexuality through the medieval period. All three of these historians set the tone for deeper analysis of female sex and gender in the decades to come.

As sexuality has become a more studied area among historians, one of the subjects that has been focused on is sex difference. In the early 2000s, historians such as Michael Stolberg and Katharine Park took on the concept of sex difference between men and women by exploring the physical bodies of women in early modern Europe. To analyze the sex difference through the physical body, both historians used dissections, studies of anatomy, and comparison of male and female reproductive systems to show the concepts and ideas of medieval and early modern elite scholars. In “A Woman Down to Her Bones,” Michael Stolberg reexamines claims that the differences in male and female

⁵ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7.

⁶ Joyce E. Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 81-102.

anatomy were a product of the eighteenth century and were used to justify female inferiority during the Enlightenment, when ideas of equality and universal rights were being discussed.⁷ Stolberg shows evidence from both male and female skeletons and their intended functions to disprove these claims. The examination of the female body emphasizes how the concepts of reproduction became the basis of differences in sex and gender. If women's bodies were made for producing and raising children, then the female sex reinforced the expected roles of the female gender. In *Secrets of Women*, Katharine Park similarly argues that the dissections of women's bodies played an important role in defining and exploring the female anatomy internally and developing new observations to add to the construction of knowledge concerning the female body.⁸ These dissections offered a deeper understanding of medical issues that women faced and elaborated on sex differences that were previously unknown to medical practitioners and scholars. These ideas on sex difference emphasized women's reproductive anatomy as an important factor in women's health and identity.

In the 1990s and 2000s, historians such as Jennifer Ward, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, and Ilse Paakinsen, started to explore gender as a tool to analyze aspects of medieval and early modern life. In *Women in Medieval Europe 1200-1500*, Jennifer Ward explores how gender influenced the daily lives of women in regard to their upbringing, marriage, family, work, and religion. She defined gender as the "social and cultural construction of human relationships."⁹ Merry Wiesner-Hanks also addresses women and gender in early

⁷ Michael Stolberg, "A Woman Down to Her Bones," *Isis* 94, no. 2 (June 2003): 274.

⁸ Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2006), 37-38.

⁹ Jennifer C. Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

modern society. In *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Wiesner-Hanks explores gender as a historical tool to study and analyze the daily life of early modern people by addressing how subjects, such as power, literature, economics, and religion interact with each other while arguing that women played an important role in historical developments as well as addressing the impact on women's lives in the early modern period.¹⁰ In her section on witchcraft, she addresses the changing dynamic of women's lives as a contributing factor in the witch hunts. More women remained unmarried, and more widows refused to marry again. She also explores women's dependence on neighbors and how they made a living as a widow or unmarried woman. She stresses how such marital statuses were viewed as threats in a changing society because the patriarchal structure of the family was built on women being married or raising women with the expectation of being married one day. Women were always supposed to be dependent on the head of the family which was the oldest male. These changes in demographics of early modern women along with other social tensions regarding opposition towards birth control and spread of syphilis highlighted the uncertainty towards the gender and its expectations in society.¹¹

By studying the life of women who lived in medieval and early modern Europe, more discussions on female gender and sexuality have been explored in relation to women's gender roles and expectations. In the 2010s, historians such as Ilse Paakinsen, Katherine Crawford, Lianne McTavish, and Lynn Botelho have discuss how female sex

¹⁰ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 4th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 13-19.

¹¹ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (London and New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 2.

and gender influenced women's identity in society. In "The Metaphysics of Gender in Christine de Pizan's Thought," Ilse Paakinen explored gender through the eyes of Christine de Pizan and her idea of equality between men and women.¹² She explains this idea of equality through Christine's interpretation of the book of Genesis.¹³ More specifically, Paakinen analyzes the writings of Aristotle, Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas to examine the formation of Adam and Eve to emphasize that women, despite the negative perspectives about the female gender, were equals in the eyes of God. These ideas of ancient and medieval theologians of female gender illustrated the emphasis on how pertinent these views were at the time of Christine de Pizan and how deeply these views were embodied in culture. In "Permanent Impermanence" (2016), Katherine Crawford analyzes how the biological sex of women influenced female sexuality and how it was ingrained in women's social identity in many areas of early modern life. She states that "[women] were identified with their wombs, while the male body [came] to represent sovereign individuality."¹⁴ This was incorporated in women's health, the characteristics that women possessed, and how society viewed them. This included distinguishing factors between masculine and feminine attributes with femininity associated with "chastity and obedience" while masculinity was associated

¹² Ilse Paakinen, "The Metaphysics of Gender in Christine de Pizan's Thought," in *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Marianna G. Muravyeva and Raisa Maria Toivo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 55-56.

¹³ Paakinen, "The Metaphysics of Gender," 55-56.

¹⁴ Katherine Crawford, "Permanent Impermanence: Continuity and Rupture in Early Modern Sexuality Studies," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver (New York, Routledge: 2016), 265.

with “honour, virility, and civility.”¹⁵ Procreation and reproduction are clearly at the center of gender roles, such as being mothers, and expectations of women, such as being chaste. One of these gender roles and expectations was that women were expected to be mothers as part of their social identity. This is connected to the ancient and medieval developments of the female sex and gender, as will be discussed later. Lianne McTavish introduces more complicated ideas of maternity as a part of women’s identity as mothers. In “Maternity,” McTavish explores the “paradoxical picture of motherhood” in relation to the violence and danger as well as negative representations and experiences of motherhood.¹⁶ These representations and experiences target infertility, the contradictions between the Virgin Mary and everyday women, and possessing knowledge of contraceptive practices. The negative representations previously described created fear and misconceptions that led to accusing women of being witches, especially older women. In “Old Women in Early Modern Europe,” Lynn Botelho explores old age as it pertains to studying gender and women.¹⁷ She focuses on the connection between fertility, or lack thereof, and old age by exploring the meaning of menopause and sex in a woman’s life as well as the perspectives of older women, including midwives. She observes how the lack of fertility and its connection to witchcraft is tied to sex and old age through knowledge of contraceptive practices. Moreover, older women were also not

¹⁵ Katherine Crawford, “Permanent Impermanence: Continuity and Rupture in Early Modern Sexuality Studies,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver (New York, Routledge: 2016), 265.

¹⁶ Lianne McTavish, “Maternity,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver (New York, Routledge: 2016), 175.

¹⁷ Lynn Botelho, “Old Women in Early Modern Europe: Age as an Analytical Category,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver (New York, Routledge: 2016), 298-315.

held to the same restrictions as younger women such as not getting pregnant from extramarital affairs and even pursuing younger men.¹⁸ All of these ideas mirror the fears of witches and witchcraft by connecting the sexual nature of old women and witches, which highlight the idea of female carnality within witchcraft through old women being separated from their primary role in reproduction.

As we have seen, the concept of procreation is deeply embedded in women as a sex, gender, and their roles. It has shaped understandings of their behavior, their health, and their purpose in life. This concept has also made its way into the practices of magic and witchcraft. Witchcraft and the witch highlight the negative associations of women and presented an anti-procreative discourse. This can be seen in the stereotype of the witch, the practices and rituals of witches, the crimes of witchcraft, and the trials of the witch hunts.

When it comes to studying women during the witch hunts of early modern Europe, each historian has their various observations and arguments about how women were impacted and how the hunts influenced society. According to scholars, a couple of defining factors in the witch hunts were religion and sexuality. As a starting point, many discussions of the witch hunts were inspired by Margaret Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* in which Murray argues that witchcraft was a cult that developed into a practiced religion with an organized system of beliefs and rituals.¹⁹ Although recent historiography has proven otherwise, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* has influenced

¹⁸ Lynn Botelho, "Old Women in Early Modern Europe: Age as an Analytical Category," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver (New York, Routledge: 2016), 309-310.

¹⁹ Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1921), 9-18.

many conversations and arguments about witchcraft and the witch hunts in relation to topics such as religion and sexuality. One of the historians who explores the impact on religion on the witch hunts and beliefs surrounding witches and witchcraft is Lyndal Roper. In *Oedipus and the Devil*, Roper explores the Protestant Reformation and its impact on sexuality such as on topics of sex difference and gender expectations.²⁰ Topics on religion and gender led to more discussions on the social impact of the witch hunts. Historians such as Edward Bever, Laura Apps and Andrew Gow, and Brian Levack were also influenced by Murray's work as they explored social aspects of the witch hunts. Murray also influenced conversations and arguments around women involved in the witch hunts. These concepts are brought up in arguments on the fantasy of witches and witchcraft, which are made by Christina Larner, Diane Purkiss, and Linda Hults.

When discussing gender and witch-hunting in early modern Europe, there was an inverse relationship of thought. The gender beliefs, especially surrounding women, played an important role in shaping the witch hunts and the fantasies surrounding witches and witchcraft. In *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe*, Laura Apps and Andrew Gow introduce the discussion of how male witches brought to life the feminization of the witch and the use of the cultural development of the female gender in witchcraft.²¹ For the witch-hunts in early modern Europe, it is important to remember, according to Christina Larner, that "[witchcraft] was not sex-specific but it was sex-related."²² She applies this

²⁰ Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 26-27.

²¹ Laura Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 7.

²² Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 92.

argument to her study of the witch hunts in Scotland. Concepts such as weakness were more associated with women than with men, and ultimately this weakness became a common characteristic of witches, more broadly. The feminization of those considered to be subordinates and their associated traits served as a window into early modern culture and thought.²³ The witch was feminized but not exclusively female. The traits of the witch paralleled feminine traits due to the polarized thought of early modern Europe where every concept had an opposite, such as God versus the Devil, men versus women, hot versus cold, strong versus weak, and so on. These same traits were associated with women and, therefore, it allowed for society and communities to be suspicious of women and to view them as the most likely culprits of the destruction and misfortunes happening within their communities. When Stuart Clark explores women's association to male elites' beliefs of witchcraft in a chapter of *Thinking with Demons*, he discusses the question of why women were more likely to be associated with witchcraft.²⁴ He mentions how binary thinking and inversion played a role in associating feminine traits with witchcraft.²⁵ In "Inversion and Misrule of Witchcraft," Stuart Clark also explores the inverse relationship of early modern thought as applied to witchcraft beliefs.²⁶ In one of the chapters in *Witches and Neighbors* (1996), Robin Briggs examines the witch as the "other" in society by placing emphasis on the social and economic context as well as

²³ Laura Appes and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 136.

²⁴ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 107.

²⁵ For more information on inversion, see Stuart Clark, "Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft," *Past & Present*, no.87 (May 1980): 98-127.

²⁶ Stuart Clark, "Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft," *Past & Present*, no.87 (May 1980): 98-127.

claiming that witchcraft was “psychologically constructed.”²⁷ The concept of the “other” was showcased through analyzing gender, families, and social tensions, such as unemployment, disease, and warfare. Briggs’ explanation of the inverse relationship of women and witches associated femininity with the “other” mirrors arguments of Clark, Apps, and Gow.

As historians study the witch hunts, it is clear that there were many social tensions that helped provoke the witch trials within communities. In *Enemies of God*, Christina Larner explores witchcraft as an idea that transformed into a phenomenon in early modern Scotland. What was unusual was how the witch hunts exploded across Europe during the early modern period in a short amount of time. She argues that the ideas associated with beliefs about witches and witchcraft were not new concepts but were already existing ideas within society.²⁸ She further studies witch-hunting as something fostered by the elites, and that the witch-hunting was to a current extent woman-hunting.²⁹ The witch trials also provided women with a chance to exercise power against social tensions within their communities. Edward Bever and Stephanie Spoto explores how the witch hunts gave women more power in communities, especially in the legal system and in politics. Women were able to challenge gender hierarchies through creating accusations that were focused on the image of the witch being connected to female

²⁷ Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 5.

²⁸ Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 2.

²⁹ Larner, *Enemies of God*, 1-3. Christina Larner, “Witchcraft Past and Present,” in *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief*, ed. Alan Macfarlane (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 79-91.

domestic roles.³⁰ In “Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community,” Edward Bever explores understanding the “paradigm shift” within the role of gender in early modern Europe society by arguing that the witch hunts had given women a voice in the legal sector and therefore power within their own communities during this period.³¹ Similarly, in “Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power,” Spoto argues that the witch trials in early modern England granted women a voice in the legal system and allowed them to be seen as respected individuals in legal proceedings. These women were able to voice their concerns over subjects such as neighborly disputes, poverty, and other matters.

Within the study of witchcraft beliefs during the witch hunts, historians present a picture of the stereotype of the witch as an old woman. Lyndal Roper in *Witch Craze* addresses the question of why beliefs of witches and witchcraft focused on older women by examining the notions of female nature that existed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany.³² She argues that the learned concepts of the nature of women that brought about the fantasies of witchcraft, which often focused not just on women, but especially older women. These concepts included carnal desires depicted in witchcraft beliefs and women’s changing roles throughout their life in accordance with reproduction.³³ One of the historians who explores this witchcraft fantasy is Diane Purkiss. In *The Witch in History*, Diane Purkiss argues that patriarchy had a role in the

³⁰ Stephanie Irene Spoto, “Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power,” *Pacific Coast Philology* 45 (2010): 53–54.

