

CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS, AND ENGLISH WITCHCRAFT

Lisa A. Martin

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APPROVED:

Richard Golden, Major Professor

Laura Stern, Committee Member

Richard Himmel, Committee Member

Adrian Lewis, Chair of the Department of History

Sandra L. Terrell, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse

School of Graduate Studies

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One area of history that historians have ignored is that of children and their relationship to witchcraft and the witch trials. This thesis begins with a survey of historical done on the general theme of childhood, and moves on to review secondary literature about children and the continental witch trials.

The thesis also reviews demonological theory relating to children and the roles children played in the minds of continental and English demonologists. Children played various roles: murder victims, victims of dedication to Satan, child-witches, witnesses for the prosecution, victims of bewitchment or possession, and victims of seduction into witchcraft. The final section of the thesis deals with children and English witchcraft. In England children tended to play the same roles as described by the demonologists.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	v
INTRODUCTION	2
STUDYING CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD	5
An Early Modern Child Defined.....	7
Various Concepts of Children and Childhood.....	7
Family Environment	14
Education	18
Children’s Work.....	22
English Law and Children	24
Childhood, Some Conclusions.....	25
HISTORIOGRAPHY ENCOMPASSING CHILDREN AND THE WITCH HUNTS	28
DEMONOLOGIES, WITCHCRAFT, AND CHILDREN.....	50
YOUNG PEOPLE AND ENGLISH WITCHCRAFT.....	66
Introduction.....	66
English Witchcraft Statutes.....	68
Pamphlets Spread Popular Knowledge of Witch Beliefs	71
How Did Children Learn About Witchcraft?.....	75
Statistical Information Regarding English Witch Trials.....	79
Narratives of Children in Witchcraft Pamphlets.....	85
ENGLISH CHILDREN VERSUS CONTINENTAL CHILDREN	101
WITCHCRAFT AND SOCIAL REWARDS FOR CHILDREN.....	103
CONCLUSIONS.....	106
CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS, AND WITCHCRAFT: AFTERTHOUGHTS.....	109
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	112
Primary Sources	112
Secondary Sources	115

TABLES

Table 1: Witches Connected with Children and Adolescents 1566 – 1644.....	84
Table 2: Numbers of Children involved in Witchcraft and Witch Trials	85
Table 3: Afflictions of Children Death and Bewitchment.....	85
Table 4: Possession and Feigned Possession.....	86
Table 5: Child and Adolescent Witches.....	86
Table 6: Children’s Evidence in Court	87
Table 7: Children’s Status.....	87

FIGURES

Figure 1: Children’s Testimony in Court.....	89
Figure 2: Children’s Information in Court.....	89

INTRODUCTION

Only in the last thirty years have historians formed definite theories about the history of children and childhood. Before the 1970s, few historians had done much work on childhood. The little work that had been completed was done by Philippe Ariès, and in the early seventies younger historians disproved his theories. In the seventies and eighties, historical theories regarding children began to develop.

Childhood and children have been difficult to study because children leave few physical records. Because the items children use do not last, piecing together the experience of early modern childhood has not been easy. Through diaries, poetry, literary accounts, folklore, autobiographies, advice manuals, and portraits, historians have been able to determine how adults felt about children and how they treated children.

One area of history that historians have continued to ignore is children and witchcraft. Throughout England and continental Europe, children participated in witch belief and the witch trials. However, not much is known about the connection between children and witchcraft, because it has not been studied in depth. Ronald Seth's *Children Against Witches* and Hans Sebald's *Witch Children* are the only two book length English studies on the subject. Children receive very little attention in survey books about witchcraft, and children usually show up only in isolated cases. No book on witchcraft devotes a whole chapter to children. When historians do write about children, the information is usually anecdotal in relation to a trial.

Most historical research regarding children and witchcraft has been done concerning the continental Europe. Midwives were accused of murdering infants for body parts.¹ What the cases from the continent show us is that children's roles reflect continental demonological theory. On

¹ Behringer, Wolfgang. "Kinderhexenprozesse: Zur Rolle von Kindern in der Geschichte der Hexenverfolgung." ("Witch Trials Involving Children: The Role of Children in the History of the Persecution of Witches.") *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*. [West Germany] 16 no. 1 (1989): 36.

the continent, children confessed to attending the sabbat.² Children also confessed to having conversations with the Devil. They did not admit to going so far as having a pact with him, but they were skirting close to danger.³

Children's actual participation in the continental witch trials tended to be precarious. On the continent children fell victim to denunciations that got out of hand. When a hunt grew large, children were counted among the accused.⁴ Also, many children were thought to be recruited for witchcraft, and large numbers of children were testified in court.⁵ When appearing as witnesses, children would be separated from their parents and kept in confinement so the authorities could garner the necessary information from the children. Children who did not conform were treated badly.⁶

In England, children's experiences differed. Children did not appear in large groups to testify against adults; the largest number of children to testify in one trial was four. Also, children were not rounded up among the accused. Except for the Matthew Hopkins fiasco, England never had large hunts, so denunciations never got out of hand, and children were never among those accused. In only one trial was there a child-witch.⁷

In the English trials, children appeared most frequently as victims of murder as a result of *maleficia*. But the authorities never accused English witches of using the children's bodies for flying unguents or cannibalizing the remains like continental witches.

² Briggs, Robin. *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*. (Penguin: New York, 1996), 46.

³ Briggs, 45.

⁴ Levack, Brian. *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. (Longman: New York, 1987), 144.

⁵ Henningsen, Gustav. *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition (1608 – 1614)*. (University of Nevada Press: Reno, 1980), 117.

⁶ Ankarloo, Bengt. "Sweden: The Mass Burnings, (1668 – 1676)." *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centers and Peripheries*. Ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1998), 303.

⁷ Potts, Thomas. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster. With the Arraignement and Triall of Nineteen notorious Witches, at the Assizes and generall Gaole deliverie... 1612. Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing*. Ed. Marion Gibson. (Routledge: London, 2000), 243.

Another way children featured in English witchcraft was as victims of bewitchment and possession. Many children, who were alleged victims of bewitchment were sick, lamed or suffered some sort of physical malady. Adults often termed them bewitched because they could not determine the cause of the children's ailments. Finally, if children's symptoms appeared to be supernatural such as hallucinations, vomiting objects, loss of sensation, or writhing on the bed, the children's doctors then termed them to be possessed.

My purpose is to examine the roles of children and adolescents in English witchcraft, how the participation of children affected the judicial proceeding, and what social rewards the children received by participating in the trials or by feigning possession. To create a foundation for early modern childhood, Section 1, "Studying Children and Childhood," discusses children in early modern England. This section describes the lives of early modern children in England and presents theories that historians have formed about children in the early modern era. Humanists and Protestant writers had firm views about how parents and teachers should treat children, and historians have also shown that parents saw children as a separate group of people.

Section 2, "Historiography Encompassing Children and the Witch Hunts," is a survey of secondary works regarding children and witchcraft. These historians have focused their energy on early modern children on the Continent and have given little attention to England. These secondary works cover various places on the Continent from Spain to Germany. Most writers make few references to children, and the review of the secondary works shows that there has been no real synthesis of the experience of children in the witch hunts. Writers describe children in isolated cases, and there is little comparison of children from one area to another. This is probably because children seem to appear anecdotally throughout the primary sources. Children

appeared in the continental trials, but so far not enough work has been done on children to give statistical information about them based on town, region, or country.

Section 3, “Demonologies, Witchcraft, and Children,” covers early modern demonological theory concerning children. Demonologists provided the theoretical framework for the relationship between children and witches, and their books provided examples for what witches did to children. From the *Malleus Malificarum* in 1486 to the late seventeenth-century, patterns of belief developed that did not change for almost two hundred years. In England, demonological theory also manifested into reality. The *Malleus* described child-witches. England produced two adolescent witches and one child-witch. Also, English demonologists discussed possessed adolescents, and pamphleteers described cases of possession that were taken to be authentic.

Finally, Section 4, “Young People and English Witchcraft,” reviews the experience of English children and adolescents and English witchcraft. First I explore the Elizabethan Statute of 1563 and the Jacobean Statute of 1604 that outlawed witchcraft in England. Second, I focus on the texts of the pamphlets and personal accounts that were the common medium for disseminating the stories of individual witch trials. This examination of sources leads to personal stories in which children appear. Some of the cases focus only on children, and in some cases, the children provided extra evidence against a person who already had been accused of other witchcraft-related crimes. Finally, I analyze and define the significance of studying how children and adolescents participated in English witchcraft trials and what children and adolescents gained by participating in the trials.

STUDYING CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

The historiography of childhood has grown substantially over the last forty years. The work of Philippe Ariès in 1960 touched off the study of childhood when he released *L'Enfant et la Vie Familiale sous l'Ancien Regime* (translated into English as *Centuries of Childhood* in 1962). Ariès is responsible for the famous theory that the people of the Middle Ages had no concept of childhood, and that childhood was “discovered” in the eighteenth century.⁸ However, since the 1970s and 1980s, historians have worked to change this theory, and they have successfully shown that adults throughout history have perceived children as a different group and treated them accordingly.

By the close of the seventies, historians generally agreed that the circumstances of children had progressed. They believed that the living conditions of children and adult perceptions of children’s lifecycles had improved over time. What this meant for historical opinion of childhood was that historians believed children were treated “better” in the eighteenth century than in the Middle Ages. Apparently parents loved their children more and abused them less. During the eighties, historians came to the conclusion that the majority of children had grown up in nuclear families, and parents had loved their children in the early modern period. Also, historians found that “continuity” had replaced change regarding the experience of children in the past.⁹ The upshot of this development signifies that Ariès was essentially wrong in his original surmise that there was no such thing as childhood in the Middle Ages, and that adults did not recognize childhood as a separate life phase until the eighteenth century. What continuity means is that childhood was not “discovered” and therefore, parents did not begin to treat children in a special way at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Historians found that

⁸ Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood*. Transl. Robert Baldick. (Jonathan Cape: London, 1962.)

⁹ Cunningham, Hugh. *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*. (Longman: London, 1995), 4.

children had always been treated as a special group. Also, as research continued in the eighties, historians found that parents did not change from treating their children poorly to treating them more lovingly. According to the new research, parents have always had close familial ties with their children throughout history.

Another challenge that historians of childhood and children face is that they must distinguish between “childhood” and “children.”¹⁰ Historians have been able to more easily chart how adults perceived children than how children actually lived and how adults treated them. Most information that historians have found has dealt more with how adults felt about children rather than how children actually lived. A child’s experience, of course, depended on variables such as nationality, social class, and gender.

A significant problem facing historians who study childhood is the dearth of primary sources. Children do not leave many records, and children’s possessions, such as books and toys do not usually survive. Historians of the early modern era have turned to various sources to obtain information about children. They have used literary accounts, poetry, diaries, autobiographies, folklore, advice manuals for parents, and visual evidence from portraits.¹¹ The issue with these sources, however, is that they only provide information on the upper literate classes, and comprise only a small pool of primary resources that make statistical analysis difficult.

Given that statistical analysis is complicated, historians seem to fall into two camps when writing about children of the past. Either they tend to make large generalizations based on few primary sources, or they confine themselves to specific sources and focus on a specific period of time or location. These facts lead historians to make limited conclusions. Both of these strategies

¹⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹¹ Heywood, Colin. *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times (Themes in History)*. (Polity Press: New York, 2001), 6.

by necessity make the study of the history of childhood difficult. Lawrence Stone takes it for granted that in the sixteenth-century parents physically regularly abused their children.¹²

However, from the diaries for the years 1550-99 that she sampled, Linda Pollock does not quote any diarist who had physically punished his or her child.¹³

The most detailed information available is how theologians, humanists, and various intellectuals felt about children and about how parents should treat them. Erasmus and John Locke are two well-known writers who had definite opinions on child-rearing and education. However, the problem with studying advice manuals is that they only focus on the wealthy or educated individuals of a culture, and this obviously neglects the poor and uneducated. Another problem with studying advice books as primary sources is that we do not know how well they reached their audience, or if the audience responded to the ideas they contained.

An Early Modern Child Defined

Western culture traditionally treated childhood as a phase to be passed through rather than a time that had inherent value in and of itself. Aristotle saw the child as “important not for himself, but for his potential.”¹⁴ During the early Renaissance, Dante (1265-1321) followed Aristotle’s ideas regarding childhood when he described the three phases of a man’s life span:

- *adolescenzia* (birth to 25) – a period of growth
- *gioventutue* (25 to 45 and peaking at 45) a period of maturity
- *senettute* (45 to 70) a final period of decline¹⁵

In Dante’s opinion, middle age (*gioventutue*), was the best time of a man’s life, whereas he described youth and old age because of their departure from the ideal time of life. This basic

¹² Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500 – 1800*. (Harper and Row: New York, 1979), 117.

¹³ Pollock, Linda. *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900*. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1983), 146. Pollock doesn’t make the point that parents might have been self-editing and just not admitted to physically punishing their children.

¹⁴ Heywood, 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

Renaissance ideal prevailed in continental Europe as well as England throughout the early modern period. However, writers divided the time of childhood up into segments based on how adults treated children.

In early modern England, childhood was split into roughly four phases. The first stage was birth to weaning, which could last until the age of two.¹⁶ After the mother or wet nurse weaned the child, he or she moved into the second phase of childhood, which lasted until the age of seven. Until this point both boys and girls were in the charge of women caretakers such as mothers, grandmothers, nurses, aunts, sisters, and governesses.¹⁷ Depending on social class, by the age of seven, the child would enter the community.¹⁸ If the child were part of the aristocracy or gentry, he would start his education probably at an elementary school or with a tutor. Peasant children worked before their seventh birthday, and adults would incrementally give them tasks that corresponded to their age and ability. Adolescence could begin as early as nine but could start as late as fourteen when the young person entered his apprenticeship or entered university. The final phase of childhood typically lasted from fourteen to eighteen and up to twenty-five or when the person married.¹⁹

Various Concepts of Children and Childhood

Two groups who held strong opinions regarding childhood during the early modern era were humanists and Protestants. Both groups believed that children needed strict education and monitoring. They felt this way because children were inherently wild and could not be left to their own devices or they would grow up unchecked. Parents varied on how they viewed their children, but they were far from indifferent to them.

¹⁶ Houlbrooke, Ralph. *The English Family, 1450 – 1700*. (Longman: London, 1984),134.

¹⁷ Heywood, 84.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 111.

¹⁹ Ben-Amos Ilana Krausman. *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England*. (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1994), 11.

Humanist View

In Renaissance Florence, humanist thinkers perceived the family as being a model for the state, and for the state to be harmonious, families needed be harmonious first. Each member knowing his or her place achieved this harmonious state. Two Italian humanists who wrote treatises about marriage were Francesco Barbaro and Giovanni Caldiera. Barbaro wrote *De re uxoria*, in which he detailed the importance of finding a wife, and how that affected the quality of one's children. He believed that children took on the qualities of their parents, and for children to be virtuous they had to be conceived in wedlock.²⁰ Caldiera's *De inconomia* delineated the structure of the proper family. According to Caldiera, the appropriate family structure was arranged in a vertical hierarchy with the father at the top. In this scheme, the children were in the middle between the mother and servants. The children were to be obedient to their parents from whom they received all their worldly goods and their patrician status.²¹

According to the general humanist family model, the father was to be the head and leader of the family. Also, he was to lead the child rearing, and he was to be responsible for seeing that the child was properly educated.²² Erasmus advised parents on how to rear their young, and during the 1520s he wrote a set of parental advice books that combined material from ancient authorities, Italian humanists, and his own experience. He felt that fathers should watch their children closely to learn their children's personalities, and this would help them possibly divine their children's future temperaments. Also, Erasmus emphasized early education and felt that

²⁰ King, Margaret. *Venetian Humanism: in an Age of Patrician Dominance*. (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1986), 97.

²¹ *Ibid*, 102.

²² Cunningham, 42.

fathers should be responsible for teaching young children how to read, and that fathers should use fruits and cookies as rewards.²³

Though humanists valued the idea of educating the young, they did not have a very positive opinion of youthful behavior that was not supervised. Erasmus, Vives and Thomas Elyot all stated that human nature tended toward sin and vice rather than virtue. These traits were especially evident in infants, children, and adolescents. These humanists felt that if parents and teachers did not watch and educate children dutifully, young people would fall to their vices and “the frute (the child) may growe wyld, and conteine in it fervent and mortal poison, to the utter destruction of a realme.”²⁴

Protestant View

Protestant theology regarding young people and sin stressed the belief that young people were not prone to falling into sin any more than their adult contemporaries. “The mind of man or a child is like a restless Mill, that cannot stand still,” stated the minister Thomas Gataker, by which he meant that people were all equally capable of sin regardless of their chronological age.²⁵ However, writers of advice books felt that children were more likely to sin because young people were more easily corrupted. A good example of the belief that young people tended toward sin was John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. He admitted that as a young child he was drawn to the Devil and was guilty of cursing, swearing, lying and “blaspheming the holy name of God.”²⁶

²³ Ibid, 43.

²⁴ Ben-Amos, 12.

²⁵ Ibid, 13.

²⁶ Ibid,13.

One issue that concerned Protestant thinkers was controlling the will of children and not overindulging them. Conrad Sum wrote in his advice book that parents should work against indulging their children:

As soon as the child can move about, one throws a ragged frock on him and treats everything he does in the same (unjudgmental) way. Soon there are outbursts and tantrums, but these only delight the old, since they come from a dear little son who can do no wrong. Where one sows thorns and thistles in this way, how can anything other than weeds be expected to grow?²⁷

Parents, however, needed to avoid this behavior because they should have been concerned for the future good of church and society, so children needed to be watched and tempered. Also, the most important issue Protestant parents should concern themselves with the condition of their children's souls. Because Protestants only had faith to save them, parents were particularly anxious that they introduce their children to the efficacy of grace and prayer as early as possible.

John Robinson, the pastor for the Pilgrim Fathers believed

surely there is in all children...a stubbornness, and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride, which must, in the first place, be broken and beaten down; that so the foundation of their education being laid in humility and tractableness, other virtues may, in their time, be built thereon. For the beating, and keeping down of this stubbornness parents must provide carefully... that the children's wills and willfulness be restrained and repressed, and that, in time.²⁸

Without proper supervision children would run wild, so parents had to control their children's behavior and guide them properly. If possible, discipline would be carried out soundly and rationally, however, sometimes a parent might have to carry out verbal or physical punishment. If physical punishment were necessary, the parent was to carry out the physical punishment without permanently hurting the child.²⁹

²⁷ Cunningham, E48.

²⁸ Ibid, 49.

²⁹ Schnucker, Robert. "Puritan Attitudes Towards Childhood Discipline." *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*. Ed. Valerie Fildes. (Routledge: London, 1990),117.

