

# European Witchcraft

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*John Wiley & Sons, Inc.*  
New York London Sydney Toronto

## PART TWO

### *The Great Witchcraft Debate, 1560-1580*

Scholars have long recognized that the great bulk of witchcraft trials in Europe did not follow immediately after the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, but began almost a full century later—in Elizabethan England, in the France of Henri III, and in most parts of Germany in the later years of the sixteenth century. The first half of that century, the peak period of Renaissance and Reformation in northern Europe, recorded far less persecution of witches than the second half. In many regions of Europe—for example, the area running from Geneva and Savoy north through Vaud, Franche-Comté, Neuchâtel, Montbéliard into Alsace and Lorraine—every province, Protestant and Catholic alike, saw a rapid intensification of persecution beginning sometime between the 1560's and the 1580's.

If the fact of rapidly increasing persecution in the last third of the sixteenth century has been established, its explanation is still very much in doubt. Two important hypotheses have recently been offered, both relying more on social than on intellectual history. The first<sup>1</sup> attempts to establish a rhythm between the persecution of heretics during the wars of religion from 1560 to 1590, and the persecution of witches from 1590 to 1630. It is even possible to find specific examples where witchcraft trials begin precisely at the point where heresy trials stop:

<sup>1</sup> Robert Mandrou, *Introduction à la France moderne: essai de psychologie historique*, Paris, 1963, p. 363. Mandrou has a few hesitations when he repeats the same hypothesis in his *Magistrats et sorciers en France au XVIIe siècle*, Paris, 1968, p. 152.

the bishopric of Cologne ceased trials for Anabaptism and started trials for malign sorcery around 1605; the city of Besançon stopped trials of Huguenots and began trials of witches around 1585. But very often witchcraft trials occurred in regions without any traditions of heresy trials, and many regions had had witch-trials long before they had heresy trials of Protestants. Another explanation<sup>1</sup> argues that the increase in persecution was a natural by-product of the wars of religion between Catholic and Protestant, a result of the heat of religious conflict. However, this explanation encounters many of the same difficulties as the other, since the upsurge of witchcraft persecution often lacked any geographical or chronological connection with the religious wars. In fact, regions that actually experienced such wars generally stopped their witchcraft trials for a long time, because their general judicial machinery was likely to have been badly damaged by these wars.

Perhaps a better set of explanations can be uncovered if we look at some simple facts of sixteenth-century European intellectual history. First, both the Protestant and Catholic reformations can best be understood as different aspects of the same spirit of religious revival, rather than as a social conflict. Because the persecution of heretics is a valuable index of the depth of religious zeal, and because witchcraft was the very worst sort of anti-Christian heresy—an organized sect of Devil-worshippers—it is not difficult to understand this enormous outburst of persecution as merely one disastrous consequence of this general eruption of religious zeal.

In order to establish such a line of argument, it is also necessary to show that both Catholic and Protestant educated opinion had no serious cause to doubt either the reality of witchcraft and its crimes or the necessity of its abolition. The argument of this section, expounded most fully in the final essay, is that there was no natural explanation for witchcraft that could stand up under serious sixteenth-century criticism. There was a great polemical debate about the reality of witchcraft and the persecution of witches in the later sixteenth century, a debate that cut across confessional lines. Johann Weyer launched it by attacking witchcraft in the 1560's, and Jean Bodin concluded it with a defense of witchcraft in 1580.

<sup>1</sup>Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change*, London and New York, 1967, p. 139ff.

I FROM *Johann Weyer*  
*De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1563)

A disciple of the famous Renaissance physician Cornelius Agrippa—who later served as a model for Dr. Faustus—Weyer spent most of his adult life (1550-1578) as court physician to the tolerant, Erasmian Duke of Cleves. His book on the illusions and impostures of devils, his frontal attack on the witchcraft belief and persecution, was the masterpiece of his life. It had four Latin editions from 1563-1568, was translated into German and French in 1567, was reprinted in an enlarged Latin edition in 1577, and this newer version was also translated into French in 1579. This is a very respectable record, considering the boldness of some of Weyer's claims about witches.

*De Praestigiis Daemonum* is a long book, forever interrupting its argument with more or less relevant digressions. Weyer's central theme, which he clearly suggests in his preface, is that witches are really harmless and confused old women, suffering from various physical and mental disorders; he insists that natural, medical explanations can be found for nearly all cases of presumed witchcraft, and that the exceptions result from poison rather than black magic. The chapters translated here are not the very best of Weyer, but they do concern a central point of witchcraft, namely the nature of the pact between witches and the Devil. Weyer argues that such pacts are legally frauds, and that witches' brews and unguents do not contain any magical properties. Note also that he argues as a Protestant, especially when discussing witches' crimes against Church ceremonies.