³¹ Edward Bever, “Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community,” *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 4 (2002): 955.

³² Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 11.

³³ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 11.

witch hunts but emphasizes that the witch was also a figure that women used to help them express their fears and desires about questions and concerns they had about motherhood and children.³⁴ A part of her research surrounds the belief that the maternal body was a way for understanding witchcraft and why women were accused of witchcraft and why women accused other women of witchcraft. Linda Hults focuses on the imagery in artwork that depicted witches. In *The Witch as a Muse*, Hults explores the image and stereotype of the witch while arguing that these images prove that the concept of gender spread throughout early modern culture and society.³⁵ She continues her argument by stating that male artists arranged the difference between men and women in order to construct the identities needed to overcome the dangers of the fantasy of the female witch by emphasizing masculine superiority of reason, virtues, and control of the senses. The imagery of older women was similar to the stereotype of the witch, which helps to explain why old women were disproportionately represented in the early modern witch hunts as discussed in Alison Rowland's article "Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany."³⁶ Moreover, Encarnación Juárez-Almendros in his article "The Disabling of Aging Female Bodies" focuses on women and their relation to their aging bodies, to healing and sexual knowledge, and their roles as aging mothers in early

³⁴ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History [Electronic Resource]: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 2.

³⁵ Linda C. Hults, *The Witch as Muse: Art, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1-26.

³⁶ Alison Rowlands, "Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany," *Past & Present*, no. 173 (January 1, 2001): 50-89. Alison Rowlands, "Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford Academic, 2013), 448-464.

modern Spain.³⁷ Importantly, Juárez-Almendros also discusses the physical and mental aging of older women that would be seen as a parallel to the stereotype of the witch, such as mental illness and increased sexual libido.³⁸ The studies of old women and witchcraft demonstrate the discussion of behaviors that single out old women as being similar to a witch's nature.

As historians learned more about the stereotypes of the witch, midwives also became a topic of conversation as a highly suspected group of women. Jonathan Durrant presents a case study demonstrating how women with knowledge of female bodies, such as midwives, were targeted by communities during the witch hunts. In one of the chapters out of *Witchcraft, Gender and Society in Early Modern Germany*, Durrant shares the story of Anna Harding and how she had provided abortions to women, despite being primarily focused on having women control their menstrual cycles.³⁹ To explore this topic further, Leigh Whaley explores female healers and witchcraft in *Women and Practice of Medical Care in Early Modern Europe, 1400-1800*. She focused on the similarities between healing, magic, and witchcraft.⁴⁰ These similarities included remedies, chants, and objects used to cure patients which were also believed to be used by witches to cure or harm.

³⁷ Encarnación Juárez-Almendros, "The Disabling of Aging Female Bodies: Midwives, Procuresses, Witches and the Monstrous Mother," in *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature: Prostitutes, Aging Women and Saints* (Liverpool University Press, 2017), 83–115.

³⁸ Juárez-Almendros, "The Disabling of Aging Female Bodies," 85.

³⁹ Jonathan B. Durrant, "HEALTH," in *Witchcraft, Gender and Society in Early Modern Germany* (Brill, 2007), 181-98.

⁴⁰ Leigh Whaley, *Women and the Practice of Medical Care in Early Modern Europe, 1400-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 174-195.

As historians study older women and midwives as people who fit the stereotype of the witch, it becomes clear that the idea of sex and reproductive knowledge were central themes in the witch hunts. Older women and midwives had more knowledge on how the female body functioned, and they knew how to manage reproductive functions, such as abortions, contraceptives, and remedies to conceive. In the 2010s, historians such as Juila M. Garrett, Lynn Botelho, and Alison Rowlands discuss how older women were connected to witch hunts and how the ideologies of witchcraft targeted them as witches. Juila Garrett in “Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge in Early Modern England” explores the sexual discourse in the witch hunts through knowledge of sexual function and pleasure.⁴¹ Garrett argues that witchcraft promoted the pursuit of sexual knowledge for both sexes, which re-enforced the idea the women’s bodies were hiding secrets, especially in regard to reproduction. Elites believed that these reproductive secrets were dangerous to the early modern community. This idea that sexual knowledge was dangerous is also demonstrated in Lynn Botelho’s “Old Women and Sex.” Botelho discusses how the image of a highly sexualized older woman was viewed with fear and suspicion.⁴² With their experienced knowledge on sex and fertility, elites saw these women as medically dangerous. These studies explore the fears of sexuality and reproductive knowledge having an impact on the elite beliefs of witchcraft and the stereotype of the witch.

⁴¹ Julia M. Garrett, “Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge in Early Modern England,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 32–72.

⁴² Lynn Botelho, “Old Women and Sex: Fear, Fantasy, and a Defining Life Course in Early Modern Europe,” *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 42 (2015): 189–99.

As scholars note in recent studies, men who were accused as witches were largely ignored in the scholarship of the early modern witch-hunts. While women made up the significant majority of those who were accused and prosecuted, men still composed a significant minority of victims. While earlier historiography focuses on women being the ultimate victims of the witch hunts, more recent historiography sheds light on the men who were accused and tried as witches across Europe. For example, Alison Rowlands estimates that women constituted “[seventy-five percent] or more of those accused of witchcraft in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the northern Netherlands, England, Scotland, Hungary, Croatia, Piedmont, Siena, the Holy Roman Empire, Geneva, the bishopric of Basel, Neuchatel, and Graubünden/Grisons.”⁴³ In Iceland, Normandy, Estonia, and Russia, however, Rowlands also asserted that men made up the majority of the accused.⁴⁴ Lastly, in Finland, Burgundy, and those parts of France subject to the Parlement of Paris, she argued men and women were accused and prosecuted roughly to the same degree.⁴⁵ Although these numbers are still contested, men still made up a sizeable minority of those accused of witchcraft. Moreover, men and women could sometimes be accused of witchcraft for similar reasons. For example, men could be known in a community as magical healers or herdsman, shamans, clerics, and “vagrants” (all positions of vulnerability), which could put them at greater risk of accusation.⁴⁶ Men who were related to someone who was prosecuted for witchcraft could also be in particular danger.

⁴³ Alison Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford Academic, 2013), 449.

⁴⁴ Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender,” 449.

⁴⁵ Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender,” 449.

⁴⁶ Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender,” 464.

Those men who “contravened patriarchal expectations about their social roles”—such as being a bad father to his children or a bad husband to his wife—could also be suspected of witchcraft.⁴⁷ Much like women, then, men were expected to follow and live up to the expectations of the male gender and conform to the ideals of the early modern man. Nevertheless, if we look at witchcraft prosecutions across all of Europe in this period, historians saw that women still made up approximately 80% of those who were prosecuted.⁴⁸ As such, the primary focus of this thesis will be on the witch hunts and the witch beliefs as they pertained specifically to women at the time.

I hope by addressing these two scholarly fields of gender and witchcraft studies, we can continue to explore and establish the connection between gender beliefs of women and their association with witches and witchcraft in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. In chapter one, I will explore the evolution of the elite gender beliefs about women from ancient to early modern Europe and how it influenced elite beliefs about witches and witchcraft. I will focus on Aristotle’s ideas of women as imperfect, passive, and inferior based on sex difference. These elite beliefs opened up discussions in the medieval period about female sexuality, which eventually led to the construction of beliefs of female carnality. These elite beliefs emphasized women’s role and importance in procreation through natural philosophy, medicine, and religion. In chapter two, I will

⁴⁷ Alison Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford Academic, 2013), 449.

⁴⁸ Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender,” 449. Edward Bever, “Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community,” *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 4 (2002): 956. Laura Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 25. Leigh Whaley, *Women and the Practice of Medical Care in Early Modern Europe, 1400-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 177.

explore the similarities between female gender beliefs and beliefs about witchcraft and witches in order to explain why women were being targeted during the witch hunts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. These elite beliefs about witches and witchcraft were centered on the concepts of fertility and procreation. These concepts of fertility and procreation in beliefs of witchcraft and witches are explored through female nature in relation to witchcraft and old age and its connection to the stereotype of the witch. These themes of procreation are based on gender beliefs and witchcraft beliefs, such as in the crimes of witchcraft, the connection between witches and the idea of the anti-mother, and similarities in traits between women and witches.

CHAPTER 1

WHY WOMEN AS WITCHES:

THE EVOLUTION OF FEMALE GENDER NOTIONS

In the early modern world (and long before), procreation held special significance in a woman's life. This was demonstrated by the premodern elite concepts of the female life cycle, her role in society, understandings of her anatomy, and societal beliefs about the female gender and sexuality. Put simply, women were expected to have and raise children. When studying the evolution of beliefs regarding sex and gender, Katherine Crawford has emphasized that "sexual identity was inseparable from... social [identity]."⁴⁹ A woman's biological sex automatically identified her with her role in society along with the traits and behaviors that she was expected to demonstrate. This combination of sexual and social identity can further be appreciated through the concept of the female life cycle, which was divided into three categories: virgin, wife, and widow, or, alternatively, daughter, wife, and mother.⁵⁰ These periods within a woman's life were strongly associated with marriage and reproduction. The virgin, also known as a maiden, was considered to be a woman who was unmarried; therefore she was "sexually immature and lacked a husband."⁵¹ The mother was considered to be a woman who was

⁴⁹ Katherine Crawford, "Permanent Impermanence: Continuity and Rupture in Early Modern Sexuality Studies," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver (New York, Routledge: 2016), 263.

⁵⁰ Lynn Botelho, "Old Women and Sex: Fear, Fantasy, and a Defining Life Course in Early Modern Europe," *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 42 (2015): 189. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, "The Female Life Cycle," in *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 4th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 63-111.

⁵¹ Botelho, "Old Women and Sex," 189.

at the “apex” of her life cycle, when she was “sexually active, reproducing children, and under her husband’s authority.”⁵² The widow was a woman whose husband had passed away, who was no longer menstruating, and who therefore no longer was able to reproduce. In fact, menstruation was further proof that women were dominated by the womb both mentally and physically. Menstruation and its functions as a biological process emphasized procreation as a woman’s natural purpose and underscored the importance of her role as a mother in society. Essentially, this concept stressed how a woman’s life was largely shaped by the responsibilities of reproduction and procreation. As we will see, however, the importance of reproduction and procreation manifested itself in other areas related to a woman’s life as well.

This emphasis on procreation also extended into fields such as medicine and natural philosophy. Natural philosophy was, in a manner of speaking, like premodern science, which helped early modern individuals understand the world around them.⁵³ Natural philosophy included all the fields (and more) that we now associate with the sciences. For elites, the emphasis on procreation influenced how women’s health was perceived and studied. Women’s health was focused on the effects that the uterus or womb had on the female body both physically and mentally. Elites such as Hildegard of Bingen and the author of *Trotula* (twelfth century) believed that the womb dictated the nature, mind, and physical structure of a woman. In *On the Secrets of Women* (late

⁵² Lynn Botelho, “Old Women and Sex: Fear, Fantasy, and a Defining Life Course in Early Modern Europe,” *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 42 (2015): 189.

⁵³ For a brief introduction into natural philosophy and its connection with medicine, see Joan Cadden, “Western Medicine and Natural Philosophy,” in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 51-80.

thirteenth-early fourteenth century), pseudo-Albertus Magnus shed light on the connection between the womb and the rest of women's health.⁵⁴ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus emphasized that "a woman's complexion depended on that of her womb; in addition, the uterus... was physically connected to almost all of women's higher organs: the brain, heart, liver, not to mention the breasts, diaphragm, bladder, and colon."⁵⁵ Additionally, aspects of a woman's body and health were seen as influencing her character and personality traits. These relationships between a woman's anatomy and characteristics were often discussed in relation to what was called her complexion, shape, and disposition. These categories defined the make-up of a woman. According to Joan Cadden, complexion was described as "the balance or ratio of qualities, especially hot, cold, moist and dry, which characterized an individual."⁵⁶ Complexion of the body was associated with heat, semen, and menstruation. The amount of heat that an individual possessed determined if they could, for example, produce semen, menstruate, or even grow a beard. Shape was associated with the physical anatomy of men and women. This category was heavily focused on the comparison of the female and male reproductive organs. Lastly, disposition was closely related to complexion, but instead of focusing on the body and the bodily functions, this category focused on an individual's character and

⁵⁴ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 1. The authorship of this treatise is attributed to Pseudo-Albertus Magnus because, although it was accepted that the German Dominican bishop Albertus Magnus (1200-1280) was the author, the treatise was more likely to be drawn partly from Magnus's own writings and partly modeled by others after his writings.

⁵⁵ Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2006), 103.

⁵⁶ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 171.

behavior in accordance with the four qualities of hot, cold, moist, and dry.⁵⁷ Complexion, shape, and disposition all were related to the understanding of heat, which was the most fundamental difference between men and women.⁵⁸ These categories were used to analyze and explain why women possessed the physical and mental attributes that they did. These categories also provide a framework within which we can explore early modern gender beliefs about women.