However, some Protestant parents felt reluctant to discipline their children as harshly as some Protestant thinkers wanted. For instance, the London minister, Thomas Cawton,

was often so moved with compassion, his fatherly bowels did so yearn over them, that the tears would trickle apace from his eyes when he was correcting them: nothing ever wrought upon me like this sight, which did plainly convince his Children of his unwillingness to chastise, but that he was forced to it.³⁰

Parental View

One particular issue that has perplexed historians was how parents regarded their children. Did parents view children as a separate class that deserved different treatment? Were parents concerned with the welfare of their children? Did parents love their children? Did parents mourn when a child died? Historians such as Laurence Stone deny that parents felt much affection for infants and young children, and he states that relations were distant. Stone states these circumstances were present because parents had a hard time bonding with children who were likely to die. In fact, Stone even goes so far as to say that some sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century fathers may have felt as much affection for their infant children as modern people do for the family pet.³¹

However, writers such as Alan MacFarlane and Linda Pollock have shown that this idea is unfounded. The Essex clergyman Ralph Josselin was desolate at the sickness and death of his eight-year-old daughter Mary:

my little Mary, very weake, wee feared she was drawing on, fear came on my heart very much but shee is not mine, but the Lords ... I was hopefull of her life, feare went of my heart wonderfully through mercy...This morning all our hopes of Maries life was gone to the Lord I have resigned her and with him I leave her...my heart could not but mourne over and for my babe...in her extremity, she would cry out, poore I, poore I...it was a pretious child, a bundle of myrrhe, a bundle of sweetness, she was a child of ten thousand, full of wisdom,

³⁰ Morgan, John. *Godly Learning : Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560-1640*. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988), 169.

³¹ Stone, 82.

...tender hearted and loving, an obedient child to us. It was free from the rudeness of little children ... Lord I rejoyce I had such a present...”³²

Linda Pollock’s study of diaries and autobiographies provides a look into how parents regarded their children. Granted, her sources are examples of “self-edited” works, and adults tended to write autobiographies when memory might be faint regarding their childhoods. Another problem with using diaries and autobiographies is that there are not enough extant examples of these works for the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries to provide statistical information. These sources also provide information only for the literate classes. However, diaries and autobiographies do open a window into how some parents felt about their children, and how some adult children remembered their childhoods.

In her study of sixteenth-century diaries and autobiographies, Pollock found that parents definitely regarded children as a special group of people. They associated children with the following characteristics:

- people that passed through developmental stages
- people that indulged in play
- people that needed care and protection
- people that needed guidance, for example through education and discipline³³

Grace Mildmay was concerned about the people one should let influence one’s children when she wrote, “It is certaine that there is foundation and ground of many great and ensueing evils when the nobilitie and great personages have no regard nor forecast what governors they sett over theyr children, nor what servants they appoint to attend upon them.”³⁴

The seventeenth-century diarists reveal that they were concerned with education, emotional closeness, and parental pride. One diarist mentioned his son’s “strange ... apt and

³² *The Diary of Ralph Josselin, 1616 – 1683*. Ed. Alan MacFarlane. (Oxford University Press : London, 197), 201 – 203.

³³ Pollock, 98. (Pollock uses the word organism instead of people.)

³⁴ *Ibid*, 98.

ingenious application for fables...,” and his “astonishing knowledge of the scriptures...;” and the father decided that his son’s abilities surpassed “his age and experience... such a child I never saw.”³⁵ Ralph Josselin called his infant daughter Mary “a pleasant comfort.”³⁶ Pollock states that the word “comfort” seems to be the typical way the diarists described their children. As for parental pride, Pollock mentions two parents as examples: Claver Morris wanted his daughter to show off her ability in French to visitors, and Adam Martindale was proud when his two-year-old son drove back a calf that would run at children.³⁷

Family Environment

The great majority of people lived in nuclear families in the early modern era, and the majority of these families included children.³⁸ Approximately seventy percent of households contained children. Peter Laslett states that most homes had between two-and-a-half and three children.³⁹

Treatment of Children

As with everything else regarding early modern children, determining how adults treated them is somewhat hard to describe. Historians such as Philippe Ariès, Edward Shorter, and Lawrence Stone emphasize that parents shifted their treatment from “worse” to “better” as the Middle Ages progressed to the eighteenth century. This means that parents treated their children without regard and affection the further back these historians researched. Once their research progressed to the eighteenth century, historians found what is commonly called the affective family. Stone says that between 1500 and 1800, the treatment of children changed from one of

³⁵ Ibid, 100.

³⁶ *The Diary of Ralph Josselin*, 12.

³⁷ Pollock, 101.

³⁸ Laslett, Peter. *The World We Have Lost, Further Explored*. (Charles Scribner’s Sons: New York, 1984), 92.

³⁹ Ibid, 119.

“distance, deference, and patriarchy” to “affective individualism,” which caused relations between parents and children to become warmer.⁴⁰

However, Linda Pollock has shown in her study of diaries and autobiographies that continuity was perhaps the norm for children from 1500 to 1800 instead of change. This thesis means that adults treated children roughly the same throughout the intervening three hundred years, and affectionate relationships between parents and children were not unusual throughout the period.⁴¹

Regarding discipline, Pollock’s diary study shows that parents disciplined children mainly for bad behavior, not just spiritual transgression. As mentioned earlier, Protestant writers were concerned that children should not be overindulged but should be disciplined for the good of their souls. However, according to diary and autobiography entries, parents disciplined their children based on their children’s bad behavior, and parents wanted to correct that bad behavior for its own sake, not only to ensure their children’s spiritual health.

Parents tried different forms of discipline; some tried verbal and behavioral discipline, and some resorted to physical punishment. After his son’s tutor told him his son was holding his pen incorrectly, Claver Morris “struck him a slap on the Hinder Part of his Head with the Palm of my Hand; But that did not make him mend it.”⁴² The discipline John Richards meted out to his son caused an argument with his wife because she felt he had been too harsh. “This evening, I beat Jack for his bad [behaviour] in play, upon that A. [wife] showed herself so insolent that I put her out of the room.” One month later he cited in his diary, “At table I had words with A. about my son John, [Jack] which became at last very high, and the next day after dinner she began to

⁴⁰ Stone, 149.

⁴¹ Pollock, 271.

⁴² Ibid, 152.

renew the quarrel .”⁴³ Though these two examples make it hard to discern the severity of the physical punishment that these fathers used, most likely these fathers were not using physical punishment as a form of abuse.

However, some parents used verbal threats to punish their children. Ralph Josselin threatened his oldest son with disinheritance if his son did not improve his behavior. “John declared for his disobedience no son I should allow him nothing except he tooke himselfe to be a servt; yet if he would depart and live in service orderly I would allow him 10/- yearly; if he so walkt as to become Gods son, I should yet own him for mine.” Josselin did not make good on his threat, however. His son continued to live at home and eventually received his inheritance. Oliver Heywood also intended to be stern with his sons, but yielded when he saw that they were upset. “On Saturday morning my sons having not made their latin in expectation to goe to Halifax, were loath to goe to schoole, yet I threatened them, they went crying, my bowels workt and I sent to call them back.”⁴⁴ Both of these fathers demonstrate that early modern discipline and treatment of children could be easier than tradition has suggested.

Leaving the Nuclear Family

A significant factor of early modern family life was that children were often separated from their families. This happened usually because the child was going to school or a child was entering some type of service work. Ilana Ben-Amos found that from the autobiographies she consulted, roughly a quarter of the writers left the parental home during their early and late childhood before they left for an apprenticeship or university.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid, 152.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 149-150.

⁴⁵ Ben-Amos, 54.

Among the autobiographers Ben-Amos consulted, the major motive for children separating from home was for them to attend school. The growing number of elementary and grammar schools grew in popularity among the gentry and yeoman classes. The usual reason for boarding a son away from home during schooling was because the school was located far away from the family home. As the number of schools increased, schools were located at twelve mile intervals, but this still created difficult circumstances for some children.⁴⁶ James Fretwell began attending school in Sandal, Yorkshire, when he was five years old. He had to walk the distance between his home and Sandal every day to attend school. The older boys would often leave him behind, and his father decided the distance was too far for the five-year-old to walk. Eventually his father boarded the boy with a widow in Sandal, and he “usually came home every Saturday.”⁴⁷

Another reason a child might leave home would be the death of a parent. When she was three, Mary Rich left because her mother died. She left “by the tender care of my indulgent father, that I might be carefully and piously educated...” going to live with a “prudent and virtuous lady.” Mary lived with this lady until she was eleven.⁴⁸

Suffering Parental Loss

Many children in early modern England were likely to lose a parent before they reached adulthood. Estimates have projected that people could expect to live until their late twenties and up until their late forties. Because of these estimates, roughly one half to two-thirds of the fathers of young women would have died by the time the girls married. Therefore, 17 percent of children age ten, and 27 percent aged fifteen would have been fatherless.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid, 55.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 56.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 57.

⁴⁹ Ben-Amos, 48.

Some apprentice registers listed whether the boys' fathers had died before or by the time the boys entered their apprenticeships. In Bristol, the registers showed that up to a third of the fathers of those apprentices had passed away. A large number of seamen died leaving their sons without fathers. Out of 71 registered apprentices, 40 (56.3 percent) had no father. Among natives of Bristol, 260 out of 609 (42.7 percent) had lost a father.⁵⁰

Apprentice registers only listed the death of fathers, but if we assume those who may have also lost a mother, the percent of orphans could have been upwards of 40 percent. Out of 74 autobiographies that Ben-Amos consulted, she found that 35 people lost a mother or father or both parents before the writer turned twenty years old.⁵¹

Education

In Protestant England, children's education took two forms, classical academic instruction and religious training. Because the patriarchal family was the cornerstone of the church and state, the school helped cultivate that foundation. Puritans tended to value education if it fostered godliness, and they accepted the classical program of the humanists.⁵²

Secular Education

The most significant issue that influenced whether a child received education was his social class, and usually a child had to be at least of the gentry class to have wide opportunities of education open to him. Children of the yeoman class were often able to forego work and concentrate on their education. These more privileged boys were able to focus on their studies with plans to acquire higher education or attain a profession.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid, 48.

⁵¹ Ibid, 48.

⁵² Morgan, 179.

⁵³ Ben-Amos, 46.

The average age a boy began to attend school at six. Helen Jewell states that children beneath the yeoman class may have attended elementary school long enough to read, but after that stage they left school before they would have learned to write. Given this supposition, more people would be able to read than write.⁵⁴ If a boy proceeded to grammar school, he would have been between eight and eleven, his time there lasting between six or seven years. After he finished grammar school, between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, the youth attended university, where he would complete a Bachelor of Arts in four years or a Master of Arts in seven years.⁵⁵

In England, humanists stressed a curriculum that included logic, rhetoric, history, English, philosophy, law, arithmetic, geometry, music, astrology, poetry, and medicine. However, most humanists agreed that instilling a Christian “sense” was most important. Most country schools did not offer such a wide variety of subjects for their students. Usually these boys were able to study basic English, Latin grammar, and maybe some Greek and rhetoric.⁵⁶

For girls of the upper and gentry classes, opportunities for schooling expanded during the early modern era. By the mid-seventeenth-century, most larger towns had some kind of educational institution for girls and adolescent women. However, the curriculum focused on domestic areas such as cookery and needlework, and the schools worked on instilling social graces through instruction in music and dancing. In Bristol the Red Maids Boarding School taught the girls to read, taught them things that might help them attain higher status later in life, and taught them how to run a household. In contrast, boys’ education focused on hard skills designed to aid them in finding a profession. At Queen Elizabeth Hospital in 1586, the boys learned reading, writing, and book-keeping “so that they may be capable and fit of being

⁵⁴ Jewell, Helen M. *Education in Early Modern England*. (MacMillan Press: London, 1998), 92.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 94.

⁵⁶ Morgan, 178.

apprentices when they come out of the Hospital.”⁵⁷ At the end of the seventeenth-century with the founding of charity schools, girls were accepted, but the curriculum still focused on useful crafts, such as knitting, sewing, and spinning whereas the boys received instruction in elementary arithmetic.⁵⁸

Education of poor children tended to follow a different path. Poor children entered into apprenticeships rather than going to schools. Local parishes were typically responsible for providing an apprenticeship for poor children. Parishes did this with the idea that poor children should become self-sufficient as soon as possible so as not to be a burden on the community. Poor children tended to enter the “humbler” professions such as barbers, sergeweavers or laborers. Occasionally the records mention that they learned to read.⁵⁹

Religious Education

Some writers disagreed when religious instruction should begin. Various writers suggested children should begin their religious education between the ages of four and eight.⁶⁰ For some, parents and ministers could not start too early. Thomas Gataker produced a catechism for children “that are not past the breast yet.” He felt that “It is an idle concept that Religion and Godliness is not for children.”⁶¹

The church and home were not the only venues where religious education was supposed to take place. Thomas Becon felt that the schoolmaster should also be responsible for disseminating religious knowledge to children

⁵⁷ Ben-Amos, 134.

⁵⁸ Jewell, 13.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 89-90.

⁶⁰ Tudor, Philippa. “Religious Instruction for Children and Adolescents in the Early English Reformation.” *Journal of Educational History*. 35 no. 3 (July, 1984): 394.

⁶¹ Morgan, 153.

It shall profit also not a little unto true godliness to have modest, learned, grave and godly schoolmasters in every country, that may bring up youth not only in the knowledge of human letters and civil matters, but also in the fear of the Lord.⁶²

A Book of Certain Canons (1571) also proscribed this requirement of schoolmasters.⁶³ The Canons of 1604 required schoolmasters to bring students to church.⁶⁴

During the early English Reformation, there was a national campaign to ensure the religious education of the young. This program lasted from approximately the mid-1530s until the ascension of Mary Tudor. The government planned to print catechisms and have children learn about religion through the church, but illiteracy was a problem. Obviously, the clergy would have had to transmit religious knowledge verbally. However, most people only heard the doctrine of their faith four times a year, and this would make remembering it impossible. Because of these circumstances, the government felt that religious instruction had to be improved.⁶⁵

Thomas Cromwell in his *Injunctions Given by the Authority of the King's Highness to the Clergy* (1536) admonished the clergy to make it clear to mothers, fathers, masters, and governors that they were all responsible for teaching children their pater noster, the articles of faith, and the Ten Commandments in English.⁶⁶ Before his death, Thomas Cromwell saw the publication of a single edition of a *Manual of Prayers*. This catechism was designed for children of the pre-adolescent age group. During Edward VI's reign, the government published a second *Book of Common Prayer* in 1554, and the catechism required half-hour weekly Sunday school.⁶⁷ For the great majority of English children, their religious training would have ended after they learned

⁶² *Education in Tudor and Stuart England: Documents of Modern History*. Ed. David Cressy. (St. Martins: New York, 1975), 20.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 29.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 31.

⁶⁵ *Tudor*, 399.

⁶⁶ *Education in Tudor and Stuart England*, 17.

⁶⁷ *Tudor*, 402-403.

the short catechism. However, just prior to the death of Edward VI in 1553, for those who had access to a better education, the government provided a longer catechism.⁶⁸

Mothers contributed significantly to their children's religious training. During the reign of Henry VIII, the wife of Sir William Lock, secretly read to her three daughters contraband books that her husband sent from the continent. Oliver Heywood's mother emphasized the "undeable maxims of [c]hristianity," and she taught her children the catechism and induced them to read the Bible and other Christian books. Lady Alice Bramston (d. 1647) taught her children the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed as well as some psalms and texts from both testaments of the Bible.⁶⁹

Children's Work

The stages of a child's working life tended to blur together. Typically, when a working child entered some type of service or apprenticeship, he or she had been working at home for several years previously. The sources vary, but apparently young people did not leave the parental home to enter service work or begin apprenticeships until they were between thirteen and fifteen years old.⁷⁰

If a child were not of the social class that went to school, his or her parents would often put the child to work doing various tasks. Sometimes the child started to work at a very early age. Four-year-olds made stockings in Westmoreland. Children entered the Birmingham button industry at the age of six. In the county of Gloucestershire children made pins when they were

⁶⁸ Ibid, 404.

⁶⁹ Houlbrooke, 148.

⁷⁰ Laslett, 8.

eight. During the reign of James I, six-year-olds and older children of Norwich knitted jersey stockings.⁷¹

Typically, the task that parents gave to the child depended on the child's physical strength. Thomas Shepherd was given the job of watching geese at the young age of three. Three boys, Thomas Tryon, ten, Samuel Bownas, eleven, and William Stout, fourteen, tended sheep. Physical strength was necessary for the child to engage in sloughing, and children were not likely to perform that job until the age of eleven or twelve. Finally, not until a child was at least twelve did he participate in driving loaded wagons or leading horses.⁷²

Regarding agricultural servants of the late seventeenth-century, a few started service before they entered their teens (age ten to twelve), however, a fifth were between thirteen and fourteen and nearly a half fell between thirteen and fifteen. The occupation of the father, the type of community, and the community's economy affected how early the servant left home to enter service. Also, the workers' average ages appear to have dropped as the seventeenth-century progressed.⁷³

Marriage and Transition to Adulthood

In the lower classes, marriage signified the end of youth because the ability to support a household meant independence. For the working class, the typical age of marriage for men was 26.5 and for women it was 23.5.⁷⁴ The most significant reason people waited so long to marry

⁷¹ Thomas, Keith. "Children in Early Modern England." *Children and Their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*. (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1989.)

⁷² Ben-Amos, 42.

⁷³ Ibid, 62.

⁷⁴ Laslett, 83.

was that they could not afford to, thus waiting until their economic circumstances allowed them to establish a household.⁷⁵

The nobility's marriage patterns differed from other classes. The nobility tended to marry earlier, in their late teens, but the newly married couple did not necessarily establish their own household. Just because the parties might have had sufficient resources to support a household and a family, their family of origin may have judged them too immature to live on their own. So for these teenage couples, adolescence continued, and marriage did not indicate transition into adulthood. The Countess of Warwick recounted in her diary how her brother married in his late teens. "Being then judged to be too young to live with his wife," he was sent to visit France, and the teenage wife was brought to the family home. Likewise, the Countess' own son married when he was nineteen, but his parents decided that he and his wife were "too young to live together."⁷⁶

English Law and Children

English law applied to children in two significant ways. Children appeared in the text of the poor laws of 1576 and 1598, and in 1624 the English Parliament passed a statute outlawing infanticide. The poor law of 1576 punished parents of illegitimate children who foisted their children onto the community and made the community financially responsible for those children. The law required the mother to identify the father, and the father in theory was supposed to pay a weekly sum to the parish. Often men of lower social class would run from the community, and fathers of better means would deny paternity. Bastardy was specifically named in this law as a "great dishonor" and a "great charge" to the nation.⁷⁷ The 1598 poor law stated that local

⁷⁵ Ibid,101.

⁷⁶ Ben-Amos, 32.

⁷⁷ Hoffer, Peter C. and N. E. H. Hull. *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558 – 1803*. (New York University Press: New York, 1981), 13.

officials would put children of the poor to work if the parents were unable to support the children. The community would also make provisions for finding poor children apprenticeships.⁷⁸

Another law that specifically focused on children was the anti-infanticide law of 1624. This law defined the crime of infanticide and laid down the penalty for women murdering their illegitimate newborns. The statute set the penalty as death if authorities discovered that a woman had murdered her newborn, and she could not prove that it was born dead.⁷⁹ The law did not address the issue of married women who may have murdered their newborns.