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SOURCE. Johann Weyer, *De Praestigis Daemonum* (1563) Book III, chapters iii-iv and translated from E. Bourneville, ed. *Histoire, Disputes et Discours des Illusions et Impostures des Diables, etc.*, Paris, 1885. Vol. I, pp. 285-296. Dedicatory epistle to Duke William of Cleves reprinted from pp. 213-215 of *A History of Medical Psychology* by Gregory Zilboorg, M.D. in collaboration with George W. Henry, M.D. By permission of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Copyright 1941 by W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Copyright renewed 1968 by Margaret Stone Zilboorg and George W. Henry.

## PREFACE

Of all the misfortunes which the various fanatical and corrupt opinions, through Satan's help, have brought in our time to Christendom, not the smallest is that which, under the name of witchcraft, is sown as a vicious seed. The people may be divided against themselves through their many disputes about the Scriptures and church customs, while the old snake stirs the fire; still no such great misfortune results from that as from the thereby inspired opinion that childish old hags whom one calls witches or sorcerers can do any harm to men and animals. Daily experience teaches us what cursed apostasy, what friendship with the wicked one, what hatred and strife among fellow creatures, what dissension in city and in country, what numerous murders of innocent people through the devil's wretched aid, such belief in the power of witches brings forth. No one can more correctly judge about these things than we physicians whose ears and hearts are being constantly tortured by this superstition.

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I notice more from day to day that the bog of Camarina blows its plague-laden breath stronger than ever. For a time one hoped that its poison would be gradually eliminated through the healthy teaching of the word of God, but I see that in these stormy days it reaches farther and farther and wider than ever. In the same way the sly devil watchfully uses each propitious circumstance. In the meantime the priests sleepily allow him to continue. Almost all the theologians are silent regarding their godlessness, doctors tolerate it, jurists treat it while still under the influence of old prejudices; wherever I listen, there is no one, no one who out of compassion for humanity unseals the labyrinth or extends a hand to heal the deadly wound.

Therefore I, with my limited means, have undertaken to challenge the grievous thing which disgraces our Christian faith. It is not arrogance which impels me. I know that I know nothing and that my work allows me little leisure. I know too that many others could do this work better than I. I would like to incite them to outdo me. I shall gladly listen to reason.

My object is chiefly of a theological nature: to set forth the

artfulness of Satan according to Biblical authority and to demonstrate how one can overcome it. Next, my object is philosophical, in that I fight with natural reason against the deceptions which proceed from Satan and the mad imagination of the so-called witches. My object is also medical, in that I show that those illnesses the origin of which is attributed to witches come from natural causes. And finally, my object is legal, in that I speak of the punishment, in another than the accustomed way, of sorcerers and witches.

But in order that I shall not meet with the reproach that I have overstepped the boundaries of my intellectual power and the limits of my profession with too great a faith in my own intelligence, I have submitted my seemingly paradoxical manuscript to men of your Highness' family as well as to theologians, lawyers, and excellent physicians, that it may be read in a critical sense. The manuscript shall remain protected through their authority if it is founded on reason; it shall fall if it is judged to be in error; it shall become better if it needs supplement or revision. For there is nothing in the world which can be made immediately and at once completely perfect.

One might rejoin here that the *Malleus Maleficarum* has already fulfilled this mission. But one has only to read in that book the silly and often godless absurdities of the theologians Heinrich Kraemer and Jacob [Johann] Sprenger and to compare these quietly with the content of my manuscript. Then it will be clearly seen that I expound and advocate a totally different, even an opposite, point of view.

To you, Prince, I dedicate the fruit of my thought. For thirteen years your physician, I have heard expressed in your Court the most varied opinions concerning witches; but none so agrees with my own as does yours, that witches can harm no one through the most malicious will or the ugliest exorcism, that rather their imagination—inflamed by the demons in a way not understandable to us—and the torture of melancholy makes them only fancy that they have caused all sorts of evil. For when the entire manner of action is laid on the scales, and the implements therefor examined with care and scrutiny, the nonsense and falsity of the matter is soon clear to all eyes and more lucid than the day. You do not, like others, impose heavy penal-

ties on perplexed, poor old women. You demand evidence, and only if they have actually given poison bringing about the death of men or animals do you allow the law to take its course.

When a prince of such virtues protects me, I have faith that I can make short work of the snapping teeth of insolent quarrelers, especially since it is certain that on my side stands invincible truth. I implore God, the Highest and Best, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may profitably extend through greater employment of the Holy Spirit what in His benevolence He has so happily begun in Your Highness, to the honor of His Name, to the glory of Your Highness and to the flourishing happiness of your country. Your Highness' most obedient servant, Johann Weyer, Physician.