In this chapter, I will explore the development of such premodern elite beliefs relating to the female sex and gender. These ideas will set the foundations for beliefs associated with witchcraft and witches that bolstered accusations and catalyzed the trials against women during the early modern European witch hunts. First, I will discuss gender beliefs derived from the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, whose writings were deeply influential in both medieval and early modern Europe. I will follow up on the evolution of these beliefs with other philosophers and physicians from ancient Europe to emphasize the long-standing foundations of these fundamental concepts related to the female sex and gender. These ideas included the negative beliefs that women were imperfect, passive, and inferior, particularly in regard to beliefs of female carnality which will be addressed in the next chapter in connection with the beliefs of witchcraft and witches. After establishing the ancient foundation for many of these ideas, I will explore the ideas and concepts of medieval theologians and physicians to demonstrate how ancient ideologies continued to influence thinkers in medieval and early modern Europe.

⁵⁷ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 184.

⁵⁸ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 171.

I will also explore how the ideas of complexion, shape, and disposition influenced the understandings of female nature and the development of gender expectations of women in early modern Europe in relation to a woman's expected characteristics and reproductive anatomy. I will further demonstrate that the evolution of the concept of sex difference between men and women combined with the ideas and beliefs associated with gender—particularly as they pertain to the themes of procreation and reproduction—and contributed to the targeting of women during the early modern witch hunts. To understand how the concept of procreation became a factor in the witch hunts and in witchcraft practices, we must first look at the evolution of gender beliefs of women from ancient Europe to medieval Europe and how they integrated their way into early modern society.

Ancient Ideals

The foundations of early modern gender beliefs stretched all the way back to Ancient Greece and the writings of Aristotle (384-322 BCE). As we will see, ancient and medieval elites' beliefs about women heavily influenced the concept of the ideal woman in early modern Europe and her expected role in society. These beliefs also influenced behaviors, expectations, and perspectives concerning the female body and female sexuality. Aristotle wrote on many topics, but in regard to the current argument, one of the most important concepts that Aristotle discussed was that of sex differences between men and women. As scholar Joan Cadden explains, Aristotle's goal was "to provide a systematic explanation of the natural phenomena connected with reproduction that was

consistent with his broader philosophy.”⁵⁹ Aristotle was trying to connect his philosophy on the difference between the male and female sex with his other philosophies in order to create a harmonious picture that provided answers as to how the world naturally operated. While Aristotle was focused on defining the differences between the sexes, his statements impacted how gender beliefs were constructed, especially for women. His philosophy focused on natural objects that were defined and shaped by their form and purpose, which Aristotle continued to apply to the sex difference between men and women.

Heat was at the core of the differences between men and women in Aristotle’s theories, which coincided with ideas concerning the polarization of males and females.⁶⁰ Heat was considered to be a major factor in the biological configuration of both animals and humans, which contributed to Aristotle’s beliefs that women were imperfect, inferior, and passive. He associated the qualities, characteristics, and traits with men were reciprocates with the opposite qualities, characteristics, and traits with women. For example, men were hot while women were cold. Men were dry while women were moist. The concept of heat can also be applied to the act of reproduction itself, and heat, or lack of, explained why women were more inclined to engage in sexual activities. Since women lacked heat, they seek to obtain it from men through intercourse because elites believed that heat could be exchanged through copulation of men and women.⁶¹ Since

⁵⁹ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22.

⁶⁰ For more information on polarized thought on men and women, Clark, Stuart Clark, “Women and Witchcraft,” in *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 106-133. Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22-23.

⁶¹ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women’s Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 70.

women's roles were focused on producing and raising children, elites believed that women were governed by their sexual desires in order to continue the process of reproduction.⁶² Additionally, he believed the heat impacted menstruation and the production of sperm, which was one of the primary differences between the male and female sex. For men, their supposedly superior heat turned blood into sperm. For women, their supposedly inferior heat turned their blood into menses and low-quality sperm. Menstruation attracted much attention among scholars and was considered a specific feature that belonged solely to females. Thinkers such as Aristotle associated hot and dry qualities with active and formative characteristics (semen) while linking cold and wet qualities with passive and non-formative qualities (menstruation).⁶³ This understanding of the polarization of men and women, which included the discussion of semen and menses, would continue to figure importantly in the writings of other ancient philosophers and physicians as well as later medieval theologians and physicians.

Aristotle applied the concept of heat as the main contributing factor to the differences between both the male and female sex in two of his ideas relating to imperfection and passivity. The first idea that Aristotle emphasized was that women were imperfect because "the female is... a deformed male."⁶⁴ This was, again, due to the perception that women were too cold and that they were unable to produce semen. According to Aristotle, women were imperfect by nature, but they were also important to

⁶² Joyce E. Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 84.

⁶³ Ilse Paakinen, "The Metaphysics of Gender in Christine de Pizan's Thought," in *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Marianna G. Muravyeva and Raisa Maria Toivo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 38.

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck, of *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943), 175.

the preservation of the human species, so he concluded that women were an intended failure by nature.⁶⁵ Galen (129-216), a Roman physician, further elaborated in his writings how Aristotle had come to this conclusion. One of the reasons that Aristotle used to justify that women were imperfect was that their bodies were colder and unable to produce semen. Galen gave two reasons why this was the case. The first reason was that “[the] female is less perfect than the male for [one] principal reason—because she is colder; for if among animals the warm one is the more active, a colder animal would be less perfect than a warmer [animal].”⁶⁶ This statement was connected to another belief that originated with Aristotle, which was that “the female... is passive, and the male... is active.”⁶⁷ This belief was based off of the idea of movement. Aristotle mentioned that “the male is the formative, moving, and active principle in generation, whereas a woman is the cold and wet, that, is watery, passive material.”⁶⁸ Here, Aristotle was again referring to the substances produced by the reproductive organs: semen and menstrual blood. The idea of movement based on these reproductive substances could be linked to their exit from the body. Moreover, Galen stated his second reason for why Aristotle believed women were imperfect by saying, “[all] the parts... that men have, women have too, [and] the difference between them lying in only one thing... that in women the parts

⁶⁵ Ilse Paakkinen, “The Metaphysics of Gender in Christine de Pizan’s Thought,” in *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Marianna G. Muravyeva and Raisa Maria Toivo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 38.

⁶⁶ Galen, *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May, vol. 2 (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), 628.

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck, of *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943), 113.

⁶⁸ Ilse Paakkinen, “The Metaphysics of Gender in Christine de Pizan’s Thought,” in *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Marianna G. Muravyeva and Raisa Maria Toivo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 38.

are within [the body], whereas in men they are outside.”⁶⁹ Galen addressed the most obvious difference of the male and female reproductive organs as proof and justification for women’s inferiority besides the inability to produce semen. This discussion surrounding semen and menstrual blood as aspects of men and women’s reproductive functions and their connection to imperfection and passivity served as a way to impose biological functions onto social and cultural expectations as we will also see later in the Middle Ages.

Being imperfect and passive, then, not only meant that there were differences in the physical appearance of the body, but there were also differences in the temperament that medical scholars associated with women. The difference in temperaments between men and women stressed how heat not only affected the physical structure of the body but also the behavior and personality of both sexes. This concept of heat influencing supposedly biologically based behavior was mentioned by Avicenna (980-1037), a Persian philosopher and scientist who was known for his contributions to Aristotelian philosophy and medicine. To describe the difference in temperament between men and women, Avicenna explained that “[females] have colder temperament than males, which is the reason they are shorter than males in physique.”⁷⁰ He continued, stating “[for] the coldness of their temperament[,] they are more curious, and for their lack of exercise their flesh is soft.”⁷¹ Here, Avicenna was referring to the passive nature that was affiliated with

⁶⁹ Galen, *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May, vol. 2 (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), 628.

⁷⁰ Avicenna, *Avicenna’s Medicine: A New Translation of the 11th-Century Canon with Practical Applications for Integrative Health Care*, trans. Mones Abu-Asab, Hakima Amri, Marc S. Micozzi (Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 2013), 64.

⁷¹ Avicenna, *Avicenna’s Medicine*, 64.

women. He does not explicitly say what he meant by women lacking exercise, but this interpretation of the active versus the passive can be referred to the lifestyles of men and women. Men lived an active life in the public sphere and women lived a passive life in the domestic sphere.⁷² This absence of a presence in public life was connected to Aristotle's belief of women being passive, as mentioned earlier. It could also mean that women were not expected to be athletic because they were busy running a household and raising children. Either way, Avicenna implied that women were shorter and their bodies more delicate because they had a colder complexion. Just like the belief that women's complexion was influenced by a lack of heat, a woman's temperament was also influenced by the belief that women were colder. This concept of heat influencing the temperament of a person could be applied to traits, such as authority. As Ilse Paakkinen explains, Aristotle argued that "the deliberative part of the soul of women lacks authority... which makes women subordinate to men."⁷³ Authority was associated with strength and if women were already considered to be weaker due to being colder and unable to produce semen, then the conclusion was that women could not be authoritative beings. This thought process followed the same logic that was applied to female bodies and reproductive functions and women's association with imperfection and passivity.

Ancient Greek and Roman physicians who studied Aristotle's ideas also applied these concepts of imperfection and passivity that were used to justify the inferiority of women through their reproductive functions. Through medicine and natural philosophy,

⁷² Joyce E. Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 83.

⁷³ Ilse Paakkinen, "The Metaphysics of Gender in Christine de Pizan's Thought," in *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Marianna G. Muravyeva and Raisa Maria Toivo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 38.

they expanded upon the understanding of the sex difference between men and women. These physicians included Soranus (98-138 CE) and Galen (129-216 CE), the latter of whom we have already mentioned. Both physicians incorporated Aristotle's ideas of imperfection and passivity into their understandings of women's bodies, especially when it came to women's health and anatomy, particularly the womb. In ancient writings, the womb was referred to as a "jar" or a "vessel" because the organ was believed to collect both male and female semen and carry the offspring created from this mixture. This analogy was originally used by Soranus to describe the shape of the uterus, which he portrayed as resembling a "cupping vessel."⁷⁴ This analogy continued to be used within medical treatises throughout the Middle Ages. For example, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), a German abbess, evoked this analogy in her medical treatise *Causes and Cures* (1150-1160). In her writing, she referred to the female genitalia as male genitalia that had been turned inside-out within the body, which was inspired by Galen's analysis of the genitalia that was quoted earlier in the chapter.⁷⁵ She further explained that "[the] woman is only a vessel, so that she might conceive and give birth."⁷⁶ This idea was set in the context of Hildegard explaining the differences of pleasure or "delectation" between men and women and the purpose of the female body in reproduction in terms of conception, menstruation, and the body's composition.⁷⁷ The descriptions of the uterus by Galen, Soranus, and as used Hildegard demonstrated one aspect of differences of male and

⁷⁴ Soranus, *Soranus' Gynecology*, trans. Owsei Temkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 10.

⁷⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures: The Complete English Translation of Hildegardis Causae et Curae Libri VI*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Vermont: MedievalMS, 2008), 64.

⁷⁶ Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, 64.

⁷⁷ Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, 63.

female reproduction and to justify the inferiority of women based on their reproductive anatomy.

Building on the ideas of ancient Greek predecessors, a number of ancient Romans also commented on male and female sexuality and reproduction. Here again, male sexuality and masculinity were associated with the ability to produce semen. Ancient Roman philosopher Aretacus the Cappadocian wrote “[for] it is the semen, when possessed of virality, which makes us men, hot, well-braced in limbs, heavy, well-voiced, spirited, strong to think and act.”⁷⁸ This heat influenced the traits that were associated with men, such as strength, authority, and power.⁷⁹ This masculinity could also supposedly be drained from men through ejaculation or the loss of semen. Indeed, the loss of too much semen was believed to feminize a man.⁸⁰ Therefore, men were encouraged to practice control within and outside of marriage engaging only in moderate amounts of sex. This reflected views of male sexuality as involving carefully controlled behavior rather than uncontrollable desire or lust which was associated with women.⁸¹ Another aspect of a man’s body that was associated with masculinity was body hair. Beards signified male maturity and sexual virility.⁸² The idea of body hair as a marker of sexual maturity and manhood was demonstrated in medieval medical texts. For example, Hildegard of Bingen emphasized a connection between body hair and procreation by

⁷⁸ Joyce E. Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 82.

⁷⁹ Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” 83.

⁸⁰ Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” 82-83.

⁸¹ Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” 84.

⁸² Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 181.

stating, “Nor should he touch a female before he has a beard.”⁸³ Having body hair, in this case a beard, signaled that the boy’s body was now sexually mature, and therefore, body hair also signified that the boy was now an adult and could contribute to the family and to society in economic productivity and in procreation. Joan Cadden has suggested that hair was the “product of useful residues of the nutritive and generative processes.”⁸⁴ Since medieval scholars believed men had better digestive processes, their bodies were able to more effectively grow facial hair and produce semen, unlike women, whose bodies were believed to not digest substances as well.⁸⁵ The substances that women were unable to digest became associated with menstrual blood and set the basis for the discussions on sex difference and sexuality by medieval scholars.