Childhood, Some Conclusions

As historians have found, early modern people defined the length of childhood differently based on class and culture. In the upper classes, childhood or adolescence tended to end when the young person married. However, this did not guarantee that the person would establish his own household. In the working classes, children had been working and providing for the family since they were very young, but children did not reach adulthood until they could support a household of their own.

Humanists and Puritans alike were concerned about how a child developed because a child's early life foretold the adult he would become. Humanists and Puritans felt that parents had to keep a tight reign on children or they would turn out badly. However, this is where the similarity ended. Humanists felt adults had to watch children closely because children were immature, whereas Puritans felt that children were no more likely than adults to fall into temptation. All Puritans had to be very careful not to fall into the snares of the devil.

⁷⁸ Brown, W. Newman. "The Receipt of Poor Relief and Family Situation: Aldenham, Hertfordshire, 1630-90." *Land, Kinship, and Life-Cycle*. Ed. Richard M. Smith. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1984), 405-406.

⁷⁹ Hoffer, 20.

Historians have definitely shown that in the early modern period adults saw children as a separate class who were to be treated differently than adults. Alan MacFarlane and Linda Pollock have shown that parents felt affection for their children, and that they were emotionally distraught if a child died.

In early modern England education was open to more children. Granted, a child had to be at least of the gentry class, but the evolution of the English grammar school allowed more children to go to school. If a boy completed grammar school he might continue to university and acquire a Bachelor of Arts or a Master of Arts in seven years. Education was even opening up to girls by the seventeenth-century. However, girls were not introduced to academic skills, but they learned domestic skills such as cooking and needlework.

Finally, religious education was a significant element of early modern England. Many felt that parents could not start a child's induction into Protestantism soon enough. During the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, the government conducted national campaigns to increase religious literacy among the young.

The most significant contribution to the study of children that historians have made is to overturn the work of Philippe Ariès. He had stated that people of the Middle Ages had no concept of childhood. However, since the 1970s and 1980s historians have worked to prove Ariès wrong. After historians in the seventies showed that the idea of childhood did in fact exist between the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, they set about exploring how children fit into early modern continental and English society.

During the seventies historians determined that the lot of children improved from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, meaning that parents treated children kinder by the Enlightenment than they would have during the Middle Ages. However, by the eighties, new

historical theories had developed to disprove this idea of childhood. Historians of the eighties showed that continuity not change was the theme of children's history, and that children had received consistent treatment from adults from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment.

HISTORIOGRAPHY ENCOMPASSING CHILDREN AND THE WITCH HUNTS

Historians have not paid concentrated attention to children and their role in the early modern witch hunts. This section reviews major books and articles of the past thirty-five years that have dealt with children and adolescents in the English and continental witchcraft trials. Historians have not presented data that encompasses children and the Scottish witch hunts.

In *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, Brian Levack gives a brief description of children and witchcraft. He begins by describing the most common association of children and witchcraft, that involving midwives. Many continentals believed that witches needed dead babies for their unguents, and therefore, people often suspected midwives of witchcraft because of their proximity to newborns. Levack points out, that like cooks and healers, midwives were victims of witchcraft accusations.⁸⁰ Parents could easily blame the midwife for the death of the infant, and this would subsequently morph into a charge of witchcraft because of the fear that a witch could make use of the dead baby's corpse. Midwives could be the victims of accumulated years of accusations of murder. For instance, Levack cites the case in 1587 of Walpurga Hausmännin who was accused of murdering forty children by witchcraft. Some of the infants had died twelve years before the authorities brought her to trial.⁸¹

Levack's *Witch-Hunt* is a general survey, and in one section he describes the social context that created the atmosphere for the hunts, and here he discusses children. Levack states that children were usually the source of accusations rather than the prosecuted victims. However, in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries authorities did prosecute children for witchcraft.⁸² Children appeared in large numbers in hunts in which the denunciation procedure got out of control. Sometimes a child was the subject of an accusation when authorities judged

⁸⁰ Levack, 139.

⁸¹ Ibid, 130.

⁸² Levack, 144.

that the child had a predilection for witchcraft. If a parent was a witch, the child could also be a witch. During a case in Saxony in 1660, authorities executed two children of a condemned magician.⁸³

Robin Briggs in *Witches and Neighbors* affirms that children's fantasies of the Devil provided some sort of comfort because these fantasies afforded the children excitement and adventure.⁸⁴ Briggs discusses several children's confessions of attending the sabbats in Lorraine. The children's experience of the Devil was more farcical than the dark events adults often recounted. Briggs includes a story of a less than mentally quick Devil confounded by one boy who hid from him rather than give him the kiss of shame. The children also provided stories of a Devil that excited their sense of adventure by taking them on rides through the air with him and providing them with the prettiest girls to dance with at the sabbat.⁸⁵

Briggs also uses a child as an example of someone who was so disadvantaged that he might have confessed to attending the sabbat to place himself in danger.⁸⁶ Briggs brings up the point that those who were socially or economically disadvantaged had the tendency to put themselves in a destructive situation. The boy he uses as an example, twelve-year-old Jean Colombain, also provided a much more vivid fantasy of the sabbat than the typical fantasy adults reported, which usually only included the black mass, dancing, and sex with the Devil. Colombain's fantasy included the diabolic mass with its attendant rituals, but also a powder that he insisted was a deadly poison. He claimed that the witches ate it and showed it to a wild boar

⁸³ Ibid, 145.

⁸⁴ Briggs, 45.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 45.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 46.

that was then unable to run away from the witches. The authorities used this boy's confession to convict his mother, but they let the boy go.⁸⁷

Briggs notes how many of the intense persecutions were built around the sabbat. One difficult aspect of these outbreaks was that children became drawn in as victims as well as accusers. Two intense hunts where children were deeply involved occurred in the Basque country from 1609 to 1610 and in Sweden from 1668 to 1676.⁸⁸

Briggs includes several examples of children used as witnesses against their parents. He points out that using children as witnesses was double-edged because children were prone to make false accusations and were a pernicious way to gain convictions.⁸⁹ He also points out that early modern people obviously did not realize how suggestible children are.

Briggs cites instances where children accused other children in their peer group of being witches and attending the sabbat. He suggests that children expanded the belief in witchcraft and furnished witchcraft accusations because they absorbed information from trials, village gossip, and childish talk that they stretched and embellished. Resentment toward parents was also a factor. He feels that the trials encouraged family members to act against each other without regard to the normal power structure, and these circumstances made parents feel vulnerable. One child witness claimed that another boy's father promised to give him new clothes if he would stay quiet before the judges.⁹⁰

Ronald Seth's *Children Against Witches* was the first book devoted to the issue of children and adolescents in the witch hunts. This book delves into different cases of English witchcraft that included children and adolescents. Seth divides children and adolescents into two

⁸⁷ Ibid, 47.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 52.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 234.

⁹⁰ Briggs, 237.

groups: those accusers who provided evidence against witches, and those who were imposters who feigned bewitchment.

Seth recounts several well-known English witchcraft cases that included children who presented evidence against the accused witch: the first Chelmsford trial of 1566, the second Chelmsford trial of 1579, the St. Osyth trial of 1582, the Lancashire witches of 1612, and the Bury St. Edmunds case in 1662. He also adds two lesser known trials; one trial in which a girl named Grace Sowerbutts accused two witches of tormenting her and another trial in which Joan Wilson was tried for bewitching Christopher Wilson in 1652.

In the second half of the book, Seth looks at children he believed to be fraudulent or who were proved to be fraudulent bewitched victims. Seth again describes several well-known cases of children who suffered bewitchment. Seth includes the Throckmorton children of the famous Warboys case in 1593; Thomas Darling, the Burton Boy; William Somers, the Nottingham Boy; Anne Gunter; John Smith, the Leicester Boy; and William Perry, the Bilson Boy. Seth adds some lesser-known cases such as Edmund Robinson and Richard Dugdale, the Surry Demoniac.

Seth provides some analysis regarding the trials where the children provided evidence, and in two cases he believes the children were coached regarding the evidence they presented. Nine-year-old Jennet Device testified against her mother, grandmother, and teenaged brother during the Lancashire trial of 1612. Seth believes that someone coached Jennet regarding her testimony because Justice Bromley performed a test on the child during her testimony. He lined the accused up among other people and required that she pick them out from the group, which she did. However, Seth does believe she was present at a witches' meeting that took place at her grandmother's home. She testified to things she had seen, and she was one of the first people to

mention the witches' sabbat in England, the meeting at Malking Tower.⁹¹ Seth does not speculate on who coached Jennet, however. Presumably someone connected with the criminal court coached Device about the testimony she was to give the court. Seth also notes one of the adolescent witnesses was coached, but this is not speculation on his part. The pamphlet that covers the trial specifically states that Grace Sowerbutts received coaching from a "Seminarie Priest" named Thompson.⁹² Seth does not elaborate on how the priest coached Sowerbutts.

Seth considers all cases of bewitchment and possession to be fraudulent whether proved so or not. For instance, no one proved the Throckmorton girls to be faking any of the bewitchment they claimed to be suffering. However, all of the other cases Seth covers were proven to be frauds. Thomas Darling, the Burton Boy; Anne Gunter; and John Smith, the Leicester Boy were all proven to be frauds.⁹³ Seth assumes the Throckmorton girls were possibly suffering from epileptic hysteria, then when they received attention for their performance they faked their behavior.⁹⁴ The Throckmorton girls could have been faking their bewitchment. However, Jane Throckmorton was legitimately sick when her "bewitchment" began, and at the beginning of her case she could have perhaps thought she was truly bewitched.⁹⁵ The pamphlet did not provide enough information to definitely prove that she and her sisters were feigning their illness when they claimed to be bewitched.

Hans Sebald's *Witch-Children: From Salem Witch-Hunts to Modern Courtrooms* is the most in-depth English language study of children and witch hunts. The title is misleading because Sebald covers the Salem trials in only one chapter, and he includes trials from Germany

⁹¹ Seth, Ronald. *Children Against Witches*. (Taplinger: New York, 1969), 91.

⁹² Ibid, 88.

⁹³ Seth, 142, 153, 157.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 179.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 131.

and England from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries. Sebald sets out to explore three major issues:

- historical records that describe witch trials to glean the roles children played in them
- the German case of “Witchboy” and to provide a detailed example of a child caught up in the process of a witch trial
- children’s behavior based on modern findings regarding child psychology⁹⁶

Sebald’s book follows an analysis of how children were originally associated with witchcraft, and as the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries progressed, how children became more involved in the witchcraft trials. Sebald states that before 1585 children figured as victims of witches. Usually, witches victimized children by cannibalizing them and using their body parts for unguents. But Sebald notes that in Trier in 1585 many children, possibly inspired by the public trials and burnings, openly confessed to being witches or having participated at the witches’ sabbats. An eight-year-old boy confessed to playing a drum at one witches’ sabbat. A fifteen-year-old son of a noble family, who was a page of the elector of Trier, confessed that he bewitched his lord and sickened him. This adolescent also implicated twenty-three other individuals who were subsequently executed.⁹⁷

After the first third of the seventeenth-century, some witchcraft trial dynamics changed. In England older women were protected a little more than they had been, and more men were accused. In previous decades, there had been two men for every ten people accused, and eventually the ratio changed to three men in ten people.⁹⁸ However, the factor that did not change regarding the witchcraft trials was the involvement of children.

Sebald uses social theory to explain why children were involved with the trials. He begins by looking at post-Reformation culture and states that it created new norms to which the

⁹⁶ Sebald, Hans. *Witch-Children: From Salem Witch-Hunts to Modern Courtrooms*. (Prometheus Books: Amherst, 1995), 11.

⁹⁷ Sebald, 36.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 37.

population must conform. Sebald uses the term *boundary maintenance* to explain what was occurring in seventeenth-century continental Europe. Social disorganization coupled with economic instability and psychological tensions forced society to redefine what was conventional behavior, what was acceptable belief, and who was inside the proper boundaries of society.

Sebald next builds on his social explanation by including the term *independent variable*, by which he means the uncertain social and natural conditions of the time period, and the *dependent variable*, the behavior the masses displayed as a result of these conditions. The Reformation and the Counter-Reformation created new circumstances to which people had to conform. The conformity had a heavy emphasis on discipline, which was very noticeable between the generations, and Sebald interprets this as children receiving harsh treatment as a result. Therefore, Sebald identifies involvement of children in the witch hunts as an intergenerational problem where the parties were working out conflict on an unconscious level. Because neither side understood the underlying dynamics of what was being played out, both sides reacted to what they saw as distasteful conduct in others.⁹⁹

Sebald organizes trials according to four categories: scandals, possessions, accusations, and confessions.¹⁰⁰ Children became embroiled in scandals that started in schools. Schools were environments where hysterical emotions and behavior easily started. Sebald lists several Jesuit schools in Cologne, Eichstätt, Hildesheim, and Düsseldorf that faced rumors of black magic.¹⁰¹ When investigators checked the circumstances at the schools, they found that the children's actions mimicked what they had learned from sermons and class discussions. The children's behavior confirmed demonological theory that Christian theologians held.

⁹⁹ Sebald, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 54.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 54.

In cases of possession, the child would gain the sympathy of the exorcists who were working to rid the youngster of the tormenting spirit. In this drama, both sides received certain rewards. The possessed victim was able to act with impunity against adults he or she might have resented. The exorcist was rewarded when he purged the child. He also purged the religious community of a perceived evil.

Sebald feels that children used accusations as a mechanism to get back at adults they resented but against whom the children had no other recourse. He also feels that children's accusations were forms of hidden rebellion.¹⁰²

Finally, Sebald discusses children who confessed to being witches or to participating in the sabbat. Children had excellent talent for spinning wild tales to please their adult listeners. Sebald believes that when they began their confessions, children knew they were lying, but as the judicial machine moved, they began to believe what they were confessing.¹⁰³

After Sebald sets the stage with the different scenarios where children appeared, he describes several geographical locations where witchcraft trials involving children took place. In North America he reviews the trials at Salem, Massachusetts. For England he includes several trials such as the Throckmorton case; three Essex trials involving children (1566, 1579, 1589); John Smith, the Leicester Boy; the witches of Lancashire; and Edmund Robinson. Sebald also adds several cases from the Continent. Hagenau was a town eighty miles southeast of Trier where a fourteen-year-old girl was implicated with a group of witches. Before the authorities executed her, she implicated another adolescent, a thirteen-year-old boy who subsequently accused others at his own interrogation. One of the places that most zealously persecuted children was Würzburg. Between 1627 and 1629 more than twenty-five percent of the 160

¹⁰² Sebald, 55.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 55.

witches executed were children.¹⁰⁴ Sebald also includes the famous Mora trials in Sweden that took place during the 1660s and 1670s in which children accused witches of taking them to the sabbat at the mythical Blökulla.

Central to Sebald's book is the confession of a child he calls Witch-boy. This boy lived in the Bishopric of Bamberg in May of 1629 when the authorities arrested him. The authorities arrested him under cloudy circumstances. Sebald analyzes his confession because he feels it opens a window into the mind of a creative child and changes the firm adult belief that children are innocent. This confession is important for several reasons. First it demonstrated the potential creativity of children. Witch-boy manifested all sorts of scenarios regarding the sabbat and witch activities. He even concocted a traffic accident that one of his friends suffered on the way to the sabbat. His friend fell off the broom both boys were riding and fell into a lake. The boy's friend magically transformed into a mouse and swam to the other side of the lake where Witch-boy picked him up on the broom, and then they proceeded on to the sabbat.¹⁰⁵ Witch-boy's confession demonstrated in detail the diabolic knowledge that people held during the early seventeenth-century. Witch-boy's knowledge showed that children as well as adults were well-versed in demonology.

The documentation of the boy's confessions shows how his inquisitors misinterpreted juvenile behavior. Whereas now adults interpreted this behavior as juvenile delinquency, the boy's interrogators interpreted this as diabolic mischief. Another important function of Witch-boy's confession was that it opened a window into the divide between elite and common culture. The confession gives a description of the boy's everyday life and activities.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Sebald, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 128.

¹⁰⁶ Sebald, 122.

The final contribution of Sebald's book is his application of child psychology to the witch hunts. He posits that the modern study of child psychology can help explain the behavior of children during the witch hunts. Sebald calls children who invent testimony mythomanes. He states that these mythomanes may at first lie intentionally and willfully, but as their stories grow and become more elaborate, they come to believe their own tales. The vast majority of people who engage in mythomaniacal behavior tend to be children and mentally retarded people. Studies have shown that when children lie, these circumstances do not necessarily indicate a pathology, whereas in adults it does. Sebald also states that when children engage in mythomaniacal behavior they are motivated by three things: maliciousness, attention seeking, or precocious sexual proclivities. One thing that is important for interrogation is that when children lie for attention they are highly suggestible.¹⁰⁷

Sebald makes several points that help explain children's involvement in the witch hunts as it pertains to their suggestibility:

- the younger the child, the more suggestible he or she is
- because children's mental Gestalt is incomplete, they are capable of self-brainwashing and believe the truth of their story telling
- similarity in belief between the interrogator and the interrogated child enhances the interrogator's ability to persuade the child
- the status of the interrogator influences the level of suggestibility
- interrogators can gain the answer they want based on leading and interpretive questions
- insistent questions cause the child to comply with leading questions
- the more persistent the interrogator is in pushing his views, the more likely the child is to conform to the proposed opinion
- the more ambiguous the proposed event, the more it resembles a social Rorschach situation with an elastic structure, and the leading questions are more effective¹⁰⁸

Sebald presents an effective book that gives a good overview of trials involving children. He studies a broad spectrum of trials that occurred from the sixteenth- through the seventeenth-

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 203.

¹⁰⁸ Sebald, 229.

centuries and over a wide geographical area. The psychological information Sebald includes a possible explanation of children's behavior during the witch hunts.

In *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition (1608 – 1614)*, Gustav Henningsen mentions two events that involved children. Both occurred in the town of Logrono, Spain in 1610. One was a case of murder by witchcraft, and in the other, children confessing to be witches. For instance, Miguel de Goiburu admitted to the Inquisition that thirty years previous he had bitten his little niece on the neck and sucked her blood from the punctures. Apparently, the witches were the only ones who knew about this but all of his village's inhabitants were able to corroborate that the child's body had been discovered a few days later, covered with bruises. Goiburu's sister had claimed at the time that witches had sucked her child's blood, but Goiburu initially insisted that he knew nothing about it.¹⁰⁹ Another woman, Estevania de Narcorena, confessed to being second in command in the Zugarramurdi coven. She also claimed to have killed her own grandchild with a powder, which she added to the child's food.¹¹⁰

In 1609, the Inquisition Council requested that Juan de Valle Alvarado travel to Logrono. He was to act as a special investigator for the Inquisition, and Valle wrote regular reports to the Inquisition. In his third letter in November of 1609, he reported that he had found fifteen child-witches who had confessed to the crime of witchcraft and renounced their Christian faith. Valle wanted leave to reconcile the children during his visitation because the majority of the parents were poor and could not afford to travel to Logrono. Valle included in his report that he had

¹⁰⁹ Henningsen, 28.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 53.

ousted a group of witches at Lesaca. He stated that seven of the witches were children who ranged in age from seven to fifteen years.¹¹¹

Valle believed that witches were seducing local children into the practice of witchcraft. At Lesaca, Valle reported, during the month after the Inquisition left the town, the Devil had recruited twelve children for his purposes.¹¹² Valle told the Council that the Inquisition would require the arrest of at least three women who were “the greatest scoundrels under the sun... accomplices of Satan,” Valle went on, “[who] are constantly wheedling children and luring them with a particular type of apply which they give them. And as soon as they have enticed the children to the sabbat they get them to renounce their faith, even if they are only nine or ten years old.”¹¹³

Children also participated as witnesses against the accused at various visitations that Valle made. A nine-year-old child witch, Maria de Yturria acted as a witness to confirm the existence of a witch coven at Lesaca. Eventually thirteen other witnesses confirmed this statement, eight of whom were children. During Valle’s visitation at Tolosa, two child witches claimed that a coven was present at Vera. Finally Mari Juri, age eight, uncovered another group at Yanci when she made her confession at Tolosa.