*CHAPTER III: THE CLAIMS OF THE WITCHES  
UNMASKED AND REFUTED: SHOWING THAT THEIR  
PACT AND AGREEMENT IS ONLY AN IMPOSTURE, AND  
MADNESS, WHICH SHOULD BE DISREGARDED*

Any man who is not completely dull-witted will easily conclude that these things are mutually contradictory, absurd, and unworthy of belief. He will also easily know that the pact [with the Devil] is only an imposture made by the appearance of some imaginary phantom or fantastic body, and grasped by a dazzled mind; or else made by some trick played on the optical nerves, by a figure concocted and adapted by Satan to the humors and spirits moving in this region. Else it is made and fixed by a breeze or dull sound or murmur in the organs of hearing, corresponding to and agreeing with the figures of the deceived imagination, which is propelled and moved by the skill of the Evil Spirit. Thus it will be seen that it has no force whatsoever, particularly if one examines it closely and weighs the various essences of the contracting parties, the form of the contract, the manner, and the circumstances in the balance of our reason and faith. It is notorious that several deeds are attributed to Witches which these poorly-informed women have confessed came only from their imagination, corrupted by the impostor—and which anyhow did not come from the Witches but from Satan, who

needs no outside help to show what he can do or to declare his actions. He is forced by no human will or power, only by God and his good ministers. This wicked deceiver obeys evil people of his own will, without being forced, although he feigns and pretends to act otherwise, as Porphyry says, for the purpose of plaguing us more by his impostures.

This imaginary pact need not be strictly binding, for it is made fraudulently and with lies by one of the parties. It could only be made through the bedazzled mind of an astonished and sleeping person, deprived of his senses. The supposition that the Devil extends his hand and bargains with the Witch is falsehood, since he is a spirit which has neither flesh nor bone. Tatian writing against the Greeks says that devils are creatures of a spiritual nature like air or elementary fire, and can only be seen by those armed with the spirit of God, but not by ordinary men with ordinary souls. Moreover, if this cheating agreement, made by fraud and chiefly invented for an evil purpose, against God's will, without witnesses and pledges, is so important and powerful that it can never be broken by any means, but that the one must necessarily follow the other's will and be compelled to obey him: then why is it that the previous compact, [when he was] truly baptized by God's special will and command and by solemn words, with guarantors and security, does not take precedence by prerogative? There is much more solidity in the contract between the true God and people of sound mind. Whatever He promises and stipulates He fulfills and does not deceive, nor does He dance and banquet while bargaining with his people, whom He neither seduces nor deprives of their senses, like Satan does with his imaginary body. If someone denies this inequality, I wonder what truth he could believe.

But you will object that the old woman has renounced the Christian faith. If we seek a way of salvation other than Jesus Christ, not observing His commandments and not following them happily with genuine faith, then we renounce his faith, and we do it with a sound mind. But in that other case, what was supposedly done by the old woman comes from the stupidity of old age, the inconstancy of her sex, fickleness, a weak mind, despair, and mental disease, when the old woman is deceived imaginarily or by the wiles of the evil spirit. Listen a bit and

hearken to the words of St. Paul, where he portrays very well those people who truly renounce the Christian faith. Namely, the Spirit says that in the last days some will revolt from the faith, amusing themselves with deceitful spirits and with the devil's doctrines, teaching hypocritically, having their conscience hardened, forbidding marriage, commanding abstention from meat which God has created through grace for use by the faithful and by those who have known the truth. Know also that in the last days there will be troubled times. For men will be filled with self-love, avaricious, boastful, proud, gossipers, lacking in filial piety, ungrateful, contemptuous towards God, lacking in natural affection, slanderers, cruel, haters of the Godly, traitors, foolhardy, swollen, lovers of pleasure instead of lovers of God; having the appearance of piety and prudence, but without the things themselves. Turn away from them, for they gorge in their houses, and hold captive weak women laden with sin. They are led along by various desires, always learning yet never coming to recognize truth. As Jannes and Mambres resisted Moses, those people—corrupted in their understanding, real reprobates in matters of faith—resist truth. . . . That is what St. Paul says.

If you return to the baptismal oil which has supposedly been removed by that [diabolical] pact, this point I could answer well in a word, for it were better to answer it so that worse things may not follow. If there is some virtue in the sacrament of baptism, surely it consists no more in the external anointment than in the external washing with water, by which a person is so sanctified and confirmed through the intervention of faith, that even if he were afterwards washed a hundred times with all the water you wish and even if all his skin were stripped away, still the essence of baptism remains in him through the character which faith has left there—even if the deceived person renounces its virtue. If perchance he returns to a better life through repentance and mending his ways, the same power and virtue of baptism will remain in him just as it had formerly been imprinted there. In other words, baptism will have its same value after a person returns to the straight path. Otherwise it would follow that this virtue was abolished by a wound received on the head or by an ulcer which appeared on the spot of the anointment. Also, I think that in this [diabolic] pact the top of the

head is not truly shaved, but only in imagination, just as in our opinion several other things happen in this business in order to tempt gullible and senseless people by wicked persuasion, making them believe that they are so well coated with diabolical lacquer that all exits are closed to them, or making them yield to despair and thus ready to undertake all sorts of extraordinary and evil things. But the path of conversion is no more closed to them, deceived in their corrupt fantasy, than to many others who sin grievously. For St. Peter, already warned by Jesus Christ, did not fail to deny him three times under oath, against the witness of his conscience. However, after he had confessed his fault and had wept, he was received into grace.