Medieval Contributions

As we have already begun to see with our references to Hildegard of Bingen, gender ideals in medieval and early modern Europe were a continuation of ideals first introduced by ancient philosophers. Additionally, medieval scholars’ understandings of sexuality also continued to influence early modern theologians’ and philosophers’ writings on theology and medicine. Through the use of theology and etymology, they sought to explain why they believed men and women to be different in social and cultural contexts. For example, Isidore of Seville (560-636 CE), a Spanish archbishop and theologian, explored the etymology of words related to words “man” and “woman.” In

⁸³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures: The Complete English Translation of Hildegardis Causae et Curae Libri VI*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Vermont: MedievalMS, 2008), 15.

⁸⁴ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 182.

⁸⁵ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 182-183. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women’s Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 71.

Latin, the word “man” is “vir,” which he noted was derived from the word “vis” meaning force or power.⁸⁶ The words “force” and “power” can also be associated with strength. In contrast, the word “woman” in Latin is “mulier” which was derived from the word “mollities,” meaning softness.⁸⁷ The word “softness” played on concepts of weakness, easy to mold, and gentleness. The idea that men were associated with power or force emphasized that men were the force that molded the softness of women. This softness versus force concept also highlighted the weakness that was associated with women, as in women were too weak to stand up against the force or strength associated with men. The idea of women being soft as a contrast to force or power highlighted the ideas of women as imperfect, passive, and inferior. This association with the etymology of the terms “man” and “woman” was used as a tool to measure intellectual capacity as well as physical capacity of both sexes and to emphasize the differences in characteristics and traits in men and women.

Medieval medical treatises also used God’s creation of Adam and Eve to justify, through natural philosophy and medicine, the differences between men and women in regard to procreation and their varying qualities. For example, the *Trotula*, a collection of medical texts written during the twelfth century, but first published in 1544, explained why men and women was different and why God created them to be so. It stated, “[God] created the male and the female with provident, dispensing deliberation, laying out in the

⁸⁶ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville [Electronic Resource]*, trans. Stephen A. Barney (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 242. Joyce E. Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 86. Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Princeton: Princeton University Press:1988), 14.

⁸⁷ Seville, *The Etymologies*, 242. Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” 86. Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, 14.

separate sexes the foundation for the propagation of future offspring.”⁸⁸ From the start, the author of the *Trotula* made a clear distinction between the sexes based on the process of reproduction and procreation. The text’s author placed emphasis on the roles that theologians believed God had envisioned for his creation. The *Trotula* further discussed the distinction between the sexes by describing the supposed qualities of each sex, stating, “[God] wished by opposing frigidity and humidity of the woman to rein him in from too much excess, so that the stronger qualities, that is the heat and the dryness, should rule the man, who is the stronger and more worthy person, while the weaker ones, that is to say the coldness and humidity, should rule the weaker [person], that is the woman.”⁸⁹ Once again, writers linked the qualities of hot and dry to the traits of strength and authority which were associated with men while cold and wet qualities were linked to weakness which was associated with women. Hildegard also showcased this relationship with her recollection of the creation of Adam and Eve. Adam was described as “virile from the vital force of the earth and very strong from the elements” while Eve, who was made from Adam’s rib, was described as “soft and had an airy, keen mind and a pleasant life.”⁹⁰ Hildegard implied that Adam was connected to the world by being formed from the same matter as the rest of God’s creations, whereas God made Eve from a piece of Adam and not the matter that created everything else. This distinction between Adam and

⁸⁸ Trotula, *The Trotula [Electronic Resource]: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine*, ed. and trans. Monica H. Green (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 65.

⁸⁹ Trotula, *The Trotula*, 65.

⁹⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures: The Complete English Translation of Hildegardis Causae et Curae Libri VI*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Vermont: MedievalMS, 2008), 38-39. Joan Cadden, “It Takes All Kinds: Sexuality and Gender Differences in Hildegard of Bingen’s Book of Compound Medicine,” *Traditio* 40 (1984): 153-154.

Eve helped justify women's inferiority throughout Christendom. It also contributed to the development of other negative perceptions that became associated with women, especially among elite theologians.

Many medieval theologians also explored the biblical character of Eve and her influence on women's nature. They emphasized Eve's weakness of "succumbing to temptation" which, as Jennifer Ward notes, became a theme that "underlay much of the misogynistic writings in the Middle Ages."⁹¹ This theme eventually made its way into beliefs of witchcraft to help explain why women were more susceptible to becoming witches themselves or being seduced by the Devil. Hildegard of Bingen made similar observations in regard to Eve and women's role in procreation. In explaining the creation of Eve, Hildegard revealed a clear connection between women and procreation stating, "[soon] after the woman was formed, God gave man the power of creation, so through his love, which is woman, he could procreate children."⁹² In Hildegard's recollection of the formation of Eve, Eve's purpose seemed to reflect how medieval Christianity viewed a woman's role in the family and in the eyes of God. Eve was acknowledged as a woman first, but then her role as a mother quickly followed as the second piece of her identity. It seemed that everything else in her identity was not mentioned or, perhaps, was viewed as unimportant. This idea may hint at the way elites perceived women more broadly during the medieval period. She was woman first, a mother second, and everything else was secondary or unimportant to her expected contribution to society. Returning to Hildegard,

⁹¹ Jennifer C. Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 3.

⁹² Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures: The Complete English Translation of Hildegardis Causae et Curae Libri VI*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Vermont: MedievalMS, 2008), 111.

she later continued stating, “when Adam looked at Eve, he was completely filled with knowledge, because he looked at the mother through whom he should procreate children.”⁹³ Again, the recollection of the creation of Eve reinforced women’s identities as mothers by how Hildegard described Adam viewing Eve as the mother of his children. In the statement, Hildegard did not say “companion” or “wife” when describing Adam’s thought process but she, instead, used the word “mother.” Hildegard’s choice of the word “mother” again emphasized the idea that women’s identities were tied to procreation and women being mothers first and foremost.

Another medieval theologian who discussed the influence of Eve on the perception of women’s nature was Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), an Italian Dominican monk who focused on integrating Christian thought with Aristotelian philosophy. In his *Summa Theologica* (1274), Aquinas illustrated the significance of procreation and marriage through Eve’s creation and its connection to women’s continued role in procreation. Aquinas described Eve as “a helper in the work of generation.”⁹⁴ Clearly stated, there was an emphasis placed on the role of women as childbearers. Aquinas also emphasized the role of women not only in procreation but in the domestic sphere by stating, “[the] human male and female are united not only for generation... but also for the purpose of domestic life, in which each has his or her particular duty, and in which the man is the head of the woman.”⁹⁵ This statement furthered the belief that men and women had their own duties and roles within the household each undergirded by social

⁹³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures: The Complete English Translation of Hildegardis Causae et Curae Libri VI*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Vermont: MedievalMS, 2008), 111.

⁹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Daniel J. Sullivan, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 489.

⁹⁵ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, 490.

and religious expectations. Aquinas underscored the patriarchal view that it was the man's duty to be the head of the household. Conversely, women ensured that guests were entertained, children received proper care, and completed other domestic tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, or delegated them to staff so that the household functioned smoothly.⁹⁶ Aquinas believed women to be inferior because of both Eve's actions in the Garden of Eden and her original creation, secondary to that of Adam's. While in many ways women were more closely associated than men with procreation, particularly in the gestation, breastfeeding, and the raising of children, in Aquinas's eyes their reproductive role remained secondary to men. In his view, women simply provided the material while men provided the matter. Since he associated with reason and authority, which was influenced by beliefs from Ancient Rome, and women were believed to be naturally inferior, Aquinas stated that women even needed male assistance and guidance due to their physical and intellectual weakness.⁹⁷ This concept of men being figures of authority became intertwined with the idea of sex difference between women and men in Christian texts, natural philosophy, and, especially, in medical treatises, which placed emphasis on reproduction in women's health.

As a part of women's health, menstruation influenced many misconceptions and elite misogynistic beliefs regarding the harm that could be caused by menstrual blood. As earlier stated, menstruation was the result of the absence of a third digestive process that processed blood into semen. Since women were believed to lack this digestive process,

⁹⁶ For more information on women's duties within the household, see Jennifer C. Ward, "House and Household," in *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 70-80.

⁹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Daniel J. Sullivan, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 489.

they instead released menstrual blood. Menstruation also cleansed the female body of toxins and impurities. One of these misogynistic beliefs about menstruation was that menstrual blood was dangerous to the touch, especially for men, because it was considered to be impure and poisonous. An important text that sheds light on such beliefs and misconceptions was *On the Secrets of Women* by Pseudo-Albertus Magnus. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus discussed the supposed purity or impurity of menses, the latter of which could be harmful. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus described pure menses as the “proper seed of the woman, which is transformed into the substance of the fetus.”⁹⁸ He explained impure menses as “a certain superfluity and impurity caused by [non-digestion] of food” which “leaves the body every month.”⁹⁹ The concept of impure menses invited elite misogynistic beliefs about women and the harm they could do to others. Menstrual blood was not only believed to be able to harm the male genitalia but also the development of the fetus. After encountering the supposedly toxic blood, the treatise stated that one’s “whole body will be infected and greatly weakened” and the man would not “regain [his] true color and strength for at least a month.”¹⁰⁰ In addition, it was also stated that the “stink would corrupt a man’s entire insides.”¹⁰¹ Another belief that was mentioned by Pseudo-Albertus Magnus was that menstrual blood could spread diseases. A man supposedly could become seriously ill or even contract leprosy if he had intercourse with a menstruating woman.¹⁰² The author mentioned how women purposely tricked men into

⁹⁸ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women’s Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 68.

⁹⁹ Magnus, *Women’s Secrets*, 68.

¹⁰⁰ Magnus, *Women’s Secrets*, 88.

¹⁰¹ Magnus, *Women’s Secrets*, 88.

¹⁰² Magnus, *Women’s Secrets*, 88.

intercourse while they were menstruating stating that “[some] evil women know how subtly to inflict a wound on men when having sexual intercourse with them in the last state of the moon, and from this wound many incurable illnesses arise if remedies are not taken immediately.”¹⁰³ This statement would go on to link the elite beliefs of women being natural deceivers and deem women to be deliberately using female reproductive functions to inflict harm for their own gain, especially in relation to beliefs of witchcraft and witches, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Classical and medieval authors believed menstrual blood was not only toxic to men but also to fetuses, crops, plants, and animals. For example, in regard to the fetus, menstrual blood was thought to negatively impact its development, potentially making it “leprous and fragile.”¹⁰⁴ In regard to other living organisms, Joyce E. Salisbury explains medical scholars believed that even “[the] presence of menstrual blood caused crops not to germinate, wine to sour, plants to parch, trees to lose their fruits, iron to be corroded, bronze to turn black, and dogs to become rabid.”¹⁰⁵ This belief paralleled the fear that witches could destroy plants and cause harm to animals. From the beliefs about menstruating women, one can see the similarities between the supposed harm of the act of menstruating and the harm that witches could cause. This harm came in the form of diseases, famines, and sterility of couples, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁰³ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 89.

¹⁰⁴ Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 77.

¹⁰⁵ Joyce E. Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (York: Garland Pub., 1996), 90.

Early Modern Manifestations

By the early modern period, the elites' understanding of sex difference and societal expectations of men and women was well-established, especially in natural philosophy and theology. As we have seen, in ancient and medieval Europe the construction of the ideas of sex difference in regard to procreation and reproduction, such as reproductive organs, influenced the discussion of women's sexuality in regard to the characteristics and religious beliefs discussed by medieval scholars. These discussions about women's sexuality inspired the image of the ideal early modern woman through traits and behaviors that ultimately integrated themselves into masculine and feminine qualities of the early modern period. According to Merry Wiesner-Hanks, the ideal wife in early modern Europe was "obedient, chaste, cheerful, thrifty, pious, and largely silent," which elites applied to both upper- and lower-class women.¹⁰⁶ Authors of early modern literature discussed these qualities as resembling similarities to the "softness" that Isidore of Seville associated with women as he explored in his explanation of the differences between men and women through etymology, which was discussed earlier in the chapter. Moreover, these qualities were discussed in early modern literature. One of the most well-known examples of early modern literature that addressed gender expectations was *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) written by Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529), an Italian Renaissance author.¹⁰⁷ In his book, one of his characters explained that the ideal lady should be "chaste, prudent, and gentle" and have a "soft and delicate tenderness"

¹⁰⁶ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 4th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 85.