In 1610, the Inquisition Council published the Edict of Grace. This edict stated that all witches who agreed to come forward and admit what they had done would be protected from property confiscation and other consequences. This edict caused many people to approach the authorities and confess their witchcraft crimes, and children were a large part of those who claimed to be witches. The inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frias took confessions under the Edict of Grace. In the fall of 1611, in one of his reports, he stated that he had dealt with 1,546 admitted

¹¹¹ Ibid, 117.

¹¹² Ibid, 117.

¹¹³ Henningsen, 118.

witches, and that 1,199 of them were children between the ages of twelve and fourteen. He stated that he had absolved all those who repented. He also wrote that he had reconciled 271 people, and they were of many ages, but a fair number of them were between twelve and fourteen years old.¹¹⁴

Erik Midelfort's *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany* analyzes witchcraft and the witch hunts in southwest Germany during the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries. Midelfort concentrates mainly on the larger hunts in Baden-Württemberg. He states that in the town of Sinzenberg and Ellwangen some individuals confessed to witchcraft crimes because they were convinced of their own guilt and turned themselves in of their own volition. In 1611, seven-year-old Margretha Gebelin claimed that she rode away at night to the witches' dance. In August, authorities arrested her, and while incarcerated she confessed to all sorts of activities regarding the Devil. Authorities, however, must have been concerned about her young age and spiritual standing because they turned her over to Jesuits for religious training. The Jesuits tried exorcism, holy oil, and other ceremonies, without success. Midelfort reports that when Margretha reached the age of eleven, she still claimed to be a witch. Unsure of what to do, the local authorities appealed to the jurists of the University of Freiburg, and they responded that an eleven-year-old was too young to convict. However, the jurists felt that if Margretha did not repent by the age of fourteen, she could be executed. Midelfort does not report the fate of Margretha.¹¹⁵

Another young person who freely confessed to being involved in witchcraft was Maria Ostertag, aged 16. She confessed that her aunt seduced her into witchcraft because Ostertag hoped becoming a witch would ease her hunger. Ostertag said that she was guilty of sin and could no longer take the torment of the Devil. She freely showed authorities her devil's mark and

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 254.

¹¹⁵ Midelfort, Erik H. C. *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562 – 1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations*. (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1972), 109.

subsequently implicated thirty-four other witches. Because of her free confession authorities condemned Ostertag and executed her with six other witches.¹¹⁶

Midelfort covers two trials where children in schools started witchcraft proceedings. These two trials occurred in the town of Mergentheim and were connected to trials in Würzburg. Bernhard Reichardt, a magistrate of Markelsheim, sent his son Johan Bernhard to school in Würzburg. But in December of 1627 Reichardt came to believe that his son had been drawn into witchcraft at the school. By March of 1628, the authorities of Mergentheim learned of nine-year-old Johan Bernhard's supposed witchcraft activities, and at the end of the month Johan Bernhard was in custody. While the authorities interrogated him, Johan Bernhard confessed to attending the witches' dance and to having sexual intercourse with the Devil. Johan Bernhard was convicted and burned for his alleged crimes two months later.¹¹⁷

Another witchcraft scandal broke out in the schools of Mergentheim two months after the execution of Johan Bernhard Reichardt. The three sons of Belltin Beckh were suspected of practicing witchcraft. A committee took the testimony of eight children ranging in age from eight to fourteen and from Beckh's sons aged twelve through fifteen. Based on the testimony of the children, the committee found that the two older brothers feigned connections with the Devil and trips to the witches' dance, and that the oldest boy claimed he had learned special knowledge from the Devil. All three brothers admitted to having a reputation as witches. However, they all claimed that their reputations were unfounded, and that they had never flown to the witches' feast. One of the younger boys implicated three other people while being questioned. Midelfort does not say what happened to the three boys.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 108.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 144.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 145.

In 1662, the confession of a ten-year-old boy set off a panic in Vaihingen, and authorities arrested many children who confessed to being witches. They condemned many people, however, the children themselves were too young to be punished severely. The children denounced one boy, age sixteen, who then denounced seventeen others, and the youth was then executed. The panic then widened and led to the death of 56 people. Finally, after the panic subsided, the Esslingen Council was lenient on the children. The Council sent four children home, admonished them to be wary in the future, and they sent two girls as maids to the prison.

Sweden is not known for mass witchcraft trials. Bengt Ankarloo in “Sweden: The Mass Burnings, (1668 – 1676),” notes that witchcraft trials were present and began by the end of the sixteenth-century. With a few exceptions, all of the early trials were contained in Götaland in the south. The famous mass trials that involved children occurred in the north. The first trial took place in Dalarna in the summer of 1668, displaying the particular character and features that were to become the hallmark for future cases in the great hunt. Everyone involved first occupied themselves with the elements of the mythical witches’ mountain, Blåkulla. Children acted as witnesses and provided fantastical testimony to implicate the accused. In this trial authorities handed down eighteen convictions, four of which included death sentences for minors.¹¹⁹ From this trial onward, the testimony of children played an important role in the court. In Swedish legal precedence, children under the age of fifteen were not allowed to testify. However, like other countries on the Continent and England, authorities relaxed this rule, and consequently made the process of convicting accused witches much easier.¹²⁰

As the trials moved north and east from Dalarna, professional witch finders cropped up, and most of them were children. They claimed they could “see” who had traveled to Blåkulla.

¹¹⁹ Ankarloo, 295.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 303.

Some audacious children blackmailed individuals for food and alcohol in exchange for not blackening their names. Impoverished orphans were typically the perpetrators of these slandering threats.¹²¹

In Sweden, children were not considered complete witnesses individually. Authorities only saw children as a portion of an adult. Therefore, they regarded a five-year-old as one-tenth of an adult, whereas a fourteen-year-old would be half an adult. By adding the children together, authorities eventually arrived at complete witnesses. Given the way they added the children together, authorities often had thirty to forty children testify. A small but active group of children were becoming responsible for convicting suspected witches. In one parish about 20 percent of the child witnesses testified against half of the accused. During these trials, the authorities kept the children together in “wake-houses” that were established to protect the children. Authorities used sleep deprivation on all the children who claimed that witches took them to Blåkulla. They were kept awake with prayers and sermons. This practice of keeping the children in close quarters led to similar testimonies, and those who deviated from the accepted stories were singled out as liars.¹²²

The authorities allowed the children into court to play the role of victim and allowed them to say what no one else could say. In essence, children took on the role of proxy for the adult. They could tell the most incredible tales of Blåkulla and not suffer any repercussions.¹²³

In his article “Kinderhexenprozesse: Zur Rolle von Kindern in der Geschichte der Hexenverfolgung” (“Witch Trials Involving Children: The Role of Children in the History of the Persecution of Witches”). Wolfgang Behringer reviews what made children important to the witchcraft trials, and how they were involved in the process of the witch trials

¹²¹ Ankarloo, 302.

¹²² Ibid, 303.

¹²³ Ibid, 304.

(*hexenprozesse*).¹²⁴ Behringer states that children were significant to the witch trials because their testimony was influenced by the psychological rewards they received for accusing others of witchcraft as well as confessing to being witches. The role that children played within the family was also significant because children often accused close relatives of witchcraft crimes rather than neighbors.¹²⁵

Children were not participants in German witchcraft trials until 1585 in Trier, when Jesuits recorded stories about children who took part in witch dances. An eight-year-old boy was present at the witches' dances, and due to his testimony, many women died. In 1587 an adolescent witness appeared. This boy was sixteen years old and apparently took lessons from magicians and witches, who compelled him to serve them. The magistrates used his testimony to condemn women in the community.¹²⁶

After the incidents in Trier, Bishop Peter Binsfeld of Munich was the first to enter the debate over how to address the issue of minors and the witchcraft trials. He used his own experience in Trier as material. He wanted to convince people who did not believe in witch flight and witch dances that these were real phenomena, and that authorities should allow children to participate in the trials. In his demonology, Binsfeld allowed for the torture of minors. He felt that the rod was appropriate because this treatment was no different from what children received at school. Binsfeld's opinions regarding the torture of children constituted a pivotal event in defining the new role of children in the German witch hunts. Binsfeld's demonology also included hints of early nationalism because he states that children can denounce their parents because "love of the fatherland should be stronger than love for the father."¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Behringer, 31.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 45.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 33.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 36.

Between 1626-1630 there was a wave of hunts, and children's role was stronger than ever before, becoming statistically significant. For instance, in 1629 Würzburg burned 160 witches, and 25% (40) were children.¹²⁸ Towards the end of the seventeenth-century and into the eighteenth, witchcraft trials involving children increased. In 1680, 70% (112) of the accused witches were under the age of 22. The last witch hunt in Freising occurred between 1720 and 1722, and it included the execution of eight “*zauberbuben*” or magic boys.¹²⁹

As the seventeenth-century progressed, various jurists began to develop legal opinions in the earlier tradition of Binsfeld. They believed that children over the age of fourteen could be convicted in court, but those under seven were free from prosecution. If children were between the age of seven to fourteen, authorities should punish them as the schools did. If fourteen-year-olds were of a bad temper or disposition, and if they were involved in horrible or dangerous circumstances, they should face the same penalties as adults because they were beyond rehabilitation.

Behringer posits some implications from children's involvement in the German witch trials:

- children gained power and importance as accusers: they had the capability to direct the fate of adults
- children did not understand the repercussions of their accusations whereas adults knew the consequences of their denunciations
- children as accusers allowed the authorities to control people: children became the tools of the higher classes¹³⁰

In “‘Evil Imaginings and Fantasies’: Child-Witches and the End of the Witch Craze,” Lyndal Roper analyzes a large hunt that involved approximately twenty children in the city of Augsburg during 1723. Apparently, an old seamstress had seduced many children into

¹²⁸ Ibid, 36.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 38.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 41.

witchcraft, and the children were performing acts of malfeasance throughout Augsburg. The children put various objects in their parents' beds such as teeth, glass, splinters, and diabolic powder. They fought among themselves, committed indecencies with each other, and they attended witches' dances. The twenty children the authorities took into custody ranged between the ages of six and sixteen, with the majority about ten or under.¹³¹ As the panic progressed, parents approached authorities and asked that they arrest the witch-children so as to protect the other children in the homes who had not been "infected." Authorities first put children in dark cells, and some were kept in solitary confinement. Finally a year later, authorities moved the children into a hospital where the accommodations were warmer and cleaner. Four guards and three attendants worked at the hospital to oversee the child-witches. Six years later in 1729, the last child left confinement.¹³²

Roper links the history of witchcraft with the history of childhood in her article. Roper makes the significant observation that the number of child-witch accusations increased during the late seventeenth-century. This increase in child-witches represents a change from one way of interpreting evil to another. The eighteenth century did show a new awareness regarding children and childhood. However, Roper feels that new attitudes to children were not only positive but punitive. The background of this attitude came partly from the deterioration in the belief of witchcraft. People slowly moved from obsessing over the mother and old women as being associated with witchcraft and as sources of evil. As the eighteenth century commenced, people began to associate children's fantasies as being evil.¹³³ One reason parents might have felt threatened is that they often claimed the parental bed was under attack. Often the child was

¹³¹ Roper, Lyndal. "'Evil Imaginings and Fantasies': Child-Witches and the End of the Witch Craze." *Past and Present*. 167 (2000): 107.

¹³² *Ibid*, 108.

¹³³ Roper, 110.

blamed for attacking the parents' sexual relationship, the father's potency, or the mother's fertility. While she was in childbed, Maria Steingruber suffered attacks due to witchcraft, and she accused her stepson of afflicting her. Franz Joseph Kuttler bewitched his parents' bed, and as a result his father lost his potency.¹³⁴

Another theme involving imagination and fantasy that Roper touches on is sexuality. Sexual themes along with anal fixation surfaced in the children's play. One boy dropped his pants and raised his shirt while his female companion "let herself be beaten with a little stick on her bare behind."¹³⁵ One boy said the sabbat happened at the Sow Market, this linking witchcraft in the early modern mind to pigs, filth, blood, and possibly Jews. At the Sow Market, the children "committed indecency, pulled down their trousers, put their hands in each other's behinds and fronts and kissed their shameful parts."¹³⁶ Roper states that the stress on anal themes and sexual performance moved the themes of the witch hunt into a different area. The sexual behavior of children is different than the typical seduction scenarios that adult female witches reported. These experiences of children show the images of a polymorphous sexual imagination.¹³⁷

In the Augsburg case, the authorities decided not to prosecute the old seamstress who the parents and children accused as causing the children's seduction into witchcraft. The authorities felt that the evidence was insufficient to try the woman. Now that the figure of the witch was gone, why were these children imagining such diabolical activities? According to Roper, the witch was removed from the scene, the child could not be seen as the victim anymore.¹³⁸ The fantasies of the children forced their parents to confront the children's emotions. The parents

¹³⁴ Ibid, 117.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 120.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 120.

¹³⁷ Roper, 120.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 127.

seemed to respond psychosomatically to their children who had become ill from the dirty objects in their beds. Eventually, the parents felt forced into giving their parental authority to Augsburg's council, thus making the city responsible for their children. Roper thinks that the children's participation in this drama may have been their way of expressing some of their parents' own unnamed perplexity, vacillation, and antagonism. As parents saw the disjointed nature of childhood, a window opened, and they saw their own negative characteristics in their children.¹³⁹ Parents saw their own problems in their children, but did not realize this was what they were seeing. They reacted by not being able to care for their children any longer.

The authorities took the opinion that treating the children's affliction should be done "by degrees, gradually drawing their imaginations and fantasies from their minds, and leading them by contrast to a true fear of God."¹⁴⁰ The Augsburg council decided upon this course, which included beatings, incarceration in the hospital, and spiritual training. As the authorities released the children from the hospital, the council appointed spiritual counselors and admonished parents to rear their children with a faith in God. The council also assigned the children certificates that assured they were "witch-free" so that they could obtain apprenticeships.¹⁴¹

Most historians have recounted the trials involving children with a basic listing of the facts and have not analyzed how children were significant to the trial process. Hans Sebald and Lyndal Roper are two exceptions, presenting detailed studies regarding the phenomena of children's involvement in the witch trials. Besides their work, there has been very little synthesis of children's roles and participation in the witch trials. Several areas of the witchcraft trials involving children are open to historians. Historians need to go as far into the past as possible to create a baseline for children's involvement in witch trials. If historians are able to find child

¹³⁹ Ibid, 127.

¹⁴⁰ Roper, 131.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 132.

participants further back in history, they will be able to follow the evolution of children's involvement in the witchcraft trials.

Historians have shown that children have been victims of various characters, such as witches in the guise of midwives and witches at their sabbats. They sometimes appeared as defendants when denunciation procedures got out of control. Children also confessed to having encountered the devil. However, these confessions seem to be attempts to gain attention from the courts and to make their lives more exciting. Authorities also used children as witnesses in court against parents and others in the community.

Historians need to study continental Europe region by region to compare how children of different countries experienced the witch hunts. Studies reviewing urban versus rural trials would tell historians more about children's experiences with the witchcraft trials and the respective justice system. Historians should also compare the experience of continental children with the experience of English and Scottish children. The role of children after the witch hunts ended is also worth studying. Just because the witch hunts ended, did not mean that beliefs about witches did. Children probably continued to play an important role in witch beliefs after the end of the trials.

DEMONOLOGIES, WITCHCRAFT, AND CHILDREN

From the first popular demonology that appeared in 1486, the *Malleus Malificarum*, demonologists refer to children in their books. Children typically filled the following roles:

- murder victims
- victims of dedication to Satan
- child-witches
- witnesses for the prosecution
- victims of bewitchment or possession
- victims of seduction into witchcraft

The demonologists do not focus on children, but many of them do not neglect to mention children as potential victims of witches. The following demonologies mention children at least once.

In the *Malleus Malificarum*, Heinrich Kramer* describe the harm witches could do to children in the context of giving examples of malicious behavior of the witch. For instance, when he described the practice of overlooking, or giving a victim the evil eye, he stated that witches particularly directed this toward young children who were extremely impressionable.¹⁴² Kramer claimed that soothsayers in the past killed children to use their souls for divination.¹⁴³

Kramer described cannibalism based on an account from the Inquisitor of Como. A man in the county of Barby witnessed this crime happening to his child. The man claimed his child was missing from its cradle, and he saw a group of women kill his child, drink its blood, and eat it. Kramer believed that midwives do the most harm to the Catholic faith. If they did not kill the child when it is born, they took it to another room and offered it to devils.¹⁴⁴ However, he stated that witches could not devour children that had been baptized. In fact, they could not harm any

¹⁴² Kramer, Heinrich and James Sprenger [sic]. *The Malleus Malificarum*. Transl. Montague Summers. (Dover Publications: New York, 1929), 17. *The *Malleus Malificarum* is attributed to both Kramer and Sprenger, but Kramer is the author.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 57.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 66.

children without God's permission. Another point Kramer made is that witches dedicated their own children to Satan.¹⁴⁵

When witches devoted a newborn child to Satan, they did this for three reasons. First, they wanted to increase their pride and mimic religious rites and ceremonies. Next they could more easily deceive men by pretending to perform a devout behavior. Finally, when witches dedicated a new child to Satan, they hoped to add to the ranks of potential witches. Kramer stated that the child's dedication to Satan harms the child in three ways. Because the witch has offered the child to Satan, now he or she could not be dedicated to a holy life in the Catholic Church and could not serve God. When the witch dedicated the child to Satan, Satan was now the child's master, even god. Therefore, the child could not be set free without some large payment. (Kramer did not say what the payment would be.) Finally, a child that a witch had given to the Devil would always be prone to practicing witchcraft.¹⁴⁶

Kramer included an example of a child-witch. In the duchy of Swabia, a man took his eight-year-old daughter to the fields with him. As the father began to complain about the lack of rain in the area, the child offered to make rain for him. The father questioned her about this, and the child affirmed that she could make rain as well as hailstorms and tempests. She claimed her mother had sent her to a master to learn how to control the weather and gain other knowledge. The father then told the girl to make the clouds rain and hail on their land, which the girl did. Subsequently, the father accused his wife before the judge, and as a result the wife was burned. The child was brought back into the Church, and after that could no longer work spells.¹⁴⁷

Kramer also used an example of the typical argument between women to show how a witch would potentially hurt a child. In the city of Spire two women argued, and "in the manner

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 99.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 143.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 144.

of women ... used abusive words to each other.” Because one woman angered another, her child was later a victim of the other’s *maleficium* (harmful magic). That same night one of the women went to her child’s cradle to nurse her child. She remembered her earlier encounter with the suspected witch. The mother was fearful for her child’s safety, so she practiced some countermagic to neutralize whatever malfeasance the witch may have perpetrated against her son. She placed some consecrated herbs under the child, sprinkled the child with holy water, placed some blessed salt to his lips, and made the sign of the cross over him. Later in the night the mother heard the baby crying. She went to the cradle, but found it empty. Frantic, the mother searched her house for the infant, and she finally found him lying on the floor under a chair. Kramer was not specific, but they are probably implying that the witch removed the child from his cradle because he was too young to have left the cradle himself.¹⁴⁸

Kramer believed that witches were not concerned only with young children, but with adolescents as well. The authorities in the city of Ratisbon condemned a witch for various crimes, but one of them was her attempt to seduce a young girl into witchcraft. Apparently Satan ordered the witch to invite the girl to her home on a feast day. The witch was unsuccessful because each time the witch approached the girl, the young woman made the sign of the cross, which drove the witch away. However, another witch was more successful. This time the witch offered to introduce the girl to some young men unknown to the townsmen. The girl consented and followed the witch to her house. The witch instructed the girl not to make the sign of the cross when she met the young men. Then, as the girl followed the witch up the stairs, she secretly crossed herself. The hag turned on her and cursed her in the name of the Devil and told her to leave. By crossing herself, the girl herself from seduction into witchcraft.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 91.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 97.