*CHAPTER IV: THE REST OF THE PROOFS, BY WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THE WITCHES' COMPACT IS A FRIVOLOUS THING*

Moreover, it is false, a pure supposition of Satan, and a crazy belief, to think that it is possible to make babies die with certain ceremonies. Similarly, it happens that when they claim to remove children from their graves, this is nothing but a diabolical persuasion springing from a corrupt imaginative faculty or else resulting from a deep dream. This can best be seen if we examine the graves from which they claim to have removed them, for the bodies will be found still buried. I also have no doubt that the child's thigh, put into the caldron and cooked until the flesh leaves the bone and thus made easy to drink, has entered their mind in the same way. For it is so inhuman, horrible, cruel, and hard to believe, that even if I saw it with my own eyes I would rather believe that my eyes were charmed by the spell of such a spectacle than confess to seeing this wicked and ultra-tragic thighbone, which surpasses all belief. But assume that the Witches, horrible workers with this unguent, have truly come from the bottom of hell and have cast aside any trace of human sentiment: now I ask you whence comes this virtue in this unguent, so that whoever rubs himself with it acquires wicked desires, execrable arts, and unbelievable travels? or that, after greasing a seat or piece of wood with it,

whoever sits on it is immediately wafted into the air, as the Witches persuade themselves? I do not wish to argue learnedly here about the complexion, temperament and virtues of that dead flesh, rotten and venomous, for I firmly believe that they could not be found in nature if so prepared. The same holds for the preparation, imbibing, and virtues of that liquid matter in the bottle.

However, it should not be denied that these miserable little women are so crazed by the devil, through the figures which have been engraved on their fantasy, that they know these things just as well as if they had truly been done. The greater part of all their works and deeds also seems to be imaginary, so that when questioned and close to the flames they openly confess faults which they only know through dreams or apparitions. The same thing is confirmed by the Decretals. Some weak women, servants of Satan, seduced by the devil's illusions, think they can perform many other wicked acts, like tearing babies from their mothers' breasts, roasting them and eating them; or entering houses by chimneys or windows in order to torment and worry the inhabitants in various ways—which things and others like them only happen in their fantasy. Moreover, the devil plays with the Witch who makes a little trench in ground and fills it with urine or water, stirring it with her finger, and believes she is stirring up a storm; while the devil troubles the air to keep her always at her job. Thus the use of that infernal drink . . . clearly demonstrates that it proceeds from imposture, not to mention its great diversity [in contents]. Concerning this, I say with Horace that fables should not be presumed to tell the truth in everything that they reveal, nor do I think that one can draw a live baby from the belly of a Witch after her dinner.

The emptiness of this [diabolical] compact is also shown, because after making it one is forced to observe ceremonies contrary to the statutes of the Church—like fasting on Sundays, eating flesh on Fridays and Saturdays, hiding one's sins at confession, spitting on the ground when the God of the Mass is elevated, babble while Mass is being sung, or do anything else which the forgers of the *Malleus Maleficarum* have written. But any honor-

able man, ever so slightly versed in reading Holy Writ, will easily know how many and how great these sins are. Because Sunday is ordained to hear the Word of God, to pray to Him and serve Him, no one could look after these things better than a man who has kept his mind pure and free from the vapors gotten by eating and drinking. There are, says Jesus Christ, a kind of devils who can only be expelled through prayer and fasting. That is why St. Peter commands us to be sober and vigilant in prayer. For the devil our adversary goes here and there, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "Do not defraud one another, unless by mutual consent and for a time so that you can fulfill your fasts and prayers." Thus fasting and prayer are almost always joined, and certainly by a very good command. I am amazed by what is written in Tertullian, that fasting on Sunday is a bad act. Other authors stand by the words of Jesus Christ, that it is legitimate in case of necessity to eat flesh on the days forbidden by the Roman Pope, provided that nobody is scandalized and that one neither nibbles or overeats. "Hearken and listen," says Jesus Christ, "it is not what enters the mouth that makes a man unclean, but what leaves the mouth." Similarly St. Paul to the Colossians, second chapter: "Let no man condemn you for eating or drinking, either because of a holy day or a new moon or the Sabbath, which things are shadows of those to come, but the body is in Christ." . . . The same St. Paul writes to Timothy: "The spirit says in particular that in the last days some will withdraw from the faith, amusing themselves with cheating spirits and diabolical doctrines, hypocritically teaching lies, being hardened in their consciences, forbidding marriage, commanding abstention from meat which God in his grace has created to be used by the faithful and by those who have known the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected which is made in grace; it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer. If you tell these things to the brethren, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and good doctrine, which you have faithfully followed. Moreover, reject profane fables, like those of old women, and do pious deeds." Thus writes St. Paul, who also says to eat every-

thing which is sold by a butcher, without asking anything for your conscience's sake, "for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