¹⁰⁷ Although David Javitch referred to Baldassare Castiglione as "Baldesar" in his book edition, I will be using the spelling of the name "Baldassare" within the thesis.

along with being “agreeable, witty, and discreet” especially when a lady was entertaining guests within the household.¹⁰⁸ Although Castiglione intended for this statement to describe the expectations of elite women, similar characteristics, such as those previously mentioned by Wiesner-Hanks, could also apply to women of the lower classes. Castiglione also included qualities that were unsuitable for women and instructed them to “avoid affection, to be naturally graceful in all her actions, to be mannerly, clever, prudent, not arrogant, not envious, not slanderous, not vain, not contentious, [and] not inept.”¹⁰⁹ The image he constructed was one of grace and calmness in women’s demeanor and behavior. Of course, early modern literature did not just describe the ideal woman, but the ideal man and husband as well. Such an individual would be “responsible, firm, and honorable.”¹¹⁰ Castiglione also included qualities of the ideal courtier who was “a man of honor and integrity,” who could “speak and write well,” who was “bold, energetic, ... faithful,” and athletic.¹¹¹ These ideal qualities and distinctions between men and women were somewhat echoed in Jean Bodin’s, a French jurist and political philosopher (1530-1596), *Six Books of the Commonwealth* (1576). Bodin stated that “[nature] has endowed men with strength, foresight, pugnacity, [and] authority, but has deprived women of these qualities.”¹¹² Men are associated with strength, force, and

¹⁰⁸ Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton Translation: An Authoritative Text Criticism*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), The following quotations are found on pages 151, 150, and 151, respectively.

¹⁰⁹ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 151.

¹¹⁰ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 4th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 85.

¹¹¹ Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton Translation: An Authoritative Text Criticism*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), The following quotations and concepts are found on pages 49, 40, 24, and 27.

¹¹² Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, trans. M.J. Tooley (Oxford: Alden Press, 1955), 211.

power which emphasized the contrast of women's association with "softness" as in gentleness and weakness. Such descriptions enforced the belief that women should be chaste and obedient and that they should remain firmly under the guidance and control of their husbands.¹¹³ These characteristics, such as chastity and gentleness, that were associated with early modern women clearly continued to support ideas from ancient Europe of women being inferior and passive. Early modern writers simply used slightly different words to describe the same ideas.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ancient Greek writers first established the ideal that early modern woman embodied evolving beliefs of imperfection and passivity about the female sex and gender. These beliefs especially revolved around the related concepts of procreation and reproduction, which shaped the elites' understandings of a woman's purpose in nature and in early modern society. As we have seen, Aristotle's ideas of women being imperfect and passive laid the foundation for later beliefs labeling women as inferior and imposing negative and misogynistic beliefs upon them, especially in connection to beliefs of female sexual desires and appetites. Ancient Roman physicians elaborated on Aristotle's writings to reinforce the discussion of menstruation and production of semen as the main difference between the sexes. Medieval theologians and physicians further applied these discussions of sex difference to female sexuality and Christian texts, specifically the creation of Eve and the downfall of humankind. The fact the Eve was created differently

¹¹³ Katherine Crawford, "Permanent Impermanence: Continuity and Rupture in Early Modern Sexuality Studies," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver (New York, Routledge: 2016), 265.

than Adam and was blamed for the downfall of humankind influenced beliefs about women by shaping the development of negative beliefs of women. This was done through the means of etymology, the study of reproductive organs and functions, and traits and behaviors. These differences of characteristics led to the development of the image of the ideal early modern woman, which included feminine traits, such as gentleness and grace, associated with the female gender and her role in society. The inverse relationship of these ideal qualities, however, would soon be integrated into the treatises of witchcraft and the idea of the witch who threatened the concept of procreation and served as antagonists to the ideal early modern woman. This perversion of procreation and a woman's role as a mother, particularly as understood within the framework of witchcraft beliefs such as women's sexual desires and copulation as it pertained to the suspicion surrounding women as potential witches, will be the main focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO
WOMEN AS WITCHES:
A THREAT TO PROCREATION

As we saw in the previous chapter, early modern elites' beliefs emphasized that procreation was a core responsibility and role of women. These gender beliefs evolved over the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods. In this latter period, however, these gender beliefs also became embedded in the stereotype of the witch that emerged in the treatises on witchcraft. This led to the targeting of mostly women during the witch hunts of the early modern period. Reversing the role of women as productive mothers, witchcraft beliefs, and the stereotype of the witch portrayed a theme of anti-fertility and destruction.¹¹⁴ As such, these beliefs revolved around a perversion of women's central roles in procreation, such as sacrificing children, causing abortions, and hindering one's ability to reproduce. If, ideally, women enriched their families and societies through the production of children, witches endangered this important societal role. According to Stephanie Spoto, the "witch was identified through her visible rejection of a society's moral code and her actions against commonly held standards for women."¹¹⁵ If elites saw women and mothers as the embodiment of fertility and procreation, then witches became the villains of the story causing infertility and hindering reproduction.

¹¹⁴ Robin Briggs, "Myths of the Perfect Witch," in *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 15-60.

¹¹⁵ Stephanie Irene Spoto, "Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power," *Pacific Coast Philology* 45 (2010): 58.

Just like gender, witchcraft reflected the polarization of thought amongst the scholarly elite in early modern Europe. As Robin Briggs has noted, everything was “defined in its relation to its opposite[:] good and evil, dry and wet, hot and cold, [and] male and female.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, as Stuart Clark has demonstrated, this theme of inversion, could be traced throughout a number of witchcraft beliefs in treatises in the early modern era.¹¹⁷ Clark argued that the reality of witchcraft was demonstrated through descriptions of the Devil’s nature and witchcraft beliefs, which were understood through inverse relationships.¹¹⁸ Early modern people understood the world through its opposite such as hot versus cold, good versus bad, God versus the Devil, and so on. The sabbat, for example, was a ritual gathering that witches attended in the night where one could make a pact with the Devil, worship through means of sacrifice of animals and children, and engage in other diabolical acts, such as cannibalism and orgies. As such, one could analyze the sabbat as an anti-fertility rite which promoted destruction in contrast to Christian rites, which promoted protection and fertility.¹¹⁹ Relatedly, elite authors of treatises viewed the Devil as the antithesis of God.¹²⁰ If the Devil was the anti-father and God was the father, then qualities of weakness and inferiority were associated with the Devil while ideals of strength and superiority were associated with God. Of course, as we saw in the previous chapter, since the days of Aristotle, elites had associated women with

¹¹⁶ Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 99. Stuart Clark, “Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft,” *Past & Present*, no.87 (May 1980): 98-127.

¹¹⁷ Clark, “Inversion,” 98-127.

¹¹⁸ Stuart Clark, “Inversion,” 101.

¹¹⁹ Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 40. Clark, “Inversion,” 101-102.

¹²⁰ Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors*, 101.

weakness, inferiority, untrustworthiness, and corruptibility, especially in relation to female carnal desires. The similarities in characteristics between women and the Devil eventually led to women being more frequently suspected as witches and further contributed to a negative perception of women which then developed into the stereotype of the early modern witch. Elites' stereotype of the early modern witch depicted such women as anti-mothers and anti-housewives, stressing their failure to live up to such important roles and responsibilities.¹²¹

The connection between women and witches dealt with the association of the mother, the housewife, and domestic space. Indeed, women made up the majority of those accused as witches. As Edward Bever explains, those most likely to be accused of witchcraft were women who were "married, not single [and] part of the broad middling peasantry, not the poorest of the poor."¹²² To this we might also add older women who, in many ways, were commonly the stereotypical witch. Spoto noted in England that accusations of witchcraft fed off of the "images of witches [that mirrored and inverted] stereotypes of typical female domestic roles."¹²³ One of the places that was thought to be a witch's space was the domestic space, which of course, was also very closely associated with wives and mothers. Many of the items that were used for witchcraft could be found within the domestic space of the household, such as cauldrons, broomsticks, and pets.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors*, 101. Alison Rowlands, "Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford Academic, 2013), 465.

¹²² Edward Bever, "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 4 (2002): 958.

¹²³ Stephanie Irene Spoto, "Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power," *Pacific Coast Philology* 45 (2010): 53-54.

¹²⁴ Spoto, "Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power," 57.

Women who worked in these domestic spaces, such as maids and servants, could also be suspected if they engaged in behaviors deemed inappropriate for one's gender role. Such behaviors could have included the refusal to marry, a harsh temper, senility, and promiscuity.¹²⁵ The authors of treatises on witchcraft demonologies, such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* (1580), and *An Examen of Witches* (1602) singled out these similar behaviors. These perceived negative traits and behaviors of women helped validate the inverted narrative between the ideal woman and witches, which will be discussed throughout this chapter.

In this chapter, I examine the importance of procreation as a theme in witchcraft beliefs and the witch hunts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Specifically, I will explore the role of procreation in targeting women as witches by demonstrating through the study of the witch hunts how early modern gender beliefs were incorporated into beliefs of witchcraft and witches. Although some men were also accused as witches, because women made up the vast majority of the accused, my primary focus will be on the women of the period. First, I will explore elites' beliefs about female nature and witchcraft. I will discuss how treatise authors connected traits such as weakness and female carnality to suspicions and accusations of witchcraft. Female carnality will be referred to the sexual desires, appetites, and sexual interactions with the Devil. The next section of the chapter will deal with the stereotype of the witch as it pertained to women and age. The focus will be on ideas of infertility, menopause, and aging appearances that were associated with old women were also shared similarities with witches. These

¹²⁵ Stephanie Irene Spoto, "Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power," *Pacific Coast Philology* 45 (2010): 58.

similarities will also include midwives. By analyzing the beliefs, stereotypes, and crimes of witchcraft and witches, we can showcase the importance of procreation to witchcraft beliefs and the cultural norms about women's roles played in the targeting of women during the early modern European witch hunts.

Female Nature and Witchcraft

Female nature, by definition, refers to the characteristics or traits that elites associated with women and their behaviors and expectations. From a more positive perspective, these traits included women's nurturing and supportive demeanor. Unfortunately, during the witch hunts, elites also associated female nature with negative traits—such as being passive, untrustworthy, corruptible, and weak—characteristics that were often associated with witches as well. These characteristics were first nurtured by medieval theologians through the story of Eve's creation and the downfall.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Christian scholars and theologians had long emphasized the negative qualities of female nature by connecting it to the story of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Many elite demonologists used the influence of Eve's story to emphasize the previously mentioned traits of imperfection, inferiority, and passivity and to link them to related traits associated with witches, such as weakness, corruptibility, and deception. In other words, while authors used the story of Eve to support the beliefs that women were weak and inferior, the authors of witchcraft demonologies also used negative qualities were also used to explain why women were more likely to become witches. For example, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) emphasized the importance of etymology as one of the explanations of why women often were believed to be witches. Written by German inquisitor Heinrich Kramer (1430-1505), the *Malleus Maleficarum* is one of the most

well-known demonologies which gave instructions on how to identify and combat witches and practices of witchcraft. The *Malleus Maleficarum* was also one of the most misogynistic of all of the demonologies. While later demonologies did not repeat the Malleus's excessively sexualized and misogynistic tone, as a popular treatise among the mostly literate male elites, the *Malleus Maleficarum* did influence demonologies written later in the early modern period based on its instructions for trials and identifying witches. As such, it is worth emphasizing here. Just as Isidore of Seville, who was discussed in chapter one, emphasized etymology as a key to understanding the world and its functions, Kramer discussed the connection between women and witchcraft through etymology by remarking, "[for] the word '*femina*' [the Latin word for woman] is spoken as '*fe*' and '*minus*' because she has and keeps less [Latin '*minus*'] faith [Latin '*fidem*']".¹²⁶ Moreover, Kramer emphasized that because of this weak faith, women would be more susceptible to witchcraft and therefore more likely to become witches. He concluded that "[woman], therefore, is evil as a result of nature because she doubts more quickly in the Faith. She also denies the Faith more quickly, this being the basis for acts of sorcery."¹²⁷ Kramer believed that the characteristics and traits of women allowed them to be more susceptible to the temptations of witchcraft. In order to further support his argument, Kramer specifically referred to the story of Eve's creation. Referencing the story of Genesis, Kramer explained that woman "was formed from the curved rib, that is,

¹²⁶ Heinrich Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Cambridge Press University, 2009), 165. Joyce E. Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 56.

¹²⁷ Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches*, 166.

from the rib of the chest that is twisted and contrary, so to speak, to man.”¹²⁸ By emphasizing “curved” in the first half of the quotation, Kramer implied that women were not on the same course as men and that their creation was a departure from the Aristotelian perfect standard of men and of nature. In the second half of the quotation, the nature of the rib was described as “twisted” and “contrary,” which implied that women were bad or imbalanced in nature and were inclined to resist authority and control from men and from God. If men possessed and represented positive qualities, then women represented the opposite. Like previous classical and medieval writers, Kramer used the story of Eve to claim that, because of women’s inferiority, women were deceitful and more receptive to the Devil’s advances. He emphasized stating, “[from] this defect there also arises that fact that since she is an imperfect animal, she is always deceiving, and for this reason she is always deceptive.”¹²⁹ If women were considered to be weak and easily corruptible, then it would make sense to also mark women as deceitful. Kramer also had reintroduced Aristotle’s belief that women were imperfect to explain his reasoning behind why women were most likely to be witches. In *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, Jean Bodin also backed up Kramer’s idea of women being spiritual weak. Bodin explained that the first crime of witchcraft was “to deny God and all religion.”¹³⁰ This renunciation of God was often the first deed that was confessed by the accused during the witch trials before they confessed to other acts, such as copulation with the Devil, attending the Sabbath, and so on. This can be seen in the confession of Elizabeth Francis, an accused

¹²⁸ Heinrich Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Cambridge Press University, 2009), 165.