Kramer related a story of a successful seduction into a sect of witches, and this story is significant because the young girl who came into the sect described some of the horrors that she witnessed there. The girl claimed that midwives inflicted the worst injuries because they were obligated to kill as many children as possible or offer them to devils. She also described how her aunt had beaten her because she had opened a “secret pot” that contained the heads of many children.¹⁵⁰

In another court case he used as an example, Kramer quoted confessions of witches from the city of Berne. These witches admitted that they looked mainly for unbaptized children, as well as baptized children who have not been protected by the sign of the cross and prayers.¹⁵¹ Kramer made the note that the witches wanted to prevent children from being baptized. The witches admitted that with their spells they killed children in their cradles so that the children appear to have died a natural death. After the children have been buried, the witches then rob the graves and cook the body in a cauldron until the flesh falls away from the bones. From this they make a soup, which gives the witches’ deep knowledge and power. From the more substantial parts they created an unguent, which helps them in their “arts and pleasures.” The unguent also helped the witches to fly.¹⁵²

Jean Bodin’s book *De la demonomanie des sorciers* (*On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, 1580) became a literary success. The book was released in twenty-three editions, and it was translated into German, Italian, and Latin.¹⁵³ In his demonology, Bodin was concerned with glorifying God. He was also focused on the idea that the prince was responsible to keep the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 100.

¹⁵¹ This statement contradicts an earlier one by Kramer that witches can not devour baptized children. He was not specific regarding this discrepancy. He might have made this inconsistent statement because witches’ testimony varied in different trials, or he may have made an editorial error.

¹⁵² Kramer, 100 – 101.

¹⁵³ Bodin, Jean. *De la demonomanie des sorciers* (*On the Demon-Mania of Witches*). Transl. Randy A. Scott. (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995.), 9.

commonwealth loyal to the Christian god.¹⁵⁴ Bodin mentioned children many times in his demonology.

Bodin believed that contemporary male and female witches dedicated their children to the Devil, and he said that they had a diabolical nature. To make his point, Bodin quoted several ancient examples, such as the people of Molech from Leviticus as well as Medea from the tragedy of *Medea*.¹⁵⁵ Bodin mentioned these ancient examples to demonstrate that contemporary witches reflected the same character attributes as those of ancient witches.

In a section entitled “On Magic in General and Its Types,” Bodin described a boy performing magic in church. During a wedding, a woman caught a little boy “tying the codpiece-string.” By doing this, the boy would render the groom impotent. The boy fled when the woman caught him.¹⁵⁶ Bodin complains that this practice (ligature) was so common that children who did not even understand that they were practicing witchcraft participate in tying the strings of codpieces.

Bodin recounted a story that he heard from the ambassador of Constantinople and the Polish ambassador to France about necromancy.¹⁵⁷ A great king of Christendom wanted to learn the fate of his country, and he called for the help of a Jacobin necromancer. After the necromancer said Mass, he blessed a Host. Upon this Host he placed the severed head of a ten-year-old child. He then asked the head questions. The head only replied, “I am suffering violence.” Immediately the king panicked and demanded the head be taken away, and the king

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 12.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 50.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 99.

¹⁵⁷ Necromancy was the practice of conjuring the spirits of the dead to magically reveal future events.

died soon after. Bodin claims that the story is accepted as true in the country, but only five people witnessed the events.¹⁵⁸

When he discusses how the Devil pursued children, Bodin recounted the story of an adolescent girl who lived in the city of Geneva. The Devil gave the girl the power to make anyone dance at anytime. She received an iron wand from the Devil that she used to touch people to make them dance. She mocked the city authorities, telling them that they could not put her to death. When the authorities arrested her, she suffered fear and violent trembling and claimed Satan was discarding her. When the authorities condemned her to death the girl was finally willing to repent.¹⁵⁹

Bodin discussed the types of *maleficia* of which witches were capable. As in other demonologies, he included the idea that witches took children and offered them to the Devil before they could be dedicated to God. Because they offered the children to the Devil, the witches believed there is some physical part of the children they could use. Bodin stated that he did not want to mention the part of the child that the witches used. Perhaps he is trying to avoid being graphic, but he is probably referring to the child's fat or bones.

In 1587 George Gifford's *A Discourse on the Subtill Practices of Deuilles by Witches and Sorcerers* appeared. Gifford was concerned with spreading the Protestant message that the Devil had no power to hurt human beings without God's permission.¹⁶⁰ Gifford called Catholics blasphemous and idolatrous, which again stressed his overall pro-Protestant message.¹⁶¹ Gifford believed that witches did not cause *maleficia* by their own volition. The Devil worked through

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 105.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 120.

¹⁶⁰ Gifford, George. *A Discourse on the Subtill Practices of Deuilles by Witces and Sorcers. By which men and haue been greatly deluded: the antuquitie of them: their diuers sorts and Names.* (London: 1587), 21.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 54.

them.¹⁶² Gifford gives a detailed typical scenario of how a witch might bewitch her neighbor. The witch would go to her neighbor and ask for milk. However, when her neighbor refused her, she went away grumbling and then hexed him or his property.¹⁶³

Gifford was not concerned with children. He focused on describing witches and their practices in general because he outlined the typical practices and *maleficia* of witches. Gifford only mentioned children in the context of giving testimony against their mothers. He said they testified that they saw their mothers give milk to “little things” the mothers kept in wool. However, when the children reached the age of discretion they admitted that they were pressured to give testimony against their mothers.¹⁶⁴

In France, Henry Boguet wrote *An Examen of Witches*, which was published in 1590. Boguet was a jurist, and he based his book on the cases he judged in the county of Burgundy. The first case of witchcraft Boguet discussed was the possession of an eight-year-old girl, Loyse Maillat. The accused witch, Francoise Secretain, had supposedly bewitched the girl because Francoise had sought lodging with the girl’s family and been refused. While the girl’s parents were away from the house Francoise forced a piece of bread on Loyse and told her not to tell her parents or she would kill Loyse. After that Loyse fell ill. When the parents reported this to Boguet, he ordered that Francoise be imprisoned.¹⁶⁵

Of all the demonologists, Boguet was the only writer who makes the important point that authorities should be cautious when imprisoning an individual on the accusation of a child alone. He made the point that children were considered unstable and light-headed, and more significantly that adults could easily persuade them to say what the adults wanted. Boguet related

¹⁶² Ibid, 24.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 45.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 48.

¹⁶⁵ Boguet, Henry. *An Examen of Witches*. (London: John Rodker, 1929), 3.

that he finally made the decision to accept Loyse's story because her depositions were very precise, and her details never disagreed.¹⁶⁶ Boguet felt that "God's secret judgment" could be seen in this child's testimony, because if God did not intend for Françoise to be imprisoned on a charge of witchcraft he would not have allowed the witch to be discovered by the means of a child. When this happens, Boguet continued, "God's glory is made manifest."¹⁶⁷

Like many other writers, Boguet mentioned the ointments and unguents that witches used. He stated that if the Devil did not give the witches the ointments himself, then witches would make their ointments. In this section he did not rely on personal experience, but quoted an Italian author he did not name. As other demonologists claimed, the witches made their ointments mainly out of the fat of little children that Satan tempted the witches to kill.¹⁶⁸

Boguet also stated that Satan demanded that witches dedicate their children to him. One man, Pierre Vuilermoz, stated that when he was eight years old, his father Guillaume took him to the sabbat. Two other children's maternal grandmother took them to the sabbat as well. Boguet believed that the father and grandmother dedicated the children to Satan. Boguet used these examples as an opportunity to admonish parents not to wait to baptize their children presumably because children were vulnerable to Satan while they were unbaptized, and if they died unbaptized they would not achieve salvation.¹⁶⁹

Boguet stated that even though parents might dedicate their children to Satan, the Devil was not interested in children under the age of twelve. The reason for this was because children under twelve could not make a binding agreement with Satan because they had no "judgment or

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 8.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 69.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 89.

discretion.”¹⁷⁰ This direct observation was unique among the demonologists. Kramer and Bodin mentioned adolescents being recruited into service of the Devil, but they did not explain why. Boguet is the only writer who gave a definite reason why the Devil would only be interested in individuals twelve and older.

In his 1656 *A Candle in the Dark*, Thomas Ady skeptically addressed the issue of the witch hunts. He mentioned children only in the context of “Romish” practices. He blamed Catholics for many things such as torture and the Inquisition. He stated that when Catholics were searching for witches, and the witches themselves would not confess their crimes, the papists would go so far as to torture the witches’ children to compel the children to accuse their parents of witchcraft.¹⁷¹ Ady was English, and he did not mention any negative Protestant practice associated with children. Apparently he was not familiar with the English practice of authorities using children to testify against their parents.¹⁷²

In *Pandaemonium, or the Devil’s Cloyster*, Richard Bovet wrote an exposition on witchcraft and gave examples of witchcraft and hauntings. He described the possible possession of a Mr. Meredith’s four children in Bristol. The children displayed the typical symptoms of possession: fits, uncontrolled laughter or crying, odd postures, bizarre speech, and vomiting pins. A neighbor woman even claimed they hung on the wall like flies or spiders.¹⁷³ The

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 156.

¹⁷¹ Ady, Thomas. *A Candle in the Dark: A Treatise Concerning the Nature of Witches and Witchcraft*. (London: n.p. 1656), 99.

¹⁷² Potts, Thomas. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster. With the Arraignement and Triall of Nineteen notorious Witches, at the Assizes and generall Gaole deliverie... 1612*. In *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*. Ed. Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.) “The St. Osyth Witch Trial.” Ed. Peter Haining. *The Witchcraft Papers: Contemporary Records of the Witchcraft Hysteria in Essex, 1560-1700*. (Secaucus, NJ: University Books, 1974.)

¹⁷³ Bovet, Richard. *Pandaemonium, or the Devil’s Cloyster*. (London: n.p. 1684), 168. For children who were proven to be frauds, their parents or other skeptical adults found that they had hidden pins in their clothes or bedsheets.

children's fits began in January, and by May with the help of physick they were well.¹⁷⁴ The physicians felt that their problems were caused by natural distemper. However Bovet did not agree.

Most demonologists just provided a description of the scenario they wanted to use to prove that witches were a reality. What is unique about Bovet's demonology is that he provided commentary and his opinion on some of the cases he included in his book. In this case he discussed possessed children. He gave his opinion that the doctors were incorrect in attributing the children's affliction to distemper. He listed reasons why they were really bewitched because their symptoms were more severe than that of natural distemper. He took the allegation that the children crawled along the walls seriously. He claimed that this was possible because they were bewitched. This behavior had been seen in other bewitched people, so this must be what was wrong with the children.¹⁷⁵

Richard Baxter's *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits* gave "authentic" examples of hauntings and bewitchment in seventeenth-century England and Scotland. In the county of Worcester in 1652, several children happened upon Catherine Huxley. The children began to harass her, and she told one child, Mary Ellins, that she would "have enough stones in your –."¹⁷⁶ Huxley was probably referring to the girl's urine because a month after the altercation, Mary Ellins began to pass stones in her urine. Authorities investigated the accused witch and found stones in her possession that were like the ones the girl had passed. Because of this the witch was taken to the assize, condemned, and executed. After the witch's execution, the girl recovered.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ "Physick" was the term early modern physician used for medicinal remedies.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 170.

¹⁷⁶ Baxter, Richard. *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits: Fully Evinced by Unquestionable Histories of Apparitions and Witchcrafts*. (London: n.p. 1691), 44.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 45.

Baxter included the case of an adolescent, Nathan Crab, who consulted a white witch for assistance because he believed he was bewitched.¹⁷⁸ The young man was on his way home from a church meeting when he became ill with a falling-fit. He seemed to “be push’d as if somebody tripped up his heels.”¹⁷⁹ He also foamed at the mouth. These symptoms continued for a year and a half before witchcraft was suspected. In response, Nathan’s father and sister consulted a cunning man, Mr. Gibbs, for a solution. Gibbs gave them “Papers of Powder” for Nathan but said that he would suffer different kinds of fits. A few weeks later the father consulted Gibbs again. This time Gibbs gave him a pouch that Nathan was to wear around his neck. After Nathan wore the pouch for a while, he was to burn it himself, and he would be cured. However, his mother removed the pouch and found that it only contained a piece of paper on which Gibbs had written a charm. The fits returned, but Nathan said he would rather have fits than a cure from the Devil. After his mother removed the pouch, Nathan recovered for awhile, but then his symptoms returned. He and his family tried several remedies and consulted physicians, but nothing worked. Baxter says that he heard this story in 1688, and that Nathan still suffered from his affliction in 1689.¹⁸⁰

Few skeptical voices stated their opinions regarding witchcraft. Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot were two men who spoke out against the practice of persecuting witches. Johann Weyer was a continental skeptic who questioned witchcraft in his book *De praestigiis daemonum (On The Tricks of Devils)*. Weyer attacked the witch hunts and set himself up as a defender of the deluded and weak.¹⁸¹ Like the Englishman Reginald Scot, Weyer questioned the

¹⁷⁸ A white witch was someone who practiced “countermagic” against *maleficia*. White witches were also known as cunning men or women.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 47.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 52.

¹⁸¹ Weyer, Johann. *De praestigiis daemonum (On The Tricks of Devils)*. Ed. Benjamin G. Kohl and H.C. Erik Midefort. (Pegasus Press: Asheville, 1998), xv.

practical problems of proving that an individual's neighbor had turned from Christ, signed a pact with the Devil, and confirmed the pact by committing horrible acts such as cannibalism, illicit intercourse with the Devil, and *maleficium*.¹⁸²

Weyer discussed what witches were supposed to do, and during his discourse he mentioned children, and what witches supposedly inflicted upon children. Throughout the work, Weyer stated that witches were unable to harm children. The first time he mentioned children was in a section entitled "Further Proofs of the Vanity of the Pact." His first statement was that even though people believed in the possibility that witches could harm children they could not. In reality witches were completely unable to harm children by using any type of ceremony. He stated that this idea was only a prompting from Satan. Apparently he meant that Satan gave supposed witches the idea that they could harm children. In the same section, Weyer stated that the claim that witches disinterred children's bodies from their graves was only a claim from the Devil. The Devil implanted this notion in people's minds while they slept. Weyer made the logical claim that if people took the time to examine the children's graves, the bodies would still be in the ground.¹⁸³

Weyer described women whom he called *lamiae* who he believed to be deluded by the Devil. He took these women seriously enough to quote another author who described these women's potion they used for "flying." Weyer stated that their flying was an illusion created by the Devil, but he believed that they actually made the ointment. The witches in typical fashion created the ointment from the cooked down fat of children. "They thicken the final residue from the boiling...they store it and make constant use of it."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ibid, xvi.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 91.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 113

Weyer gave an account of a husband's concubine accused of stealing the wife's new baby. Apparently the wife was taken ill and thought to be possessed. When she went into labor the witch-concubine managed to act as midwife to the laboring mother. The mother lost consciousness, and when she revived, she saw her infant. The next day the infant was gone and was not seen again. Weyer was skeptical about this story. He does not doubt that the events happened, but he believes Satan was responsible for all the events. He says that Satan caused the pregnant woman to suffer symptoms of possession. Weyer also thought that Satan created the illusion of a child for the new mother to see, and then he removed the baby to torment the mother. Weyer completely discounted the possibility that the concubine could have been a witch who was responsible for any of the mother's problems.¹⁸⁵

Weyer did not neglect to mention a possessed teenaged girl. He took this girl seriously, blaming Satan directly for the girl's possession and mentioned the girl accusing a local woman of bewitching her. The girl manifested the typical behavior of vomiting pins and needles. Weyer found a piece of black cloth in the girl's mouth that had pins and needles through it. Weyer also stated that the girl behaved in the typical fashion of a possessed person: her mouth closed shut, her hands contorted, her eyes wrenched out of line, and her body wracked in pain. The girl's father suggested that the group make the sign of the cross over her, but Weyer said that he did not do this because the sign was only a symbol for Christ's death. Weyer then may have prayed over the girl because he quoted several Bible verses. Weyer did not record the girl's fate.

In 1584, Reginald Scot wrote his skeptical *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, in which he examined the existence of witchcraft. Scot was not a freethinker in the sense of questioning the existence of the Devil, but he believed that searching for witches was misguided. He felt that the women whom the authorities accused of witchcraft were just old melancholics who should be

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 131.

pitied. Scot believed people tended to blame their misfortunes on the Devil. This was misguided because God was responsible for all things, and people should accept the misfortunes that happened to them.

Scot, like writers who believed in the reality of witches, wrote about what witches were supposed to do. As he explored witchcraft he mentioned children several times. Inquisitors sometimes focused on the child of the accused witch to convince the child to testify against his or her mother.¹⁸⁶

Using various sources, Scot listed presumptions that could lead to witchcraft accusations. If a woman killed her child, and no one knew how she did it, authorities would not presume she killed it unless she were a witch. Based upon that assumption, the authorities would execute the mother. Another presumption Scot noted was that if a woman was suspected to be a witch, and her child went missing, the authorities were to assume she had sacrificed it to the Devil.¹⁸⁷ Scot also stated that authorities could torture little children “at the first dash,” but, citing Bodin they should not torture old women.¹⁸⁸

In the ninth chapter of the First Book of the *Discoverie*, Scot listed several crimes that authorities accused witches of committing. When he listed a crime, he then followed it with his commentary. Witches were believed to sacrifice their children to Satan before baptism, by thrusting a needle into the baby’s brain. Scot then stated that this claim was “follie to believe it,” and the source of the story, Bodin, should not be believed. He also mentioned the claim that witches burned the bodies of the children after they sacrificed them. He concluded that readers should not believe this claim because this statement probably came from tortured prisoners.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Scot, Reginald. *The Discovery of Witchcraft*. (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), 15.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 20.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 21.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 25.