As for the fact that, according to the pact, they are forced to hide some of their sins at confession: who can do it, I ask you, who can recite them *all* distinctly, since usually even our thoughts, our words and our acts are tainted with sin? What testimony of the divine will commands us to recount all our sins so precisely, one after the other? In what order will the publican tell them in the temple, or the brigand on the cross?

The sin in spitting on the ground while the God of the Mass is raised is exactly as great as in keeping the saliva in one's mouth. The useless words spoken at Mass merit just as great punishment as those spoken after Mass. The same goes for their heinous crime in walking on the cross. Similarly, that they enter the Church on Sundays before the holy water is consecrated, and a thousand other follies of old women, which have been promoted by devils in order to establish superstition and impiety under the pretext of religion.

Any honorable man can thus easily perceive the force of this compact. St. Augustine says it very well: all these false arts of harmful superstition, coming from a pernicious association of men and devils, such as faithless pacts and false friendship, ought to be completely rejected. And Origen in his third book on Job: Enchantments, he says, are seductions of devils, mockeries of evil spirits, mud of idolatry, brutishness of soul and scandal of heart. See the recapitulation of this work (Book 6, Chapter 25), where I again describe the nullity of these pacts and agreements.

Together with the above silliness, I will also tell what Psellus writes about the Euchetes and Gnostics, who are said to perform wicked and horrible sacrifices in order to receive the devils into all their thoughts. They assemble on the day when the saviour was crucified, in the evening, at a prearranged spot, with girls whom they know. After some sacrifices they snuff out the candles and sleep indifferently with their daughters or sisters or other women. Nine months later they return, summon the women and take their children, whom they cut all over their bodies and

fill phials with their blood. They burn the bodies and mix the ashes with the blood. Then they season everyone's food and drink with this sauce, or whatever part of it they can preserve. For they think that with this sacrifice and nourishment, as something truly very evil, the divine character imprinted on us which keeps the devils at bay is completely abolished; thus the devils can approach them with more assurance. . . .

[Weyer fills two more pages of this chapter with more citations and stories, but no more arguments.]

2 FROM

Jean Bodin  
*Démonomanie des Sorciers*

*Bodin was one of the most talented and versatile writers of the late sixteenth century. His best-known and most popular work, the Six Books of a Commonwealth (1576), has insured his immortality, at least in the history of political thought. But it is seldom recognized that the Demonomania was Bodin's second most popular work; it went through fifteen editions in four languages within 25 years (as compared with 28 editions in five languages in 30 years for the Commonwealth). It held the field in the 1580's and 1590's as the best recent handbook on witchcraft, before it was challenged by larger or more practical guides like Delrio or Bogue.*

*Bodin's refutation of Weyer, appended to all editions of the Demonomania, offered a thoroughgoing set of objections to Weyer's arguments. Bodin's clarity of thought and language, the range and precision of his examples, make him a formidable controversialist. His demolition of Weyer was total, extending even into his rival's own professional field of medicine, where he gave a rigorous demonstration of the falsehood of the proposition that witches were really old women suffering from melancholy: "Weyer must confess that it is a notable incongruity . . . and far too gross ignorance (but it is not ignorance) to attribute melancholic sickness to women." He also specializes in refuting Weyer from his rival's own examples, "by his*



very words and by his books." Bodin had honestly convinced himself that Weyer was really a sorcerer masquerading as a physician, and as such deserved the full rigors of the law.

When this work was finished and ready to be sent to the press, the printer to whom I had entrusted it sent me a new book, *De Lamiis* by Doctor Johann Weyer, where he maintains that Warlocks and Witches should not be punished. This has delayed the publication of my book. Weyer had held this opinion for a long time; and because his opponents had not touched upon the main threads of the subject, he could have replied as though he had been victorious. This gives me a chance to answer him—not from hatred, but principally for the honor of God, against which he has armed himself, and secondly to change the opinion of some judges, whose verdicts that man brags he has changed. He glorifies himself for having won this point through his books: that Witches were now clearly and simply released, and the judges who put them to death he calls hangmen. This greatly astonished me, for such an opinion must necessarily be that of a very ignorant or else a very wicked man. Johann Weyer shows by his books that he is not ignorant, that he is even a physician. Nevertheless he teaches a thousand damnable sorceries in his books, including printing the words, invocations, figures, circles, and symbols used by the greatest Sorcerers who have ever existed in order to perform a thousand execrable misdeeds. I have not been able to read this without horror. Moreover, he prints all the writers on Sorcery, the most important who have ever existed, that they may be used. What is more, at the end of his book *De Praestigiis* printed at Basel in 1578, he put the inventory of the diabolical monarchy with the names and surnames of 72 princes and 7,405,926 devils (barring mathematical errors). He counts the small ones by legions, and puts 6,666 in each legion, adding their qualities and properties, and what can be used for invoking them. Still, after having knowingly taught the diabolical recipes, he adds these words (which is mischievous). The first law