¹²⁹ Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches*, 165.

¹³⁰ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 204.

witch from Chelmsford, who discussed her experience learning about witchcraft and said that “when [her grandmother] taught it [to] her, she counselled her to renounce God and His word.”¹³¹ Through spiritual weakness, elites believed that this “deflect” allowed the Devil to act more easily through these women.

Many authors of demonologies stressed that women were more likely to be witches due to their nature, which combined gender beliefs surrounding temperaments and behaviors with the nature of witchcraft and the witch. Many of these writers stressed that women, who were already associated with imperfection and passivity, were also weak, untrustworthy, and corruptible, and thus emphasized that women in their communities should be viewed with suspicion. Within the treatise, Kramer argued that women’s nature, both mentally and physically, made them ideal participants for practicing witchcraft and working with the Devil. In this way, Kramer sought to explain why people should be wary of a woman being a witch by linking older accepted notions of women’s weaknesses with practice of witchcraft.¹³² He did this in three ways. First, he implied that the mental weakness of women was the reason that women came to doubt God and, therefore, were more likely to renounce God. He stated that “as the result of the first defect, that of intelligence, is that they commit the renunciation of the Faith more easily than do men.”¹³³ He went on then to claim that “the result of the second, namely irregular desires and passions, is that they seek, think up and inflict various acts of

¹³¹ Brian P. Levack, “Witches’ Demonic Familiars at Chelmsford, 1566,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 243.

¹³² Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 35.

¹³³ Heinrich Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Cambridge Press University, 2009), 167.

vengeance, whether through acts of sorcery or by any other means.”¹³⁴ In his explanation, Kramer claimed that the first reason of why people should be suspicious of women was women’s intellectual and spiritual weakness. Drawing upon Aristotle’s idea of imperfection in women as weakness, Kramer translated this weakness into not only an intellectual defect but also a spiritual one. Being weak-minded allowed women to be more easily influenced by demonic forces which would lead women to be more likely to practice witchcraft or be easily convinced to practice witchcraft. Kramer linked women’s supposed lack of intelligence with the belief that they were of weak faith and would engage in witchcraft. This suggested that women were more gullible and easily persuaded to engage in sinful acts, which can be compared to the qualities that were attributed to Eve because of her actions in the garden.

For the second reason of why people should be wary of women, Kramer implied that a woman’s temperament was to blame. He stated that, “on account of the tendency of their temperament towards flux they are by nature more easily impressed upon to receive revelations through the impression of the disembodied spirits, and when they use this temperament well, they are very good, but when they use it badly, they are worse.”¹³⁵ Here, Kramer commented on the irregularity of women’s behavior, and stressed that people were right to be suspicious because it was believed that a woman’s nature was inconsistent and often based on her whim. If a woman was good and followed proper expectations, she would not be tempted by the Devil or demonic creatures. Conversely, if

¹³⁴ Heinrich Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Cambridge Press University, 2009), 167.

¹³⁵ Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches*, 164.

she behaved badly or if she was demonstrating qualities that were considered to be unacceptable, then such a woman could be tempted to collaborate with the Devil to cause adversity and hardship for others. Kramer demonstrated that he was influenced by older accepted elite beliefs about women's nature and added these ideas as "new" elements of demonology.

Lastly, Kramer stated that women were prone to gossiping. He explained, women "have loose tongues and can hardly conceal from their female companions the things that they know through evil art, and since they lack physical strength, they readily seek to avenge themselves secretly through acts of sorcery."¹³⁶ Here, the demonologist claimed that women were often gossips and were unable to keep secrets from other women which could contribute to the spread of witchcraft. Something as simple as talking was considered to be dangerous because it was believed that witches had to recruit as many people as they could as a part of their oath. Likewise, Jean Bodin in his *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* stated that witches "[made] an oath and [promised] the Devil to lure as many as they can into his service."¹³⁷ One of the ways that this could be done was through talking to or gossiping with other people. It was believed women then used this skill to avenge themselves against men because they were the weaker sex.¹³⁸ Since women were believed to be weaker than men, both physically and mentally, they could not physically confront a man or even have the mental ability to successfully outsmart

¹³⁶ Heinrich Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Cambridge Press University, 2009), 164.

¹³⁷ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 206.

¹³⁸ Heinrich Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Cambridge Press University, 2009), 164.

him. This meant that women had to use witchcraft as a means to help them execute their diabolical plans because they could not depend on anything else. In a time when women had few financial or legal rights and even were considered to be the property of their husbands and fathers, this statement showcases how women and their roles were determined by their families, their communities, and society as a whole.

Drawing on elites' gender beliefs and the circumstances of women in society, demonologists explained why women were so susceptible to demonic creatures and to the practice of witchcraft due to a woman's composition. In *Compendium Maleficarum*, Francesco Guazzo (1570-1640?), a member of the oldest Catholic Ambrosian order in Milan, suggested that the composition of a woman's body could help explain why women were more susceptible to demonic advances. He remarked, "[the] feminine sex is more foolish, and more apt to make natural or demoniacal suggestions for ones of Divine origin. Women, too, are of a more humid and viscous nature, more easily influenced to perceive various phantoms, and slower and more loath to resist such impulses. Therefore[,] women are quicker to imagine[...], since women have less power of reasoning and less wisdom, it is easier for the devil to delude them with false and deceptive apparitions."¹³⁹ With this passage, Guazzo identified a woman's composition and mental weakness as being culprits in explaining why he and others believed that women were more prone to certain behaviors and actions. Mental weakness and composition also was used to justify the supposed inferior status of the women, which was related to pre-existing gender beliefs. In pointing out women's "humid" nature,

¹³⁹ Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum: The Montague Summers Edition*, trans. E.A. Ashwin (Dover, 1988), 137.

Guazzo referenced the wet quality that was associated with women due to the fact that women had the ability to menstruate as a part of their reproductive function. Additionally, his mention of women's "viscous nature" could possibly also be a reference to menstruation, which itself was connected to the belief that women were considered to be cold and wet. This idea of women being cold and wet tied back to women's inability to produce semen due to their lack of heat. Therefore, the women's constitution and its inability to produce semen alluded to the belief that women were imperfect and weaker which enforced the belief that women were more susceptible to demonic forces. Guazzo clearly demonstrated ideas from medieval physicians regarding the female body as a reason that women would be susceptible to the Devil's advance, and therefore, a woman's composition would be the reason for women to enter into the pact with the Devil.

The idea of female sexuality as a powerful weapon led to the development of one of many elite beliefs that witches caused physical harm through their sexual power. According to Stephanie Spoto in her analysis of James I's *Daemonologie*, she observed that female sexuality, when viewed negatively, was used to describe a witch's power as being a sexual power.¹⁴⁰ This idea of a witch's power being sexual came from the deeds or behaviors that elites, including James I, believed witches engaged in, such as casting diseases, hindering reproductive functions, and copulation. This idea was again discussed in many demonologies. For example, the *Malleus Maleficarum* mentioned that "the sorceresses can affect the force of procreation with sorcery by means of such things,

¹⁴⁰ Stephanie Irene Spoto, "Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power," *Pacific Coast Philology* 45 (2010): 58.

preventing a man from being able to couple or a woman from being able to conceive.”¹⁴¹

One of the things that could prevent a man from reproducing was a sexually transmitted infection.¹⁴² These diseases or infections can cause issues such as infertility in both men and women and erectile dysfunction in men. These sexually transmitted infections left marks on the private areas of the body, which were mistaken for witches’ marks.¹⁴³ One such infection that was related to the topics of women’s sexuality, promiscuity, and witchcraft was syphilis, which was believed to have been brought over from the Americas during the time of exploration and which then spread rapidly throughout the sixteenth century.¹⁴⁴ Syphilis could cause infertility in both men and women, but for men, it caused inflammation of the testicular tubes and erectile dysfunction. Unsurprisingly—as a sexually transmitted infection—syphilis was linked to prostitutes and sexually active women and, as we have seen, demonologists often feared that sexually active women were more susceptible to witchcraft. Thus, over time, syphilis’s spread increased anxieties towards women, and the disease and its carrier became associated with witchcraft.

Another way that female sexuality was viewed as a weapon of the witch was through copulation, especially within marriages. Henry Boguet (1550-1619), a jurist and

¹⁴¹ Heinrich Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Cambridge Press University, 2009), 321.

¹⁴² Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 306.

¹⁴³ Stephanie Irene Spoto, “Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power,” *Pacific Coast Philology* 45 (2010): 59. A witch’s mark, also known as a Devil’s mark, was a mark that would have been identified on the body of the accused in the form of a mole, birthmark, rash, or other skin lesions that was visible during the time the person was being examined.

¹⁴⁴ Eric B. Ross, “Syphilis, Misogyny, and Witchcraft in 16th-Century Europe,” *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 2 (April 1, 1995): 333–37. See article for Ross’s argument on the spread of syphilis and its impact on misogynistic beliefs on women in early modern Europe and how it influenced beliefs on witchcraft and witches.

judge from Burgundy, described how witches prevented copulation and conception in married couples stating, “[witches] prevent carnal copulation between a man and a woman by relaxing the nerves and depriving the member of rigidity.”¹⁴⁵ He continued stating, “at other times they prevent procreation by turning aside or blocking up the seminal ducts so that the semen does not reach the generative cells.”¹⁴⁶ In doing this, the goal of the witch was to disrupt the peace within marriage and create tension between the couple because they were not producing children and, therefore, not upholding their expected duties.¹⁴⁷ Once again, this only served to increase elites’ fears of female sexuality and of women themselves, especially young women.

The idea of female carnality also influenced witchcraft beliefs. One of these interactions that was frequently discussed was copulation as a way to recruit witches. For example, Henry Boguet discussed how the Devil used sexual acts to lure women into performing evil deeds. Boguet explained that the Devil used sexual acts “because he knows that women love carnal pleasures, and he means to bind them to his allegiance by such agreeable provocations.”¹⁴⁸ This assumption referred back to the belief that women craved sexual experiences due to their lack of heat, and the only way to obtain heat was through intercourse.¹⁴⁹ In *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, Bodin also explored ideas of female carnality in witchcraft crimes in relation to procreation through the crimes of

¹⁴⁵ Henry Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 2009), 90.

¹⁴⁶ Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, 90.

¹⁴⁷ Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, 90.

¹⁴⁸ Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, 29.

¹⁴⁹ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women’s Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 70.

witchcraft. These crimes included having an “incestuous” relationship, “carnal copulation with the Devil,” and causing sterility.¹⁵⁰ Within all these crimes and confessions in the witch trials, a common theme that appeared was not just the intimacy between the Devil and the witches, but the latter’s renunciation of God.

Influenced by beliefs of female carnality, a common interaction that was described in demonologies and confessions was the descriptions of copulation being explained as an unpleasant and painful experience between women and the Devil. Another detail was that the semen was described as cold. These ideas highlighted a few things. First, the idea that copulation was unpleasant and painful emphasized previous beliefs of female carnality and the inversion between the qualities associated with men versus women and God versus Devil. Normal sexual relations were associated with warmth and pleasure, which were connected with good or superior qualities. Warmth or hotness was associated with men as coldness was associated with women, as discussed in the previous chapter. This inversion of ideas linked the differences and associations with God and the Devil. God was good and the Devil was bad. God was the father and the Devil was the anti-father. These descriptions from both confessions and demonologies referred to the idea that heat was perfect or superior while cold was considered imperfect or inferior, which, in turn, became associated with the idea that warmth from a man was associated with good and pleasurable experiences while coldness from a demonic creature was associated with bad and painful ones. Both hot versus cold qualities and good versus bad qualities connected to the idea of the cold, unpleasant, and painful

¹⁵⁰ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 206-207.

description of copulation with the Devil as expressed in the forced confessions of accused witches. Bodin stated that witches “abandoned themselves to Satan in carnal intercourse, and that they are displeased when they found some sort of very cold semen.”¹⁵¹

According to Bodin, witches participated in copulation because they desired carnal pleasure, but this pleasure was not achieved. Despite the torment and pain experienced, this activity appeared in numerous confessions and reinforced the medieval medical belief that women supposedly had strong carnal desires that were difficult for them to control.

An unnamed woman’s confession in the witch trials at the German town of Eichstätt in 1637 served to further demonstrate these ideas of copulation with the Devil found in elite treatises of witchcraft that trickled down to the lower classes. The unnamed woman was an older woman who was accused of being a witch. Under integration and torture, she had confessed to becoming a witch before she got married.¹⁵² Her confession started with her wishing the Devil would take her and her children after her husband came home drunk one night.¹⁵³ Apparently, after she made her wish the Devil appeared the next day under the guise of a hangman with whom the unnamed woman was having an affair. He was unsuccessful in pursuing the woman the first night, but he returned the next night and was successful in copulating with the woman. This happened twice, and the woman described “his member [as] very cold.”¹⁵⁴ The Devil finally revealed himself

¹⁵¹ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 156.