In the first chapter of his Third Book, Scot listed several Catholic writers as the sources for the demonic pact. Scot may have been trying to push through an anti-Catholic bias because he neglected to quote any Protestant authorities regarding the pact. Scot said that, according to his sources, the Devil taught witches to make unguents that included the typical ingredient of children's fat.¹⁹⁰ The witches boiled the child's remains in a cauldron until they were drinkable.¹⁹¹ Again, Scot denied this allegation as he did with the other claims he refuted.

Whether a writer was a believing demonologist or a skeptic, he did not deviate from the same message regarding the behavior of witches. Witches' actions regarding children were not a large part of the writers' books, but each demonologist took time to mention children at least once. Patterns regarding children appeared in each work, and from the *Malleus Malificarum* into the seventeenth-century, the ideas one demonologist mentioned usually emerged in the work of a later writer. Kramer depicted children as murder victims, as material for flying unguents, as victims of dedication to Satan, as child-witches, and as those seduced into witchcraft. In 1563, Weyer also wrote about using children's fat for flying unguents. In 1580, Bodin mentioned witches dedicating children to Satan, using a child's head for divination, enlisting a child-witch, and using children's fat for flying unguents. Possessed children and adolescents also appeared in the demonologists' works. For example Weyer and Boguet described possessed adolescent girls. Into the next century two English writers, Bovet in 1684 and Baxter in 1691, mentioned possessed children and adolescents.

Continental and English demonologists obviously believed that children were necessary for the practice of witchcraft. Children feature in each demonology as playing significant roles in the witch trials. Children's functions regarding witchcraft followed the same patterns:

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 31.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 32.

- murder victims
- victims of dedication to Satan
- child-witches
- witnesses for the prosecution
- victims of bewitchment or possession
- victims of seduction into witchcraft

As demonological theory developed, and as trials occurred, these roles for children became regular occurrences. Theory became reality in England. In English trials children appeared in four of the six functions: murder victims, child-witches, witnesses for the prosecution, and victims of bewitchment or possession.¹⁹² Witnesses, parents, and courts took the behaviors, testimony, and deaths of children as manifestations of witchcraft and believed them to be truth. The demonologies show that theory put into practice could result in serious consequences.

¹⁹² *The Examination and Confession of Certain Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex Before the Quenes Majesties Judges, the XXVI daye of July Anno 1566.* *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618.* Ed. Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.) London: 1566. *A Detection of Damnable Driftes. Practized by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsford in Essex at the Assizes there holden, which were executed in Aprill.* London: n.p., 1579. *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618.* Ed. Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.) *A Rehearsall both straunge and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile, Alias Rockingham, Mother Dutton, Mother Devell, Mother Margaret, Gower notorious Witches, apprehended at winsore in the Countie of Barks. And at Abbington arraigned, condemned, and executed on the 26 daye of Februarie laste Anno. 1579.* London, 1579. *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618.* Ed. Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.) *The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys, arraigned, conuicted and executed at the last Assises at Huntingdon, for the bewitching of the fiue daughters of Robert Throckmorton, Exquire, and diuers other persons, with sundrie Diuellish and grievous torments: And also for the bewitching to death of Lady Cromwell, the like hat not been heard of in this age.* London: 1593. *Witchcraft in England.* Ed. Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.) Bradwell, Stephen. *Mary Glovers Late Woeful Case, Together with Her Joyfull Deliverance.* London: n.p., 1603. In *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan England: Edward Jorden and the Mary Glover Case.* Ed. Michael MacDonald. (London, N.Y.: Travistock/Routledge, 1991.) "The St. Osyth Witch Trial." Ed. Peter Haining. *The Witchcraft Papers: Contemporary Records of the Witchcraft Hysteria in Essex, 1560-1700.* (Secaucus, NJ: University Books, 1974.)

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ENGLISH WITCHCRAFT

Introduction

When we think of witch trials, and witch trials that involved children, the events of 1592 in Salem, Massachusetts, come to mind. However, often neglected is a long precedent established in England regarding children and witch trials. During the mid-sixteenth- to the end of the seventeenth-centuries, children played an important role in the miscarriage of justice that was known as the English witch trials.¹⁹³

The English witch trials in which children appeared were a blueprint for what later happened in New England. Most of the shocking events associated with the Salem girls, and the subsequent trials and executions, were essentially duplicates of English trials. In fact, it is highly likely that the bewitched girls in Salem learned what they knew about bewitchment from the infamous trials of their English predecessors.

Children were significant players in English witchcraft trials. What stands out so obviously about these participants is their age. They were allowed to testify despite the fact that in other types of trials the legal age to testify was fourteen.¹⁹⁴ The testimony of children as young as seven and eight years old helped build cases against accused witches.

Most of the children testified to being bewitched or possessed. A popular belief was that the possessed person was not responsible for his or her state of possession. Therefore, a second party had to be liable for bewitchment. Often, the symptoms of an unexplained illness were all that was necessary to suggest that a child had been bewitched. If the child was old enough, he or

¹⁹³ The first English witchcraft trial was at Chelmsford in 1566. Agnes Brown, 12, testified against one of the defendants. Her testimony was one of the factors that led to the execution of Agnes Waterhouse. *The Examination and Confession of Certain Wytches at Chensforde ... 1566. Witchcraft in England.* Ed. Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991), 95.

¹⁹⁴ Russell Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology.* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1959), 85.

she frequently made the accusation against the witch. If the child was too young to speak, often a parent made the accusation.

Many social changes of the early modern period paved the way for children to be allowed to testify. First, the focus on witchcraft as a crime spread throughout continental Europe and England, and adults and graphic, fiery sermons exposed children to the fears of witchcraft. Eventually, the fears of adults would become so focused on the power of witchcraft that the courts allowed underage children to give testimony against accused witches. Finally, the pamphlet literature that served as information for the general public multiplied. These pamphlets exposed a greater number of people to witch beliefs and how bewitched people behaved.

As children took on the social roles of accuser and actor, the adults were allowed to experience vicariously the children's roles. The children, by acting bewitched, allowed the adults to play out their own hidden beliefs and fears, and the children gave the adults the "evidence" that the courts required. Therefore, the adults could create a community purge to rid themselves of a marginalized person who embodied the hidden anxieties of Christianity that the collective community feared and loathed. This scenario was played out in the case of Thomas Darling and Alice Gooderige. Thomas feigned his possession, but he served as a means for the community to rid themselves of a marginalized individual, Gooderige.

In this section I review the function of children in English witchcraft and the witch trials. I also review the English witchcraft laws, which provided the vehicle for children's participation. Pamphlet literature was important for the dissemination of witch beliefs, and children learned from these printed sources about witchcraft and how to act possessed. Included in this section is an analysis of this literature and its relevance to children. Finally, I look at the social rewards

children received for their participation in the witch trials and for their outrageous behavior. Children had their reasons to act as they did, and I examine why.

English Witchcraft Statutes

Between the Elizabethan witchcraft statute of 1563 and the repeal of James I's 1604 Act in 1736, possibly 500 people were executed for witchcraft in England.¹⁹⁵ Until 1563, witchcraft was not considered a secular crime.¹⁹⁶ Witches were charged under English civil law with murder, and the courts would use a witchcraft accusation to prove the act of murder, or the evil deeds known as *maleficia*.

The "Act Against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts" of 1563 was split into three types of crimes:

- human death
- property crimes
- divination and charm making¹⁹⁷

Except for a human death, on a first offence, those convicted of witchcraft were given prison sentences that were typically one year long. After the second conviction, the condemned witch would be executed. What is important about the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act is that witchcraft is not defined as a thought crime. The law was very specific as to what one must have suffered to press a charge of witchcraft against an individual.¹⁹⁸ The Act interpreted crimes of witchcraft as something physical, and the defendant had to be convicted of actually harming another person. There were no accusations of invisible witches' Sabbats or beliefs, unless some measurable tragedy was attributable to an accused witch. Even though the evidence used to convict a witch

¹⁹⁵ Sharpe, J. A. *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England, 1550-1750*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), 7.

¹⁹⁶ A.D. 1563. 5 Eliz., c. 16. *Witchcraft in England*. Ed. Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991), 54.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 55.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 56.

was not something that would be sufficient in a modern court, the accuser at least had to show some measurable damage to himself, his property, or his family. Also, the act did not specify how old the accuser must be in order to testify in court, and during the first witchcraft trial in England (1566),¹⁹⁹ one of the testifiers was twelve year-old Agnes Brown.

Parliament eventually passed the new witchcraft statute in 1563. Witchcraft was made a felony, but this law was less severe than the original 1542 law because it gave a gradation of offenses and penalties, where some offenses were considered more serious than others. This statute outlawed the following behaviors:

Item 1

- invoking / conjuring evil spirits
- using witchcraft to kill a person

Punishment

First offense: hanging and loss of benefit of clergy and sanctuary

Item 2

- injuring a person's body
- damaging a person's property

Punishment

First offense: one year in jail and quarterly appearances in the pillory.

Second offense: hanging

Item 3

- sing witchcraft to find treasure, lost or stolen goods; provoke someone to unlawful love; or hurt anyone in his or her body or goods

Punishment

First offense: one year in jail and quarterly appearances in the pillory.

Second offense: life imprisonment and lose all property²⁰⁰

Two points are uncertain, however. Items two and three both state that an accused witch could be convicted for damaging a person's goods. The law was not distinct about what items fell under

¹⁹⁹Robbins, 64.

²⁰⁰A.D. 1563. 5 Eliz., c. 16., 54.

points two or three. Interpreting these items may have been left up to the justice of the peace when he took evidence from the complainant.

Elizabeth I died in 1603, and her cousin James I from Scotland succeeded her. During his next year in England, he saw the passage of another witchcraft statute. The background to this law is unclear. However, it reflects possible changes to perceptions of witchcraft, and perhaps lawmakers felt the witchcraft statute should address issues that the courts were facing. This 1604 law was harsher than the 1563 law because it divided offenses into two categories, one of which required an automatic death penalty. For the lesser category, a second offense was hanging, whereas in 1563 the penalty had been confiscation of property and life imprisonment. The new law criminalized the following:

Item 1

- invoking a wicked spirit
- consulting or rewarding any evil spirit for any intent or purpose
- disinterring a dead body to be used in witchcraft
- using witchcraft to kill or injure a person

Punishment

First Offense: the penalty is death.

Item 2

- using witchcraft to locate buried treasure, lost or stolen goods; provoke someone to unlawful love; destroy someone's property; hurt someone in his or her body even if it does not work

Punishment

First Offense: one year in jail without bail and quarterly appearances in the pillory.

Second offense: hanging and loss of benefit of clergy and sanctuary.²⁰¹

Besides being harsher than the 1563 law, this new law criminalized two new items. First the new statute forbade feeding or rewarding spirits in exchange for any thing. This point is referring to the witch's imp, which had figured prominently in English trial literature before the

²⁰¹ A.D. 1604 1 Jac. I., c. 12. *Witchcraft in England*. Ed. by Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991), 57.

passage of this law. People believed the imp to be a vampirish spirit that sucked blood from various places of the witch's body called "teats." In exchange for the witch's blood, this imp would perform acts of mischief, such as harming neighbors or their property. The law also mentions "covenanting" with spirits as being illegal. This was possibly a vague reference to the demonic pact that was central to the demonological beliefs of continental witchcraft. This new crime of "covenanting" with evil spirits would send many witches to the gallows who had not committed murder.

Pamphlets Spread Popular Knowledge of Witch Beliefs

An increase in literacy is often associated with the Elizabethan age. Therefore, more people became familiar with the ideas contained within the pamphlets or chapbooks that described the events of witchcraft trials. Frequently in England, the public's access to information regarding witchcraft came from written sources, not official proclamations, confessions at executions, or even sermons.²⁰² The pamphlets were a popular source of information to the public for a variety of things; they were the tabloids of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries. They were cheap, and publishers could mass-produce them relatively quickly. Even during this period people were aware of the sensationalism of which the pamphlet writers were guilty. The writer who sought to explain the matter of the frauds Rachel Pinder and Agnes Briggs, complained in his own work about the information "so constantly reported and spread by their printed books ... it is mere vanity and falsehood."²⁰³

Many of the witch beliefs that writers described in the pamphlets were already part of English culture, but the pamphlets allowed for a wider distribution of those beliefs. They also

²⁰² Rosen, *Witchcraft in England*, 20.

²⁰³ *The Disclosing of a late couterfeyted Possession by the Devyl of two Maydens within the City of London*. London: n.p., 1574. *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*. Ed. Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991), 231.

may have helped make some of the beliefs that were circulating in popular society more concrete. For instance, if someone were sentenced for injuring a neighbor's child, and a writer described this crime in a circulated pamphlet, readers might take being injured by witchcraft more seriously rather than just hearing about it in gossip. Also, seeing a conviction in print reinforced the law and made the consequences of witchcraft more concrete.

Another important point about the witchcraft literature was that some literature mentioned previous pamphlets, demonologies, or trials. This suggests that later writers were using previous trials and pamphlets to create knowledge as well as support their arguments against witchcraft when they presented their pamphlets. As a result of trials, writers produced literature, which created subject matter for public consumption, and if not helping create new witch belief, at least reinforced present witch belief. As witch belief continued, more accusations continued to happen which caused more trials, and in turn writers generated more pamphlets. The next group of pamphlets then helped reinforce more witch beliefs.

Pamphlets mentioned other literary sources about witchcraft and witchcraft trials; thus previous trials created subject matter for pamphlet writers. For instance, the writer of the pamphlet about the trial of the witches of Northamptonshire, *The Witches of Northamptonshire*,²⁰⁴ wrote about people who might have been skeptical about witches. He admonished the reader with references to previous trials and judges. He did not mention any trials by name, but he talked about convictions of witches and the sufficient evidence against them. Then he wrote that some maintained that the devil could do nothing by witches. This had to be a reference to Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, where he stated that disasters

²⁰⁴ *The Witches of Northamptonshire*. Agnes Browne. Arthur Bill. Joane Baughan. Hellen Jenkenson. [Witches] Mary Barber. Who were all executed at Northampton the 22. of July last. 1612. *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing*. Ed. Marion Gibson. (Routledge: London, 2000), 197.

happen to people, that disasters are part of God's master plan, and not the action of witches.²⁰⁵

The writer of the pamphlet used this trial to prove skeptics wrong.

The pamphlet that described the Flowers family who allegedly killed two sons of the Earl of Rutland, *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Joan Flower neere Bever Castle...*, also referred to previous pamphlets or demonologies. It mentioned three demonologies: *Dæmonologie*, written by James I when he was King of Scotland; another treatise by a pastor, Alexander Roberts, regarding the witchcraft case of a Mary Smith; and *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcrafts* by another minister, George Gifford. *Dæmonologie* would have been widely available in England by the time Philip and Margaret Flowers were put on trial in 1618. The writer then referred to three previous cases of witchcraft to bolster the case he is trying to make: the famous witches of Lancashire in 1612; Jennet Preston at Lancaster in 1612; and Mary and Mother Sutton of Milton Miles.²⁰⁶ Finally, to reinforce the reasons witches were being tried and condemned, he quoted the Bible, then England's law and an impetus of trial activity: "Let not a witch live saith God...let them dye (saith the law of England)..."²⁰⁷

Another author who referred to previous literature and witchcraft cases was Mathew Hopkins' partner, John Stearne. He wrote an apology of their witch hunting practices in his long pamphlet *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*. He referred to sources that he drew upon to justify where he found his information. He mentioned reading about "approved relations touching the arraignment and condemnation of witches."²⁰⁸ He named James I's *Dæmonologie*

²⁰⁵ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 54.

²⁰⁶ *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Joan Flower neere Bever Castle...*, 9.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 45.

²⁰⁸ Stearne, John. *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft, Containing These Severall particulars; That there were Witches Called Bad Witches, and Witches Untruly Called Good or White, and What Manner of People They*

as well. To justify his claim that witches existed, he gave a long litany of reasons, first starting with God's laws against witches. His seventh reason supporting the existence of witches mentioned the truth of previous histories and the many "relations"²⁰⁹ of witches' arraignment and convictions. This reference to histories and revelations can only mean that Stearne had been exposed to the popular literature of trial accounts, and that he probably applied his knowledge of these to his own witch-hunting activities. Stearne referred to three famous cases he was familiar with. When he was making his case that the majority of "hurting" witches were women, he listed the cases of the Witches of Warboys from 1593, the Pendle Forest witches in Lancaster in 1612, and the Flower women who killed two sons of the Earl of Rutland.²¹⁰ He also referred to an instance that he read about, whereby the authorities forced a witch to touch a dead body of a supposed victim, and the body bled. He was probably referring to the 1612 Lancaster case, because the authorities imposed this test upon Jennet Preston during that trial.²¹¹ Finally, Stearne mentioned Thomas Cooper's *The Mystery of Witchcraft*, which was a well-known English demonology that discussed the limited power of the devil.²¹²

The authors responsible for the witchcraft pamphlets varied. Typically, the author was not a participant in the events that led up to the trial, nor was he an official connected to the trial. The judge of a trial might have commissioned the work, but most likely he would not have written the pamphlet.²¹³ However, Lord Brian Darcy used the pseudonym W.W. to write about the 1582 trial at St. Osyth that he adjudicated.²¹⁴ Finally, Edward Fairfax is an example in which

Be, and How They May Bee Knowne; with Many Particulars thereunto Tending. (London : William Wilson, 1648), A3.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 4.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 11.

²¹¹ Potts, 261.

²¹² Stearne, 26.

²¹³ Tatem, Moira. *The Witches of Warboys.* (Cambridge: Cambridgeshire County Council, 1993),10.

²¹⁴"The St. Osyth Witch Trial," 43. Moira Tatem states that Judge Fenner commissioned the work.

the writer of the pamphlet was a relative who participated in the events that led to the witchcraft trial.²¹⁵

MacFarlane notes that one significant factor about the English witchcraft pamphlets is that they tracked the buildup of aggravations from which accusations of witchcraft arose between neighbors.²¹⁶ The most typical accusations were refusing to return borrowed goods, constantly begging favors, cursing one's neighbors, and gossiping. If an individual were charged with any of these behaviors over a period of years, and if any tragedies could be attributed to that person, that was usually enough to land him or her (usually her) into the local Assize court on a charge of witchcraft.

However, for the purposes of this paper, the most significant factor about the witchcraft pamphlets is that they were a means to spread witch beliefs, stereotypical behavior of "bewitched" victims, and successful results of various witch trials. Therefore, if a greater number of literate adults were able to absorb this information, so were more children, either by reading the pamphlets themselves, or being told this information by others who could read.

How Did Children Learn About Witchcraft?