SOURCE. Jean Bodin, *Démonomanie des Sorciers*, Paris: Jean Dupuis, 1580, fols. 218r-219r, 225v-227v, 232r-235r of the "Refutation des opinions de Jean Wier."

*de Variis cognit. au, #medicos, ff.*, says that one should not call Physician anyone who "casts spells, who invokes curses, who, using the common words of impostors, exorcises; These are not physicians." The law of God does not say that it is a mere imposture, but rather a detestable impiety. One could thus call "impostor" whoever is not content with deeds, but also teaches such wickedness in printed books, and in order to cover them up sometimes talks about God and the faith, an imposture which Satan and his subjects have always used. This is, namely, to slip in all the impieties imaginable under the cover of sacred and holy things. . . . Thus one must not stop when Weyer talks of God, since such horrible blasphemies are found in these books. Just as there is no poison so dangerous as that which is mixed with sugar or appetizing sauces, so that it is swallowed more easily and vomited with more difficulty, there is no impiety so great as that which is covered with a cloth of piety.

For Weyer agrees<sup>1</sup> that Witches have communication and compacts with devils, and that they do much wickedness with the Devil's aid; nevertheless, in his book *De Lamiis* he says in one place that there is no compact, and in another that one could not prove it, and in yet another that the confessions of Witches should not be believed, that they fool themselves in thinking that they do what they say they do, and that they are in the grip of a melancholic sickness. Such is the disguise which ignorant people or Sorcerers have used to let their colleagues escape and increase the kingdom of Satan. Heretofore those who have said that it was melancholia did not imagine that there were any Demons, nor perhaps that there were any angels nor any God. But Weyer confesses that God exists (as the Devils also confess it, and tremble beneath His power, as we read in Scripture). He also confesses throughout his writings that there are good and evil spirits who have dealings and compacts with men. So one must not attribute the movement of Witches, their evil deeds and strange acts, to melancholy, and much less make women melancholics. Antiquity has noticed as a strange thing that no woman ever died of melancholy nor any man of joy, but on the

<sup>1</sup> See Weyer's *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, Bk. II, chs. 4, 8, 34; Bk. IV, ch. 14; and Bk. V, ch. 9 [Bodin's note].



contrary several women died from extreme joy. Because Weyer is a physician he cannot ignore that woman's humor is directly contrary to adult melancholy from which the furor proceeds, be it from yellow-brown bile, or from melancholic juice, as physicians agree. Both of them proceed from excessive heat and dryness, as Galen says in his book *De atra bile*. Yet women are naturally cold and wet, as the same author says; all the Greeks, Latins and Arabs are agreed on this point. For this reason Galen also says that man, being of a hot and dry temperament, can fall into the melancholic sickness in a hot and dry region. Also, Olaus Magnus, Caspar Peucer, Saxo grammaticus, and Weyer himself agree with all the Inquisitors of Witches in Germany that Witches abound in the arctic region or the frozen sea, and in Germany and the Alps and Savoy. It is certain that northern peoples have as little melancholy as African people have pitiuity. For all northern people are white, green-eyed, blond-haired and slender, reddish-faced, joyous and chattering—things totally contrary to the melancholic humor. Moreover, Hippocrates in the first book of common sicknesses and Galen in the same book hold that women are generally healthier than men, on account of the menstrual flow which preserves them from a thousand diseases. Never, says Hippocrates, do women have gout or long ulcers, adds Galen, nor epilepsies, nor apoplexy, nor frenzies, nor lethargies, nor convulsions or tremblings while they are flowing or menstruating. Although Hippocrates says that epilepsy and demonic attacks (also called sacred sickness) are natural, nevertheless he maintains that these things only happen to the pituitous and not to the bilious—which Weyer, being a physician, cannot but know. We have shown that ordinarily women rather than men are demoniacal, and that by diabolical means Witches are often transported in body and often put in an ecstatic state with the soul separate from the body and the body remaining senseless and dumb. It is even more ridiculous to say that the illness of Witches comes from melancholy, because illnesses coming from melancholy are always dangerous. Nevertheless one sees Witches who have been in the trade for forty or fifty years, from the age of twelve, like Jeanne Harvillier who was burned alive on April 29, 1578, or Madalena de la Cruz, abbess of Córdoba in Spain, 1545, having had ordinary intercourse and copulation with the Devil which lasted forty years in one case and thirty in the other. Weyer must thus