¹⁵² Brian P. Levack, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt, 1637,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 221.

¹⁵³ Levack, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt,” 221.

¹⁵⁴ Levack, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt,” 221.

to the woman in which she described him as “talking lewdly, and demanded that she give herself to him, and renounce God and our dear Lady and all the saints.”¹⁵⁵ Her confession then skipped to events which occurred several days later. She confessed to being given a green powder and a black ointment to do the Devil’s bidding.¹⁵⁶ She confessed to using the powder and ointment to kill young children and harming her husband. This included poisoning her own six year-old daughter by putting the ointment on cherry and feeding it to her, after which the daughter became ill immediately and died an hour later.¹⁵⁷ She also confessed to putting ointment in a stew and feeding it to the four year-old boy who was the son of her former mistress.¹⁵⁸ He also got sick and died two days later.¹⁵⁹ These confessions of the deaths of young children, including her own daughter, reenforced the ideas of elite beliefs of witchcraft influencing the confessions to showcase the elites’ ideas of female carnality. It also influenced how female sexuality was negatively perceived in the face of the witch hunts and witchcraft beliefs through weakness and corruptibility.

One of the ways that female sexuality influenced beliefs of women being weak and easily corruptible was demonstrated through Kramer’s discussion of how the Devil lured young women into his service. Kramer associated young women with innocence and sexual immaturity, and he interpreted these characteristics negatively as something that could supposedly lead them to be deceived by the Devil and lured into witchcraft.

¹⁵⁵ Brian P. Levack, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt, 1637,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 221.

¹⁵⁶ Levack, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt,” 221.

¹⁵⁷ Levack, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt,” 222.

¹⁵⁸ Levack, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt,” 222.

¹⁵⁹ Levack, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt,” 222.

The values and standards that young women were expected to uphold turned into a double-edged sword during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the witch craze spread across Europe. In the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Kramer discussed how the Devil preferred virgins to other women, “since the Devil’s intent and appetite are greater in tempting the good than the evil... he makes greater efforts to lead astray all the holiest virgins and girls.”¹⁶⁰ Kramer’s statement highlights how susceptible young and inexperienced women could be to the machinations of the Devil and the corruption of their purity. The idea that the Devil preferred virgins played on the double standard that young women faced. Young women’s innocence and sexual immaturity were connected to the expectations that they be obedient and subordinate to those with authority, such as their fathers or soon-to-be husbands. In the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Kramer discussed several methods that the Devil used to lure young women and maidens into witchcraft, such as being persistent and trying to tempt them through romance. Kramer emphasized that the Devil would attempt to wear down a woman’s spirit through “exhaustion that results from them relentlessly causing losses in temporal matters.”¹⁶¹ The Devil was believed to be so persistent in his attempts to lure women into a pact that women would have done anything or given anything, such as renouncing their faith, causing illnesses, or making sacrifices, in order to be left alone. This was another explanation that helped to justify the belief that women lacked the intellectual strength needed to fend off the persistent threats of the demonic forces. According to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Kramer

¹⁶⁰ Heinrich Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Cambridge Press University, 2009), 277.

¹⁶¹ Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches*, 275.

clearly stated that even the best of women would eventually succumb to the pressures of witchcraft.

It was also believed that one of the ways that the Devil recruited women, especially younger women, was by preying on their vulnerability and deceiving them through romance. Kramer remarked,

“[young] girls are sometimes corrupted by lovers with whom they have shamelessly copulated for the sake of marriage. The girls trust their lovers’ promises, and then when they are rejected, they are disappointed in their every expectation and consider themselves to be disgraces in every regard. At this point, they turn to every sort of assistance offered by the Devil or plot vengeance by affecting with sorcery their lover or the woman to whom he has joined himself or else by subjecting themselves to all filthy acts.”¹⁶²

Despite the deception that the young women faced, this statement implies a double standard for young women, highlighting their naivety and immaturity. Kramer suggested that these women were wrong to put their trust in their lovers and that they should have known better than to trust a man who promised to be their future husband with their bodies. The repercussions of such actions could land a woman in poverty, causing her to pursue even less desirable means of survival, such as begging or prostitution. Cast into such unfortunate life circumstances, Kramer assumed that these women would then want revenge on the men who initially deceived them, and the women would turn to the Devil for his aid in this endeavor.¹⁶³

The witch trial at Chelmsford in 1566 provides just such an example of a young woman who confessed to using witchcraft to obtain her romantic desires. Elizabeth

¹⁶² Heinrich Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Leiden: Cambridge Press University, 2009), 278-279.

¹⁶³ Kramer, *The Hammer of Witches*, 278-279.

Francis was subjected to an examination by judges through, most likely, intense questioning in which elites' ideas of witchcraft had influenced Elizabeth's confession. In her confession, Elizabeth described similar circumstances as those discussed by Kramer.¹⁶⁴ She had her eyes set on a particular man and so she confessed that "she desired to have one Andrew Byles to [be] her husband, which was a man of some wealth, and the cat [i.e. the devil as a familiar in the form of a cat] did promise she should; but that he said she must first consent that this Andrew should abuse her, and so she did."¹⁶⁵ She continued stating that "after... he would not marry her, wherefore she willed Satan to waste his goods, which he forthwith did; and yet not being contented with this, she willed him to touch his body, which he forthwith did, whereof he died."¹⁶⁶ As a young woman, Elizabeth confessed to enlisting the help of the Devil to improve her situation. This confession seems to hint that working with the Devil led to negative consequences. This example reiterated the belief that women needed the Devil's assistance in order to exact revenge or even obtain their desires. Moreover, these women's vengeful actions could be seen as providing proof that they were indeed corruptible, thereby, reinforcing the belief in the negative qualities of women's nature and setting the cycle in motion yet again. These vengeful actions would be seen again and discussed differently for older women in connection to motherhood. Elizabeth's confession served as an example of elite's ideas being transmitted through the trial process and appearing in the confessions of the women who were accused as witches.

¹⁶⁴ Brian P. Levack, "Witches' Demonic Familiars at Chelmsford, 1566," in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 243-249.

¹⁶⁵ Levack, "Witches' Demonic Familiars at Chelmsford, 1566," 244.

¹⁶⁶ Levack, "Witches' Demonic Familiars at Chelmsford, 1566," 244.

Age and Witchcraft

When exploring the connections between old age and witchcraft, one of the most important concepts to consider is that of the anti-mother, which reveals how society viewed old women, infertility, and aging physical appearances.¹⁶⁷ Out of all of the women who were accused of witchcraft, about half to three-fourths were women aged fifty years or older.¹⁶⁸ While older women accounted for most of the women accused, this age group of women composed less than twenty percent of the total population.¹⁶⁹ In other words, older women were disproportionally accused of witchcraft.¹⁷⁰ One of the reasons why old women were accused was because they contradicted the ideal image of the early modern woman. Old women were viewed as “corrupted social agents that harm the body and the body politic with distorted knowledge and evil powers.”¹⁷¹ Old women, unlike virgins and young women, were not naive. Elites believed that old women were knowledgeable thanks to their life experiences, and old women were more capable of navigating situations and challenges that could arise in interpersonal relationships, both inside and outside the household. An older woman’s life experiences—birthing and raising children, helping her husband, and managing a household—were dismissed by elites and her wisdom went unrecognized. She and others like her were instead viewed by

¹⁶⁷ For more information on the anti-mother theme, see Lynn Botelho, “Old Women and Sex: Fear, Fantasy, and a Defining Life Course in Early Modern Europe,” *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 42 (2015): 193-195.

¹⁶⁸ Edward Bever, “Old Age and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe,” in *Old Age in Preindustrial Society*, ed. Peter N. Stearns (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982), 157.

¹⁶⁹ Bever, “Old Age and Witchcraft,” 157.

¹⁷⁰ Alison Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford Academic, 2013), 460.

¹⁷¹ Encarnación Juárez-Almendros, “The Disabling of Aging Female Bodies: Midwives, Procuresses, Witches and the Monstrous Mother,” in *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature: Prostitutes, Aging Women and Saints* (Liverpool University Press, 2017), 83.

elites as “less intelligent, useless, [and] repulsive” because the knowledge obtained in running a household and childcare was dismissed as unimportant, and it caused aging women to become “alienated and invisible.”¹⁷² Conversely, old men were viewed by elites in a much more positive way. Old men were associated with “attributes of wisdom and dignity.”¹⁷³ This contrast reinforced the link between men’s rationality and women’s irrationality in terms of their characters and temperaments. Even in old age, women were still subjected to the inferior beliefs about their gender. Moreover, due to this change in their situation, elites believed that old women became “jealous over the fecundity of others.”¹⁷⁴ It was thought that older women were jealous of younger women because younger women were able to fulfill their expected role as childbearers and caregivers to their children and partners to their husbands in all matters. For the authors of the witchcraft treatises, the perceived jealousy of older women that supposedly drove them to practicing witchcraft and seek out the Devil.

Indeed, infertility was a commonality between old women and witches because both could no longer bear children and, therefore, could no longer contribute to the household as a mother. As Lynn Botelho has noted, both were “domestically unnecessary.”¹⁷⁵ While fertile women were considered to be productive members of the household who brought life into the world and whose bodies produced milk to nurse their young, once a woman hit menopause, her image and role changed. Old women were still

¹⁷² Encarnación Juárez-Almendros, “The Disabling of Aging Female Bodies: Midwives, Procuresses, Witches and the Monstrous Mother,” in *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature: Prostitutes, Aging Women and Saints* (Liverpool University Press, 2017), 84.

¹⁷³ Juárez-Almendros, “The Disabling of Aging Female Bodies,” 85.

¹⁷⁴ Lynn Botelho, “Old Women and Sex: Fear, Fantasy, and a Defining Life Course in Early Modern Europe,” *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 42 (2015): 195.

¹⁷⁵ Botelho, “Old Women and Sex,” 195.

considered mothers, but not in the traditional sense that they were raising and caring for small children of their own or bearing more children. The children of older women were adults and no longer needed their mother's care. Early modern physicians held misconceptions about the post-menopausal female body that also emphasized the theme of destruction rather than creation, through which many older women were often associated with witchcraft. As we have seen, early modern medicine revolved around the humoral theory and the balancing of humors. Men were believed to be hot and dry while women were believed to be wet and cold. When a woman was no longer fertile or stopped becoming pregnant, her womb was believed to be dried up. Authors of medical treatises advised men not to have intercourse with older women because women's wombs could potentially dry up a man's testicles and extract heat from the man. This medical ideology elaborated upon the believed carnal nature of witches who participated in the sabbat and who had intercourse with the Devil or demons. The similarities in these qualities, again, can be connected to the polarized ideology of men being hot while women were cold. Late medieval medical treatises, such as *On the Secrets of Women* by Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, also helped support these negative and dangerous views of older women.¹⁷⁶ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus warned of the dangers posed by old women remarking that "old women ought not to be permitted to play with children and kiss them, because they poison them to such a degree that sometimes they die."¹⁷⁷ The reason for this, as Pseudo-Albertus Magnus explained, was that "in these women the natural heat is

¹⁷⁶ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 1.

¹⁷⁷ Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 131.

so deficient that the menses collected in them cannot be expelled.”¹⁷⁸ Therefore, the poison of the menses also poisons the humors, and poisons an old woman’s touch, by which they could then harm others. This could lead to sterility among families and couples or even cause illness or death in the children and adults who came into contact with these older women. These ideas of menopause and infertility of old women parallel beliefs of the witch as being associated with the anti-fertility concept. Witches were also associated with causing infertility and harm to children. As previously stated, menstruation was believed to purify the body. If there was no menstruation, there was no way to purify the body. The negative beliefs of menstrual blood as a source that could cause disease and harm others became tied to old women and their bodies as being a harmful source.

Another commonality between old women and witches was their physical appearances. Although popular conceptions often influenced beliefs about the physical appearance of the witch, some demonologists and respected members of communities also fed the narrative of the ugly, old-looking witch. In the *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), Reginald Scot (1538-1599), a member of the English Parliament and a skeptic of the witch hunts, shared his description of the women accused of witchcraft in Kent. He noted that they were “women which be commonly old, lame blear-eyed pale, foul, and full of wrinkles.”¹⁷⁹ He also added that these women appeared to be “lean and deformed,

¹⁷⁸ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women’s Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 131.