Children most likely learned about witchcraft from three sources:

- adults in the community
- parents
- witchcraft pamphlets

Adults in the Community

One example of a child who learned about bewitchment from a man he knew in the community, was the thirteen-year-old Boy of Bilson, William Perry. His case took place in 1622, and he behaved as most afflicted children had in previous years. The boy's father consulted Catholic

²¹⁵Fairfax, Edward. *Daemonologia: A Discourse on Witchcraft*. Ed. William Grainge. Harrogate: unpublished, 1882. Repr. New York: n.p., 1971.

²¹⁶Sharpe, J. A. *Instruments of Darnkness*, 208.

priests who tried to exorcise William.²¹⁷ After the “papists” were unsuccessful, William decided to accuse a local woman, Joan Cox, of bewitching him. The authorities brought her to trial for bewitching William and causing his possession, but after the court questioned her, they let her go.²¹⁸ However, Thomas Morton, the Bishop of Lichfield, was suspicious of William, and proved him to be a fraud. William eventually admitted to the Bishop that an old man he called Thomas had trained him in the art of fraudulent possession.²¹⁹ During the summer Assizes of 1621 the authorities required William to publicly acknowledge what he had done and ask forgiveness of the Almighty and Joan Cox. He also asked the country, which he had “notoriously and wickedly scandalized,” for its forgiveness.²²⁰

Parents Teaching about Witchcraft

Children also learned about witchcraft from their parents and older relatives. For instance, the Throckmorton children’s maternal uncle, Gilbert Pickering, was a minister,²²¹ and he probably had a special interest in the topic of witchcraft. He also was one of the authors of the pamphlet describing the Throckmorton case.²²² The Ann Gunter case is an example of children learning about witchcraft and bewitchment from parents and elders. Ann became sick and showed signs of possible possession. Soon after, friends of her family brought in books by John Darrell and the Throckmortons.²²³ That Brian Gunter, Ann’s father, read these books is certain,

²¹⁷ *Boy of Bilson, or a true discoverie of the late notorious impostures of certain Romish priests in their pretended exorcism or expulsion of the devil out of a young boy named William Perry.* (London: 1622), 63.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 60, 62.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

²²¹ Tatem, 11.

²²² Rosen, 229.

²²³ Robbins, 238.

because during the trial he complained that “his daughter[s] could not have that justice w[hi]ch Mr. Throgmorton’s children hadd.”²²⁴

Learning from the Witchcraft Pamphlets

The first English witchcraft trial took place in Chelmsford in 1566, and the pamphlet was published in 1567.²²⁵ This pamphlet set the stage for the written dissemination of witch beliefs and created a script for accusers. Eventually, this pamphlet and subsequent pamphlets created blueprints for the behaviors of bewitched victims. In the 1566 Chelmsford trial, Agnes Brown, age 12, was the first child to testify in a witchcraft trial. Her testimony would be repeated frequently in subsequent English witch trials. Agnes claimed to have been afflicted with a typical symptom of victims of witchcraft,²²⁶ i.e., lameness, and she also insisted the witch’s familiar tormented her. Her claims would find their way into many witchcraft pamphlets.

As the witch trial phenomena developed through England, the behavior of bewitched children and testimony of children at trials directly mirrored that which had been written about in previous pamphlets. For instance, in 1593 the Throckmorton girls accused an old woman who lived close to their home of bewitching them.²²⁷ Like Agnes Brown (1566), the Throckmorton girls claimed Mother Samuel’s familiar tormented them.²²⁸ The girls displayed the typical symptoms of bewitchment, such as hallucinations, seizures, paralysis, and odd behavior in the presence of the accused witch. Eventually, the accused witch was hanged for her alleged crimes. Twenty-six years later, the Fairfax daughters had the same behaviors and symptoms of the Throckmorton girls. Edward Fairfax, the father, was very distressed about the problems of his

²²⁴Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 209.

²²⁵*The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde ... 1566.*, 72.

²²⁶*Ibid.* p. 80.

²²⁷*The Most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys...1593.*, 241.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

household, and attempted to bring the victimizer of his children to justice. However, he was unsuccessful.²²⁹

Ann Gunter definitely learned from the witchcraft pamphlets. If she did not read them directly, her father must have told her about the contents of the pamphlets. Ann admitted that she had seen “the book of the wyches of Warboys (Throckmorton case) & some other bookes.”²³⁰ Ann claimed that the familiar of the witch she accused had the same name as the witch, Mother Samuel, who was one of the accused witches in the Throckmorton case.²³¹ Finally, the Throckmorton book explained to Ann how to throw fits,²³² and she insisted that the accused witch recite the same charm created by the Throckmorton girls which they had forced upon their identified witch.²³³

Given the behavior of the children described in later witchcraft pamphlets, a general line of succession can be traced case to case.²³⁴ We cannot definitively assume that children learned bewitchment behaviors only from these pamphlets, but the pamphlets surely played a role in teaching children about witch beliefs, and behavior of the bewitched. The pamphlets must have had an impact because people from geographically separate locations learned the same information somehow. The fraudulently bewitched maidens in London (Rachel Pinder and Agnes Briggs),²³⁵ and the legitimately bewitched Throckmorton and the Fairfaxes displayed the same symptoms and made the same accusations. Widely dispersed printed information would be an easy means for these girls to learn identical information. Granted, long standing oral folk

²²⁹ Fairfax, 25.

²³⁰ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 208.

²³¹ Robbins, 238.

²³² Sharpe, 208.

²³³ Robbins, 208.

²³⁴ This can be seen from the first Chelmsford trial to the Throckmorton trial. After that the pattern was definitely set from “legitimate” cases to those that were definitely proven to be false. Ann Gunter was a good example of this.

²³⁵ *The Disclosing of a late counterfeyted Possession by the Devyl of two Maydens ... 1574.*, 231.

tradition was powerful, but widely circulated pamphlets about previous witch trials may also have provided them with ideas for their performances and accusations.

Statistical Information Regarding English Witch Trials

Historians can never collect complete statistical information regarding the English witchcraft trials and the people who fell victim to them. Because a large number of trial records are missing, historians have to rely for the most part on pamphlets. There are ample extant pamphlets, but only a small number of them still exist relative to the number of trials and number of pamphlets that were probably printed. Many of the pamphlets read like the sensational and biased tabloids of today, however, they do provide us with information about the trials. We can hope the information the pamphlets present to us is accurate, but unless more sources are discovered, pamphlets and spotty court records are all that will be available to us.

I studied twenty-four witch trial pamphlets that involved children. The following tables are broken into statistics from twenty-four pamphlets and quotes from one trial from a secondary source.^{236 237} All tables are for years 1566 – 1664.

²³⁶ Sharpe, 209.

²³⁷ Information comes from the following pamphlets. *The Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches. Arraigned and by Justice Condemned and Executed at Chelmsforde in the Countye of Essex, the 5. day of Julye, last past.* London: n.p., 1589. *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618.* Edited by Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.)

A Detection of Damnable Driftes. Practized by three Witches ... which were executed in Aprill.

A Discovery of the Fraudulent practices of John Darrel, Bachelor of Artes, concerning the pretended Possession and Dispossession of William Somers of Nottingham. (London, 1599.) (*Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618.* Ed. Barbara Rosen. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.)

A Rehearsall both straunge and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile, ... 1579.

A True and Exact Relation of the Severall Informations, Examinations, and Confessions of the late Witches Arraigned and Executed in the County of Essex. Who Were Arraigned and Condemned at the Late Session, Holden at Chelmsford Before the Right Honorable Robert Earle of Warwick, and Severall of His Majestie's Justices of Peace, the 29 of July, 1645. (London: 1645.)

A tryal of witches at the Assizes held at Bury St. Edmonds for the county of Suffolk on the tenth day of March, 1664, before Sir Matthew Hale, Kt., then the Lord Chief Baron of His Majestie's Court of Exchequer [1682]. (London: J. R. Smith, 1838.)

Bradwell.

Fairfax.

Table 1

Witches Connected with Children and Adolescents 1566 - 1644

Number of witches tried for harming or killing children	86
Adult witch executed	50
Adult witch imprisoned	2
Adult witch died in prison awaiting execution	3
Fate not recorded	2

Table 1 outlines the fate of witches. Sometimes multiple witches were tried in the same trial, but only some witches were accused of harming children. The eighty-six witches listed in Table 1 represent the witches accused of killing or harming children.

Holinshed, Raphael. *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. Extract. *The Witchcraft Papers: Contemporary Records of the Witchcraft Hysteria in Essex, 1560-1700*. Edited by Peter Haining. (Secaucus, NJ: University Books, 1974.)

“Katherine Malpas.” In *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*. Edited by Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.)

The Disclosing of a late couterfeyted Possession by the Devyl of two Maydens ... 1574.

The Most Cruell and bloody murther committed by an Inkeepers Wife, called Annis Dell... With the severall Witchcrafts, and most damnable practises of one Johane Harrison and her Daughter... London: n.p., 1606. In *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*. Edited by Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.)

The Most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys..., 1593.

Potts, Thomas. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster. With the Arraignement and Triall of Nineteen notorious Witches, at the Assizes and generall Gaole deliverie...1612*. In *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*. Edited by Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991.)

The Most wonderful and true story of a certain witch named Alse Gooderige of Stapenhill, who was arraigned and convicted at Derby, at the assizes there. As also a true report of the strange torments of Thomas Darling, a boy of thirteen years of age that was possessed by the devil, with his horrible fit and terrible apparitions by him uttered at Burton-upon-Trent in the county of Stafford, and of his marvellous deliverance. London: 1596.)

Sharpe, J. A. *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England, 1550-1750*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996.)

The Boy of Bilson... 1622.

The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde ... 1566.

The severall factes of Witch-crafte, approved and laid to the charge of Margaret Harkett, of the Towne of Stanmore, in the Countie of Middlesex, for which she was arraigned and condemned at the Sessions house, before her Majesties Justices the 17. of February, and executed for the same at Tyborne this 19. of February 1585. *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing*. Ed. Marion Gibson. (Routledge: London, 2000.)

“The St. Osyth Witch Trial.”

Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, for notable villainies by them committed both by Land and Water. With a strange and most true triall how to know whether a woman be a Witch or not. London: 1613. . *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing*. Ed. Marion Gibson. (Routledge: London, 2000.)

The Witches of Huntingdon, Their Examinations and Confessions... 1646.

The Witches of Northamptonshire... 1621.

The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch, late of Edmonton, her conuition and condemnation and death. (London: 1621.)

The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, ... 1619.

Table 2
Numbers of Children involved in Witchcraft and Witch Trials

Number of children – victims and accusers	91
Child as accuser that starts the trouble - accusers	10
Female children	36
Male children	21
Sex undetermined	34
Average age of testifier	12
Age of victim undetermined	69

The number children included in Table 2 represents all children mentioned in the pamphlets, and some of these children were not involved in trials because their cases never made it to court.

Most writers did not list the ages of the victims, so it is impossible to give the median age of the victims. Most writers only listed the children as “children,” without being more specific. Some writers listed the children as “nurse child,” which presumably means that the child was between 0 to 1-1/2 years old.

Table 3
Afflictions of Children Death and Bewitchment

Death of bewitched child	40
Affliction of child (ill, lame, stupor, nosebleeds)	21

Table 3 lists what witches were believed to do to children, killing them and bewitching them through witchcraft. Afflicting a child means all the things witches supposedly did to harm children, including laming, obsession and illness, but not including possession, which is listed separately.

Table 4
Possession and Feigned Possession

Possession of child	12
Feigned possession	7
Child hallucinations from possession:	
Familiar	6
Witch	7
Other *	1

When children were possessed they often claimed that they saw apparitions. Table 4 lists what children claimed they saw. Usually children saw the witch or her familiar. "Other" refers to hallucinations that did not include the witch or her particular familiar. Helen Fairfax saw a young man who offered to marry her.²³⁸

Table 5
Child and Adolescent Witches

Child-witch executed	1
Adolescent witch arrested – Thomas Lever	1
Adolescent witch acquitted – Joan Waterhouse	1

England produced one child witch, Alizon Device. She was executed in 1612. The other two witches were adolescents, Joan Waterhouse, 18, and Thomas Lever, 13. Waterhouse was acquitted at her trial. Lever's fate is unknown, because the author who wrote about Thomas said he remained in prison, but he did not know what happened to the boy.

²³⁸ Fairfax, 31.

Table 6
Children's Evidence in Court

Testimony against relative	10
Testimony against neighbor	8
Bodily testimony against neighbor	11
Parental evidence on behalf of children	56

Children presented evidence two ways: they gave verbal testimony against neighbors and relatives or they acted out their bewitched symptoms in court. As for parental evidence, parents gave testimony in court on behalf of children if the child was too young to talk or had died.

Table 7
Children's Status

Child victims from same family	19
Social status relative to witch:	
Unknown	4
Higher	74
Same	10

Table 7 lists children's status and how many children in the same family were afflicted. Regarding social status, children were either higher or the same relative to the witch. In some cases the children's social status is unknown.

As accusers, children tended to participate in two ways. They either gave verbal testimony against the accused witch, or they acted out their bewitched symptoms inside or out of court. Anne Gunter, Elizabeth and Deborah Pacy, Elizabeth and Helen Fairfax, and Mary Glover demonstrated their symptoms in court. William Rabet, Jennet Device, and Joan Cuny's grandsons gave oral testimony. Also, the children accused either two groups of individuals: neighbors or relatives, usually their mothers. Finally, if a child were too young to talk in court and provide evidence of what had happened to him or her, the parents testified or deposed for the child. Figure 1 provides a percentage breakdown of children whom testified against either a

relative or a neighbor. Figure 2 gives percentages for how the testimony of children was given in court: verbal, performance, or in the case of a child who was unable to communicate, a parent.²³⁹

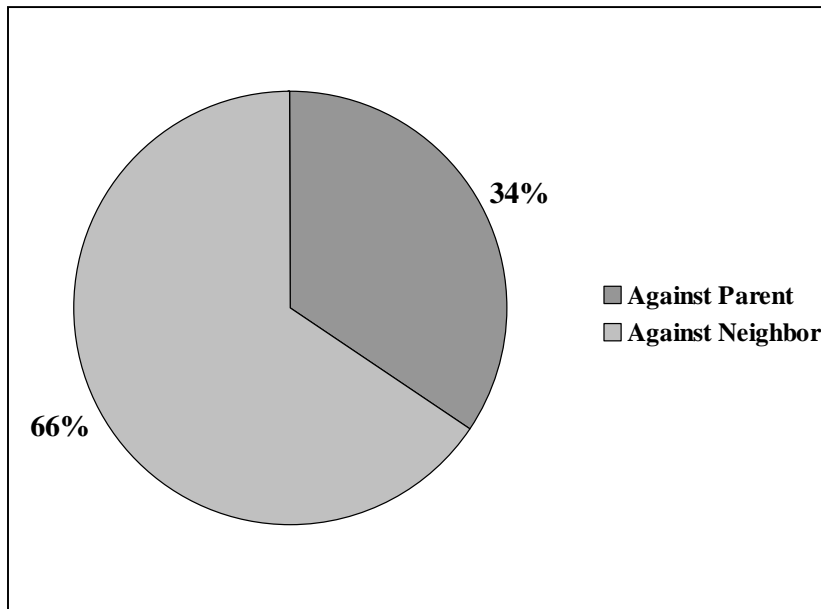


Figure 1: Children's Testimony in Court

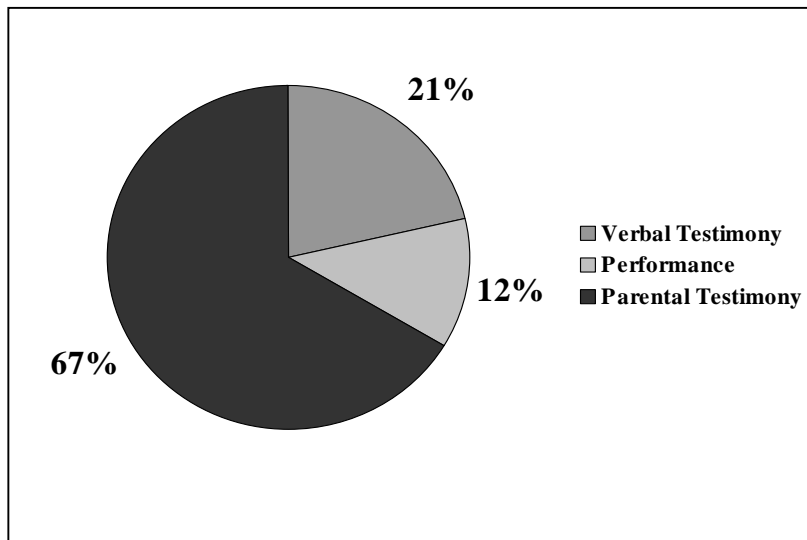


Figure 2: Children's Information in Court

²³⁹ Parental evidence was counted when a child was dead or too young to talk.

Narratives of Children in Witchcraft Pamphlets

All of the witchcraft pamphlets followed a typical rhetorical pattern. They began with a preface that paid some sort of homage to the person who commissioned the work of the pamphlet. The preface typically contained admonishments to the reader to follow the laws of God and remember how easily Satan could snatch the unwary into his grip. Finally, the preface ended with supplications to the Almighty to bless the following work so that the reader might learn from it and reject evil. The pamphlets then began by giving background information to the reader. Also, the writers include informative section headings to describe who was deposing against the witch and which witch that information concerned.

Information was very sparse in the pamphlets regarding the role children played; in places a child was listed as if he or she were property of the parent. Often in the case of very young children, the writer did not mention gender. However, in accounts written by parents or relatives of afflicted children, the accounts became so detailed that the writer essentially recorded every sleeping and waking moment of the afflicted children in the household.

Children tended to play five roles in the pamphlet literature:

- victims who died
- child or adolescent-witches
- witnesses for the prosecution
- victims of bewitchment or possession
- children and adolescents who feigned possession

Unlike the continental demonologies, English pamphlet writers do not mention children being used as material for flying unguents. However, was one reference told of a child being enlisted into witchcraft. Alizon Device testified that her grandmother, Elizabeth Southern, told Alizon to

let Southern's familiar suck on her.²⁴⁰ Here Southern played the role of recruiter by introducing her granddaughter to Southern's imp.

Victims Who Died

The most common way very young children appeared as characters in the witchcraft literature, was as victims who died. Forty out of the ninety children described in the witchcraft pamphlets died. The reader does not read the words of these children, only those of their parents. These children were frequently anonymous, unless they were from a prominent family such as the Earl of Rutland's. Joan Flower and her two daughters, Margaret and Phillip, bewitched his oldest son John to death in 1618.²⁴¹ Typically most children were called the child of -, or the daughter of -. Writers did not list the death of a child as a special crime. Usually the writer included the murder in the litany of the witches' crimes.