confess that it is a notable incongruity in him as a physician, and far too gross ignorance (but it is not ignorance) to attribute melancholic sicknesses to women, which suit them as little as do the praiseworthy effects of a temperate melancholic humor, which makes a man wise, serious, or contemplative (as all the ancient Philosophers and Physicians have remarked). All these qualities are as little compatible with woman as fire is with water. . . . So abandon the fanatical error of those who make women into melancholics. Weyer also—seeing that his cloak of melancholy was ripped away by demonstration and obvious truth coming from human and divine laws, by so many stories from all the peoples of the earth, by so many confessions partly voluntary and partly forced, by so many judgments, convictions, condemnations and executions made for three thousand years in every country of the world—hit upon a much too coarse ruse to prevent Sorcerers from being put to death in saying that the Devil seduces the Witches and makes them believe they are doing what he does himself. In doing this he pretends that it is really very contrary to Satan, and nevertheless he saves the Witches; which is in plain words to mock Satan verbally, but in reality to establish his grandeur and his power. For he knows very well that magistrates have no jurisdiction nor power of seizure upon Devils. This will not only absolve all Witches, but also all murderers, thieves, perpetrators of incest and parricides who are impelled by the enemy of the human race to perform their deeds. Then he greatly praises the tariff of the Papal *camera*, which condemns repentant Witches to pay two ducats for a pardon. In another place he says he will maintain that not only should Witches not be punished with death by the Law of God, but also that there is no mention of Witches in Holy Scripture, by which he could easily be convinced. Here I call on God and His law as witnesses, and a thousand passages of the Bible to convince this man.<sup>2</sup>

To demonstrate that Satan charms the soul from the body, leaving it senseless and apparently dead, as we have discussed in

<sup>2</sup> Bodin here cites twenty-four Scriptural passages, all from the Old Testament or Apocrypha, to refute Weyer's contention in *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, Bk. III, ch. 35.

the chapter on ecstasy, and which is not sleep: evidence shows that no mere soporific can prevent a man, however deeply asleep, from feeling fire applied to his skin, and yet sorcerers feel neither the fire nor any pain, being charmed into ecstasy, as has often been proved by experiment and as we have shown above, interpreting the passage in Vergil where he tells about the witch who promised to free his mind. Still another argument can be seen, which cannot be answered, to show that her state comes neither from an unguent nor from sleep, but is a true enchantment of the soul outside the body: it is that everyone thus charmed returns a half hour later and as soon as he wishes, which is impossible for anyone put to sleep by simple narcotics, who sometimes remain for a full day or two without waking up. And it has also been alleged that those who were charmed had truly noticed things happening a hundred leagues away, as we have previously said. But one must also note that the composition of this unguent, which the author of *Natural Magic* [Giovanni Battista Della Porta] has given, is not a simple soporific, but really several dangerous poisons. . . .

If it is thus true that the demons by a just permission of God have the power to separate the soul from the body, why would they not have the power to transport them corporeally? It is incomparably more admirable to disconnect and separate the soul from the body and to rejoin it, than to carry off the body and the soul together. As for me, I hold that this ecstasy or *aphairaisia* is one of the strongest arguments, after the witness of the law of God, which we have for the immortality of the soul, and decisive proof for Aristotle's hypothesis that the soul is immortal if it can perform something without the body—which the great sorcerers (who know it by experience, like Orpheus) call the prison of the soul, and the most illustrious magicians of that time, Empedocles and Zoroaster, call the sepulchre, and after them Plato and Cratylus say that *soma* or body is derived from *sema* or sepulchre, and Socrates calls it the cavern of the soul. Besides these arguments and reasons, to which Weyer has no answer, we have the authority of the greatest personages of all antiquity, like Plutarch, who gives several memorable examples of it, Plotinus, Pliny, Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, doctor Bonaventura, Durandus and all the theologians, Sylvester Prieras, Paul Grillandus, and the five German Inquisitors who have prosecuted an infinite number of Witches and who have

briefly written down their trials in a book [the *Malleus Maleficarum*]. And beyond the authority of so many persons we have the ordinary experience of an infinity of trials, where the testimony, verifications, confrontations, conventions and confessions at the point of death can be seen. So it is not stubbornness on Weyer's part to maintain the contrary, but impiety, and a desire on his part to increase the kingdom of Satan.