¹⁷⁹ Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 20. Also found in Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, ed. Brinsley Nicholson (Project Gutenberg, 2019), Book I, Chapter III.

showing melancholy in their faces to the horror of all that see them.”¹⁸⁰ This particular description could have attested to the appearances of older women in courts after they were accused of witchcraft and tortured for a confession. As such, many images depicted the witch as an old and ugly woman. In *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, Jean Bodin made a connection between ugliness and witchcraft. He associated beauty with God stating that “beauty can come only from God.”¹⁸¹ Conversely, Bodin referred to the copulation between witches and the Devil as something that could physically make someone ugly. He concluded that “women... by intimacy with Satan become hideous, doleful, ugly[,] and stinking to an unnatural degree.”¹⁸² Beauty, in a way, was associated with goodness and fertility while ugliness was associated with evil and infertility. This idea of beauty versus ugliness also connected to a woman’s physical appearance and fertility. More youthful appearances signaled that a woman was more fertile, had less sexual maturity, and could be naive. An older appearance signaled that a woman was less fertile or even approaching the end of her childbearing years. The wear and tear of multiple pregnancies on the body and other aspects of aging such as skin becoming less elastic and mobility being diminished as joints and muscles become more inflexible added to the weathered and wrinkled appearance of older women. Once again, authors of witchcraft treatises using older ideas about female sexuality, roles in procreation, and gender norms by introducing them as new elements tied to demonology on the stereotype of the witch.

¹⁸⁰ Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 20.

¹⁸¹ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 155.

¹⁸² Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, 155.

Midwives were also associated with the stereotype of the witch due to their close contact with the female body and the fact that most women who were midwives were mostly older women.¹⁸³ In order to stoke fear, demonologies often mentioned midwives in relation to crimes, such as abortions and infanticides, that they were thought to have committed. This fear of midwives could stem from their knowledge of female sexuality and reproduction. The knowledge that midwives possessed included forms of contraception, how to conceive, and how to induce abortions. This sexual knowledge of female reproduction was viewed as dangerous because the control of reproductive information was believed to be an abuse of power and it was viewed as being against God's will for women as mothers and procreators.¹⁸⁴

There was a strong stance against contraceptives and abortions within the Church and early modern society. In *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, Bodin incorporated many ideas from Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum* on subjects such as infanticide, abortion, and contraceptives. Bodin claimed that "[a] person... who obstructs the conception or birth of children must be considered just as much a murderer as the person who cuts another's throat."¹⁸⁵ This idea seemed to be an extreme perspective opposing any form of contraceptive. France, where Bodin resided, seemed to share this extreme perspective because, in 1556, "the Parliament of Paris passed an anti-abortion edict requiring all pregnant women to register their pregnancy and have someone witness the

¹⁸³ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 4th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 291.

¹⁸⁴ Stephanie Irene Spoto, "Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power," *Pacific Coast Philology* 45 (2010): 58.

¹⁸⁵ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 101. Leigh Whaley, *Women and the Practice of Medical Care in Early Modern Europe, 1400-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 189.

birth. If these practices were not followed and the child died, the woman could be prosecuted for murder.”¹⁸⁶ Other crimes of witchcraft also were associated with midwives. These crimes included “promising their children to Satan,” sacrificing their “infant children before they are [baptized],” “[dedicating children] right from the mother’s womb,” and “murdering little children, then boiling them to render their [humors] and flesh drinkable.”¹⁸⁷ These fears continued to be directed towards midwives and the nature of their work in close proximity with infants, young children, and expecting mothers.

Since midwives worked closely with the female body and were involved in the process of childbirth, demonologists associated midwives with the crime of infanticide and the use of female body parts for the purposes of witchcraft. Parts of the female body were believed to be used for witchcraft, especially as ingredients in potions. These body parts included the placenta, the umbilical cord, and the caul, which were all related to the female reproductive system and thus emphasized the highly gendered and sexualized nature of witchcraft.¹⁸⁸ Francesco Maria Guazzo briefly mentioned in the *Compendium Maleficarum* that witches will “offer [the Devil] pitch black candles, or infants’ naval cords.”¹⁸⁹ The main fear surrounding these women was that they would harm babies and cause the deaths of both infants and mothers during childbirth. Of course, even without

¹⁸⁶ Leigh Whaley, *Women and the Practice of Medical Care in Early Modern Europe, 1400-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 189.

¹⁸⁷ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 205-206.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas R. Forbes, “Midwifery and Witchcraft,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 17, no. 2 (1962): 267.

¹⁸⁹ Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum: The Montague Summers Edition*, trans. E.A. Ashwin (Dover, 1988), 35.

the use of witchcraft, childbirth was inherently dangerous for both the mother and the child, and death could naturally happen to either the mother, the infant, or both. In *Examen of Witches*, Henry Boguet discussed the crimes of which midwives were accused. Boguet accused witches of having a “habit of offering to Satan the little children which they deliver, and then of killing them, before they have been baptized, by thrusting a large pin into their brains.”¹⁹⁰ Midwives could also be blamed for the deaths of the infant and the mother since they were responsible for the delivery of the baby, as well as the care of mother and child after delivery. For example, midwives were responsible for baptizing the child once it was born, especially if the child was dying. It was very important for the child to get baptized because if the child died without a baptism, then they would not experience eternal life with God. Demonologists, such as Henry Boguet, believed, however, that witches would take these children, prevent their baptism, and then sacrifice them to the Devil. Boguet highlighted the sense of vulnerability behind this belief stating, “what danger these children are until they have received this Holy Sacrament; seeing that, if through the ministry of a witch they die before baptism, they are eternally deprived of the sight and glory of God.”¹⁹¹ For someone, especially a witch, to take away that means of salvation from a defenseless being would have been considered evil and appalling. Early modern states began instituting laws and policies designed to curb infanticide by punishing women, especially peasant and artisans women who did it.¹⁹² Additionally, this idea manifested into witches taking children’s body parts

¹⁹⁰ Henry Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, ed. Montague Summers (Dover Publications: 2009), 88.

¹⁹¹ Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, 89.

¹⁹² Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 4th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 76-78.

to make powders and ointments for witchcraft purposes. For example, in the *Compendium Maleficarum*, Francesco Maria Guazzo mentioned the use of an ointment at the Sabbat that witches used stating, “before they go to the Sabbat[,] they anoint themselves upon some part of their bodies with an unguent made from various foul and filthy ingredients, but chiefly from murdered children.”¹⁹³ This idea appeared in confessions of accused witches, such as the unnamed woman at Eichstatt who confessed to exhuming her child’s grave who had been dead for six years. She remarked that she “took the remains home, stirred them for two days and nights, then put them in a pot, [and] pounded them into a powder.”¹⁹⁴ According to the beliefs of witchcraft, then, even a child’s dead body could be used to make powders and ointments which in turn were thought to be used to cause abortions, infanticide, or another child’s death. This passage demonstrated one of the elites’ beliefs that the bodies of deceased children was used in aiding a witch in her pursue to harm others. The idea that a trusted professional could cause harm to the vulnerable groups of people, such as pregnant women, infants, and children made midwives as witches dangerous. If they were believed to be practicing witchcraft, midwives represented a threat to procreation of one’s family and others within the community because of knowledge they alone possessed in regards to reproduction.

Walpurga Hausmännin’s confessions at the Dillingen witchcraft trial of 1587 highlighted some of these fears of infants and children falling victim to witchcraft at the

¹⁹³ Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum: The Montague Summers Edition*, trans. E.A. Ashwin (Dover, 1988), 34.

¹⁹⁴ Brian P. Levack, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt, 1637,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 225.

hands of a midwife.¹⁹⁵ Walpurga was a formerly licensed midwife in the German town of Dillingen. Under torture, she confessed to copulation with the Devil, renouncing God, and attending the Sabbath. What is interesting in her trial was the enormous number of children and mothers she supposedly harmed and killed during her time as a midwife. These confessions of harm ranged from deaths of both mother and child, stillbirths, infanticide, and deaths of young children. The extent of these confessions could have been influenced by the intense torture and interrogation that Walpurga received in her trial. She confessed that she was given a salve in order to enact these horrors. One of the people that Walpurga used the salve on was a woman experiencing her first pregnancy and childbirth. Walpurga confessed that “she had rubbed Anna Hämännin... with her salve on the occasion of her first childbirth and also otherwise damaged her so that mother and child remained together and died.”¹⁹⁶ The salve she used also caused a number of stillbirths. She confessed that “[when]... the organist’s wife was awaiting her confinement, she touched her naked body with her salve, whereby the child promptly died and came stillborn.”¹⁹⁷ Numerous mothers, children, and fetuses suffered under Walpurga’s care highlighting the vulnerability of these specific groups of people which helped to further cultivate fears of midwives participating in witchcraft.

Conclusion

As we have seen, procreation was at the center of ideas concerning female nature, witchcraft beliefs, and the stereotyping of the witch. The ideas of female nature that were

¹⁹⁵ Brian P. Levack, “The Confession of Walpurga Hausmännin, 1587,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 193-198.

¹⁹⁶ Levack, “The Confession of Walpurga Hausmännin,” 195.

¹⁹⁷ Levack, “The Confession of Walpurga Hausmännin,” 195.

influenced by previous elite beliefs about gender such as weak, corruptible, and deceptive were reenforced by the discussion of Eve by theologians who turned Aristotle's understandings of women as imperfect and passive into beliefs that women were corruptible and deceptive. These ideas influenced discussions of female sexuality and negative beliefs of female carnality within witchcraft beliefs, especially in regard to older women. Indeed, procreation and reproduction dictated the lives of women, particularly older women and how they were treated by society. Older women were seen as having outgrown the important role of mother while witches were seen as a concept of the anti-mother. Both groups were associated with infertility, aging physical appearances, and concepts of female carnality. These concepts were centered on causing diseases and copulation with the Devil. Midwives were also included in the concepts of female carnality in relation to witchcraft beliefs. Accusations and confessions from the witch trials also highlighted certain behaviors and characteristics that were associated with female carnality and showcased how ingrained carnal beliefs were in the witch hunts. As a result, beliefs of female carnality demonstrated that witchcraft and witches were threats to procreation and led to the targeting of women as witches.

CONCLUSION

With the combination of gender beliefs of women along with the beliefs of witchcraft and witches, it is clear that procreation was a clear contributing factor in the targeting of women in the early modern witch hunts. Procreation laid at the heart of beliefs of the witch and witchcraft as well as of the female sex and gender. Religion and natural philosophy reinforced the idea that women were created to be a mother and expected to uphold their motherly duties in society. Starting with the ancient ideas of women, both ideas of imperfection and passivity constructed the understanding of the female sex and gender as it pertained to women's gender roles and expectations as mothers. These suspicions of women as most likely to be witches developed from Aristotle's ideas that women were imperfect and passive, and therefore, women were inferior. Ancient physicians such as Galen and Soranus added their own thoughts to what Aristotle stated about sex difference. Medieval theologians and physicians, then, took the ideas of imperfection and passivity and applied them to beliefs of female sexuality, which would eventually lead to the development of negative notions of female carnality within beliefs of witchcraft and witches. Since reproduction and procreation was at the heart of female gender beliefs, it was not surprising to find that many negative perspectives on female sexuality and female carnality were developed. Women became associated as sexually insatiable which was tied to their roles as mothers and as housewives. The ideas of imperfection and passivity formed the ideal early modern woman as gentle, submissive, and chaste.

Witches contrasted with the ideal early modern woman and was presented as the antithesis to the mother, housewife, and grandmother. The witch being the opposite of the ideal woman emphasized the inverse relation of early modern thought which was similar to men being the opposite of women. These ideas of women as imperfect, passive, and inferior transformed into women as easily corruptible, deceitful, and deeply influenced by carnal thoughts and activities. Female nature forms a big part of why women were most likely suspected as witches. Both a woman's constitution and temperament had been named as contributing factors. Women were believed to be mentally weak, easily influenced, and too talkative. These traits of women's temperament justified the carnal nature of women, especially when it came to copulations with the Devil. Female sexuality was seen by demonologists as a negative power or weapon to be used by witches. This power or weapon took the form of casting diseases, such as sexually transmitted infections, or preventing conception, or harming children or pregnant women. It was not just theologians who emphasized the negative qualities of female nature and carnality but also the demonologists. Demonologists incorporated themes of procreation and carnality in beliefs about witches and witchcraft. Demonologies discussed copulation between witches and the Devil, witches preventing conception and causing abortions, and sacrificing and killing children. Older women paralleled the stereotype of the witch through old age and being infertile. They were no longer functioning mothers in society and lost their youthful appearances. Similarly, the witch was also associated with infertility and was represented as the anti-mother. Midwives also fit into the stereotype by their association of working closely with the female body and infants. They had access to knowledge to cause abortions and they could be blamed for infanticides.

Even nowadays, procreation has been changed from something to be celebrated to something that can be used to imprison, dictate, and control the lives and roles of women through the denial of contraceptives, abortions, basic healthcare, and legal protections. Yet, this is not the first time in history that procreation has been used to maintain gender beliefs and underscore expectations of women. Rather than being discussed as a strength and source of pride, in early modern Europe, procreation and women's roles in reproduction were used by elites to belittle and shame women as being inferior and physically and mentally weaker. This is seen constantly in beliefs of witchcraft and witches. The connection of elites' ideas of witchcraft and women's reproductive roles became something that was weaponized against the concept of procreation which led to the targeting of women during the early modern period.

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