For we have proof of Witches absent at night who have confessed the truth and the cause for their absence. We know that those newly arrived at such assemblies, calling God to their aid or simply afraid and horrified at what they saw, suddenly found themselves a hundred or fifty leagues away from their house, and took days to return from the place where Satan had transported them in a fraction of an hour. I remember recently the examples of Loches, Lyon, Le Mans, Poitiers, Chateauroux, Longny, and very many others. Just read the authors whom I have listed, who cut through all of Weyer's arguments that Witches are melancholics. For he cannot say that about those who have returned after several days; although Weyer, contradicting himself at every step, agrees that Simon the Magician, whom Nero honored with a statue, flew through the air. The ancient doctors, in great numbers, have also recorded this. It is thus extreme folly for Weyer to confess that Simon the Sorcerer flew through the air, and to maintain that the other Sorcerers deceive themselves in thinking they are transported through the air to their assemblies. Has Satan less power than he had then, which was after the death of Jesus Christ? Even Weyer says that in Germany he has seen a Sorcerer-mountebank who rose into the heavens before an audience in broad daylight, and when his wife caught hold of his legs she was carried away, and the maid clung to her mistress and was also carried away, and they remained a fairly long time like that in the air, with the audience astonished and delighted by this miracle. We read the same thing in the history of Hugh of Fleury, that a Count of Maçon was thus raised into the air and carried away while shouting, Help me, friends!, and was never seen again, no more than Romulus, who was charmed into the air before his army. By the text of Scripture it appears that Jesus Christ was transported by Satan onto the summit of the temple, then onto the peak of a mountain. From which Thomas Aquinas draws

an indubitable consequence: that Satan, with God's permission, has no less power over other men to transport them, since it is completely certain that Jesus Christ was a real man and not ghostlike. But it is enough for me to convince Weyer by his very words and by his books. He himself writes that he has seen men carried into the air by Devils<sup>3</sup> and that there is nothing absurd about it; and in the same place he writes something false, that a Sorcerer was sought in Germany who promised to draw the children of king Francis I from the castle of Madrid and carry them through the air from Spain into France, but that nothing was done about it from fear that he would break their necks. Moreover, he writes<sup>4</sup> that the Devil, disguised as a lawyer pleading a court case and hearing the other party give himself to the Devil if he [were guilty], suddenly let the bar of justice carry away the man who had perjured himself in public. He says that the story really happened in Germany. After he has given several examples of these diabolical transports, he concludes that such things are certain and that there is no absurdity there, and yet in his book *De Lamiis* he says exactly the contrary. In this one can see a light brain which gets confused on every topic. Although he rejects several historians and theologians, still he uses the Golden Legend, citing the life of St. Germain where it says that St. Germain went to see the Witches' dance and straightway afterwards went to their husbands' beds, where the women were found, as though St. Germain were swifter than Satan. Since he had transported them, Satan could have brought them back just as quickly.

As for what Weyer says, that Witches cannot by themselves make thunder or hail, I grant it to him; and just as little can they kill, or make men die, by means of wax images and words. But it cannot be denied, and Weyer agrees, that Satan can kill men, beasts and fruits unless God prevents him, and can do this by means of the sacrifices, vows and prayers of the sorcerers and by just permission of God, who takes revenge on his enemies through his enemies. Also, the Witches deserve a thousand times more tortures for having renounced God and adored Satan than if

<sup>3</sup>See *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, Bk. II, ch. 12 [Bodin's note].

<sup>4</sup>See *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, Bk. IV, ch. 19 [Bodin's note].

they had effectively murdered their fathers and mothers with their own hands, and set fire to the grain. For these offences are against men, as Samuel says; but their offence is directly against the holy majesty of God. [They are punished] with even more cause if God is directly offended, and men are also killed and fruits spoiled by the Witchcraft of such people. Hence the law of the twelve tables punishes those who have put spells on fruit; Weyer mocks this, as he also slanders the Law of God. But one can answer him that his vocation is to judge the color and consistency of urine and other such things, and not to touch holy matters nor infringe divine and human laws. For however much Weyer confesses that the agent is Satan, still he cannot deny that Satan is incited, impelled, attracted and helped by the Witches, and the Witches by him, to commit these wicked deeds.

### 3 E. W. Monter "Law, Medicine, and the Acceptance of Witchcraft, 1560-1580"

*A brief survey of the intellectual survival of witchcraft during the whole of the sixteenth century, this essay argues that in none of the learned professions—law, medicine, theology, or philosophy—could any convincing "natural" explanation for witchcraft be found. Thus the intellectual foundations of the great persecutions from 1580-1650 were fairly solid.*

The most baffling fact about the theories of the *Malleus Maleficarum* is not their relatively late appearance, but the general degree of acceptance they received among the educated classes of Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Historians of a rationalistic bent, from W. E. H. Lecky a century ago to Hugh Trevor-Roper, agree that Europe produced no convincing anti-

SOURCE. E.W. Monter, "Law, Medicine, and the Acceptance of Witchcraft, 1560-1580." (Paper delivered at the Chicago Renaissance Society, Nov. 21, 1967.)