The writers tended to list the children based on their parents' surnames, no name or sometimes the writer simply referred to them as "nurse child." In the following trials the children who died are listed in the following manner:

- 1566 Chelmsford Trial: John Auger's child
- 1585 Middlesex: nurse child
- 1606 Annis Dell: young child
- 1612 Northampton Trial: young child²⁴²

Two trials had large numbers of children die. For instance, in the 1582 witch trial at St. Osyth at Chelmsford, five witches bewitched eight of their neighbor's children to death.²⁴³ Brian Darcy did not list any of those children by name. All of the children were listed by their parents' surnames. During the 1645 Chelmsford trial there were several accusations of witchcraft causing

²⁴⁰ Potts, 243.

²⁴¹ *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, ... 1619.*, 6.

²⁴² *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde ... 1566.*, 18. *The severall factes of Witchcraftes, approved and laid to the charge of Margaret Harkett*, 126. *The Most Cruell and bloody murther committed by an Inkeepers Wife*, 326. *The Witches of Northamptonshire... 1621.*, 166.

²⁴³ "The St. Osyth Witch Trial," 54-55.

the deaths of small children. For instance, Alice Dixon and Mary Johnson were accused of murdering the child of Elizabeth Otley. Dixon allegedly sent her familiar into Elizabeth's house through a hole in the wall and charged her familiar to rock the child's cradle. Next, Johnson brought an apple into the house and kissed the child. A short time later, the child sickened and died.²⁴⁴ During this trial, twenty-one children were said to have died as a result of witchcraft.

Child- and Adolescent-Witches

The English pamphlet writers wrote about one child-witch and two adolescent witches. All of the younger witches had an apprentice-type relationship with an older witch, two of which were with a relative. The third youthful witch was an apprentice of a man he worked for. Probably none of the young witches would have become involved in witchcraft if it were not for their older recruiters. The two females who were the inheritors of their witchcraft tradition were probably accused of witchcraft because of the popular belief that witches easily transmitted their traditions from one generation to the next.

The first trial of 1566 produced an adolescent witch, Joan Waterhouse, aged 18. Agnes Brown accused Joan of sending her familiar Sathan to torment Agnes.²⁴⁵ The jury found Joan not guilty. Presumably Joan was acquitted because she had only tormented Agnes with the familiar, and she had not killed anyone.

Alizon Device was the youngest English witch. She was eleven years old at the time of her trial in the famous Lancaster case in 1612. She testified against her neighbors and relatives and incriminated herself. She testified how one of her neighbors bewitched another neighbor to

²⁴⁴ *A True and Exact Relation of the Severall Informations, Examinations, and Confessions of the late Witches Arraigned and Executed in the County of Essex... 1645.*, 17.

²⁴⁵ *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde ... 1566.*, 79. According to Laslett, young people were considered adolescents until their late teens. Laslett, 83.

death. She revealed the witches' plot to blow up Lancaster castle, and she disclosed the method by which her grandmother used *maleficia* to kill their neighbors. Alizon confessed that she had allowed her grandmother's familiar that looked like a black dog to suck on her body. She also admitted that she sent this familiar to lame a peddler who had made her angry. She also caused her familiar to lame a neighbor, John Law.²⁴⁶ Because of her confession regarding the familiar and laming her neighbor, the jury found Alizon guilty, and she was hanged.²⁴⁷ James Device, Alizon's brother, also accused her of bewitching a child to death, but Alizon was not tried for this crime.²⁴⁸

Young Thomas Lever, aged 13 was arrested with his master. He was an apprentice of William Randall of Ipswich in Essex who was a conjurer.²⁴⁹ Randall was arraigned for conjuring to find treasure in the earth on 28 November 1579, and Thomas was jailed with him. Randall was also accused of being able to summon spirits and call the Devil to perform. Thomas was said to mix Randall's potions, and he was familiar with his master's workings.²⁵⁰

Randall was found guilty and executed, but the pamphlet ends with that. It states that the child still languished in the jail, but no one knows what the charges were. Thomas' mother had attempted to have him released, but was unsuccessful.²⁵¹

Witnesses for the Prosecution

Out of twenty-one witchcraft cases, twenty-nine children appeared in court to give evidence against an accused witch. By giving verbal testimony or acting out their bewitched symptoms for the court, these children effectively turned the social hierarchy on its head. When a

²⁴⁶ Potts, 243-244.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 253.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 208.

²⁴⁹ Holinshed, 37.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 37.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 38.

child testified against a neighbor, he or she or the child's parents had usually had an altercation with the witch, and subsequently the witch allegedly bewitched the child as a result. Typically when a child testified against a relative, he or she described the imp the relative kept. In an unusual event, one child witness, Alizon Device, incriminated herself for laming a man and told the court how her grandmother bewitched a child to death.²⁵²

Agnes Brown was the first child to testify for the prosecution. Three witches were on trial in Chelmsford in 1566, but Agnes testified against two: Agnes Waterhouse and her daughter, Joan Waterhouse. First, Agnes accused Agnes Waterhouse of making her right arm and leg decrepit.²⁵³ Next, Agnes claimed Joan Waterhouse sent her familiar, Satan, to harass Agnes. The familiar was a small black thing like a dog, and Agnes claimed it had a face like an ape, a short tail, and a silver chain and whistle around its neck. Agnes testified that it demanded butter, raided the milk house, cursed at her, and stabbed her with Mother Waterhouse's knife.²⁵⁴ Agnes Waterhouse confronted Agnes and tried to defend herself, but was not successful; Agnes Waterhouse was hanged at the end of her trial.²⁵⁵

The 1582 St. Osyth trial had the largest amount of children testify against their parents. Four children testified against their parents. All of these children came from different households, but they all testified about the same feature of witchcraft, which was the familiar.²⁵⁶ The youngest person to testify in an English witch trial appeared at St. Osyth who was Agnes Dowsing, aged seven. When the court asked her if her mother kept imps, Agnes answered yes. She said that her mother kept things like black birds, and in another box she had creatures that

²⁵² Potts, 187.

²⁵³ *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde ... 1566.*, 72.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 80.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 85.

²⁵⁶ The testimony of these children regarding their mother's familiar is unique to English witch trials. There was no real equivalent on the continent to the English idea of the familiar spirit.

resembled cows that were as big as rats.²⁵⁷ Phoebe Hunt, aged eight, testified that her stepmother kept “two little things like horses, the one black the other white which she kept by her bedside in a little low earthen pot.”²⁵⁸ The other two witnesses were boys, aged nine. They also testified to the fact that their mothers kept imps in their homes. Because in 1582 having imps was not a crime by itself, the testimony of these children would not have been enough to send their mothers to the gallows. However, it provided corroborating evidence that their mothers did have creatures to send out to perform *maleficia*, which they practiced to kill those whom they were accused of murdering. The court convicted and executed all of these children’s mothers.

The next example of children testifying against adults was probably the most well known case, the Witches of Warboys. The case was adjudicated in 1593, but had been building since 1589 when the Throckmorton family had moved to Huntingdon in September of that year. Jane Throckmorton was the first child of the household to accuse Alice Samuel, a neighbor, of bewitching her. Jane and her sisters over the course of four years produced many fits and crazy behaviors. Finally on April 4, 1593, Joan Throckmorton appeared before the Assize court in Huntingdon. Five hundred men came to see her in one of her fits.²⁵⁹ Agnes Samuel was compelled at this point to recite one of the incantations that the Throckmorton girls had forced upon her to alleviate their fits. Agnes had to recite the following before the five hundred gentlemen: “As I am a Witch, and did bewitch Mistress Throckmorton of Ellington since my mother’s confession, do I charge ye devil to let Mistress Joan come out of her fit.”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ “The St. Osyth Witch Trial,” 52.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 46.

²⁵⁹ *The Most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys...* 1593., 290. The text lists the five hundred men as gentlemen.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 291.

Later that same day, another accused witch, John Samuel, was pressed to recite another charm for the court and was threatened with immediate death if he did not.²⁶¹ After he complied, Joan Throckmorton was well again. She asked her father's blessing and produced no more fits. Although her behavior in court was not identical to that of Agnes Brown's testimony, it was taken as valid evidence for the prosecution.

Another important case that used the testimony of a child was the Lancashire witch trial of 1612. In that trial, nine-year-old Jennet Device (sister of Alizon Device), testified against her mother and brother. The child's mother became hysterical and began to curse Jennet. Eventually, the prisoner had to be removed from the courtroom so the child could condemn her mother. Jennet had to be set on a table so all the observers could see her.²⁶² Jennet claimed she knew her mother was a witch, and that her mother had a familiar because she, Jennet, had seen it several times. Named Ball,²⁶³ it had killed a man named James Robinson for her mother. She also stated that her mother had taught her two prayers, one to procure alcohol and one to cure the bewitched. Her brother used one to find alcohol.²⁶⁴ After these claims, Jennet recited the text of the two prayers. The one she repeated that had procured alcohol had apparently been effective for getting her brother drunk.²⁶⁵

Jennet was definitely responsible for sending her mother to the gallows. If there is any poetic justice to this experience, it may be that Jennet herself was condemned but reprieved for witchcraft in the Pendle Swindle witch craze of 1633. Apparently her conviction was based on the testimony of a juvenile witness, Edmund Robinson.²⁶⁶

²⁶¹Ibid, 291.

²⁶²Potts, 202.

²⁶³Potts, 202.

²⁶⁴Ibid, 214.

²⁶⁵Ibid, 214-215.

²⁶⁶*Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*. Ed. Barbara Rosen. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969, 1991), 364, n. 18.

In the last case in which children appeared in court, two girls performed in public. This case occurred in St. Edmonsbury in 1664. Elizabeth Pacy's father brought her to the Assize to demonstrate what Amy Duny, the accused witch, had done to Elizabeth. Elizabeth, aged 11, was in a paralyzed state and unable to speak. Elizabeth lay on the floor for a while, and then she was able to stand. She was helped to the bench, and she laid her head on it. The court officials brought Duny to her, even though Elizabeth could not see it was Duny because she had her eyes shut tight. Elizabeth then scratched Duny until Duny bled. Then Elizabeth became angry and the adults had to pull Elizabeth off of Duny.²⁶⁷ Another girl, Ann Durent, appeared in court. Her father produced pins that Ann had vomited. The writer of the pamphlet says that Anne was present in court but was in a stupor, so she was unable to verbally testify about her experience of bewitchment. However, when another accused witch, Rose Cullender, came into Anne's presence, Anne went into violent fits.²⁶⁸ Even though these two girls did not verbally testify that the two accused women bewitched them, the court took their behavior as evidence that the witches were guilty of harming the girls.

Victims of Bewitchment or Possession

People frequently accused witches of bewitching their children in order to make them sick or causing them to be possessed. When a child was bewitched there were various symptoms that the child complained about, but most sounded like physical problems that contemporary physicians were unable to diagnose.

²⁶⁷ *A tryal of witches at the Assizes held at Bury St. Edmonds*, 8.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

Typical symptoms of bewitchment fell into seven categories:

- fits
- lameness
- paralysis
- physical transformation
- bedridden
- undetermined symptoms²⁶⁹

Each of these problems showed up at least once in the pamphlets. The most common was fits. Writers used the general term “fit” to cover all symptoms, but that was the only word they used to describe a child’s illness so determining exactly what they meant is difficult. Dorothy Durent claimed that Amy Duny was responsible for her infant’s fits after they had an altercation over childcare.²⁷⁰ However, the writer did not go into more detail to describe the physical symptoms of the child. He only attributed the illness to bewitchment. Later in the narrative of the pamphlet, the same mother, Dorothy Durent, accused Duny of harming her ten-year-old daughter Elizabeth. She asserted that Duny lamed her daughter, and that the girl had to use crutches until the time that the Assizes met.²⁷¹ The most common way writers described the bewitching of children, is that they suffered generalized illnesses, and the writers avoided listing any symptoms. In the pamphlet *A Detection of Damnable Driftes*, the writer listed four children whom the witches bewitched and then became sick. However, he listed only one child who had symptoms. He suffered “sweat and coldness shrieking and staring wringing and writhing to and fro”²⁷²

If the physical illness developed into other symptoms such as hallucinations, convulsions, contortions, vomiting objects, and loss of sensation, often physicians gave up trying to diagnose an illness. By that point they often told parents that their child was possessed. Mary Glovers’

²⁶⁹ *A Tryal of Witches, at the Assizes held at Bury St. Edmonds*, 6, 9. *The Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches...* 1589, 185. *The Examination and Confession of Certain Wytches ...* 1566., 72, 99. *A Rehearsall both straunge and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile, ...* 1579., 97.

²⁷⁰ *A Tryal of Witches, at the Assizes held at Bury St. Edmonds*, 6.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, 7.

²⁷² *A Detection of Damnable Driftes. Practized by three Witches ... which were executed in Aprill*, 97.

doctor treated her unsuccessfully for three months before giving up.²⁷³ Several cases fit this pattern of physical symptoms that physicians eventually termed possession.

Theoretically, anyone could be a victim of possession. On the continent, frequently Catholic nuns in convents were victims of possession. However, in England, children and adolescents were the only victims who tended to be possessed by evil spirits.²⁷⁴ As the popular witchcraft literature spread and developed, the focus shifted from the activities and crimes of the witch to the afflictions and hardships of the victims and their families. Four examples of this were the cases of the Throckmortons, the Fairfaxes, Elizabeth and Deborah Pacy, and Mary Glover.

Jane Throckmorton appeared to be ill in the fall of 1589. Alice Samuel, an elderly neighbor, came to visit her to see how she was recovering. Immediately upon Mother Samuel's arrival, Joan asked her grandmother to make Mother Samuel leave because she was a witch and was making her ill.²⁷⁵ After this first accusation, over the course of four years (1589-1593), the other four Throckmorton daughters eventually accused Mother Samuel, her husband John, and their adult daughter Agnes of bewitching them. The girls soon began to display typical symptoms of bewitchment and possession. Nine-year-old Joan was tormented by a spirit.²⁷⁶ Jane was beset by strange fits.²⁷⁷ Elizabeth hallucinated the apparition of Alice Samuel, and Samuel forced a mouse into the girl's mouth.²⁷⁸ Finally all the girls claimed that they saw the familiar of Alice Samuel, which they said was a dun chicken.²⁷⁹

²⁷³Bradwell, 5.

²⁷⁴Sharpe, 196.

²⁷⁵*The Most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys...* 1593., 239.

²⁷⁶Ibid, 243.

²⁷⁷Ibid, 246.

²⁷⁸Ibid, 252.

²⁷⁹Ibid, 257.

The adults did not protect Mother Samuel from the girls: Jane was allowed to scratch Mother Samuel's hand until it bled.²⁸⁰ Also, the children were allowed to harass the old woman into reciting charms that were essentially confessions of being a witch. Robert Throckmorton then forced Alice Samuel to come live in his household, presumably to watch her movements.²⁸¹ Oddly enough, this relocation sometimes worked because the children were able to control the whereabouts and actions of Mother Samuel; therefore, they did not have fits after she was moved into the Throckmorton house.²⁸²

The living conditions in the household continued like this until the Throckmorton children began to speak of the day when Mother Samuel would be compelled to confess. Mother Samuel insisted she would not confess to something that she had not done, yet the girls accused her of having bad habits and of not attending church.²⁸³ Apparently the stress was wearing the old woman down, and she eventually confessed (probably so the girls would be quiet and leave her alone). When they heard her words, the girls ceased their fits.²⁸⁴

However, this was not the end of the matter because Mother Samuel retracted her confession. Throckmorton was compelled to have others hear her confession so he could force her to appear before the Assize court. Finally one of the daughters, Joan, attended the Assize court and testified and performed against Mother Samuel, her husband John Samuel, and their daughter, Agnes Samuel. All three were hanged upon conviction.²⁸⁵

Another meticulously documented case was that of Mary Glover. She was from a religious family and connected to London's ruling elite, so the case attracted a fair amount of

²⁸⁰Ibid, 247.

²⁸¹Ibid, 264.

²⁸²Ibid, 267.

²⁸³Ibid, 269.

²⁸⁴Ibid, 273.

²⁸⁵Ibid, 296.

attention.²⁸⁶ Mary was the fourteen year-old daughter of a London shopkeeper, and after an argument with an old woman, Elizabeth Jackson, Mary became possessed. Her affliction lasted for seven and one-half months. Several doctors examined her.²⁸⁷

Stephen Bradwell's account of Mary's behavior is detailed, but where Throckmorton's and Fairfax's books focused on recording conversations, Bradwell recorded Mary's symptoms: "she was turned roue and a whoop, with her head backward to her hippes...her body was suddenly turned round the contrary way, that is, her head forward between her leggs, and then also rowled and tumbled as before."²⁸⁸

Bradwell describes all sorts of bizarre behaviors in graphic detail. Mary played with her fingers as if she were playing a harp or the virginals. Her body would flop around or she would be in danger of hurting herself against the bedposts. Also, if the witch, Elizabeth Jackson, came to her parents' home, Mary would have an attack until Elizabeth left. Mary's affliction began in the spring of 1602, and Elizabeth was finally arraigned in December of that year. Elizabeth was convicted and sentenced to spend one year in prison and four occasions in the pillory.²⁸⁹ Jackson spent one year in jail because this case occurred one year before the new Jacobean witchcraft statute of 1604, which would have made Jackson's crime punishable by death.

Edward Fairfax produced a long book detailing the events surrounding the possession of his daughters. The Fairfaxes lived at Fystone in the county of York.²⁹⁰ This family's troubles started when Edward's oldest daughter, Helen, was found unconscious by the fire. The father consulted physicians, but he did not believe that what was afflicting his daughters had a natural cause. He even received books from the physicians, but he refused to believe that anything

²⁸⁶Sharpe, 191.

²⁸⁷Bradwell, 140.

²⁸⁸Ibid, 6.

²⁸⁹Sharpe, 191.

²⁹⁰Fairfax, 31.

natural was responsible.²⁹¹ Fairfax stated that Elizabeth Waite was the main witch who tormented his daughters. It is significant the Fairfaxes had a former possession of the witch's, a penny, which she had given them in payment for a household item.²⁹² Fairfax seemed particularly fixated on this, and he perhaps may have believed that having something that used to belong to the witch caused the affliction of his daughters.

Another feature of his account was the detailed conversations he produced between his daughter and the apparitions she apparently saw. At one point she saw a young man named Cooke who offered to marry her and make her queen of England if she would go with him. Cooke forbade her to say the name of God. She replied, "You are no man if you cannot abide the name of God; but if you be a man, come near me and let me feel you."²⁹³ Fairfax's account continued in sharp detail as he described almost every occurrence of his daughters' afflictions.

Fairfax was eventually able to bring six witches to the Assize court in the city of York. The judge questioned Elizabeth Fairfax before she fell into a trance, and Helen Fairfax just spat blood.²⁹⁴ A neighbor child, Jeffray's daughter, also attended the court; but through tough questioning, her possession was proven fraudulent.²⁹⁵ Fairfax was quick to point out that this had nothing to do with his girls. Later the girls were separated from their parents and tests were performed on them to ascertain if they were faking their possession. Apparently the court did not conclusively prove the Fairfax girls to be fakes, but nonetheless, the six accused witches were acquitted and released.²⁹⁶

²⁹¹Ibid, 36.

²⁹²Ibid, 43.

²⁹³Ibid, 38.

²⁹⁴Ibid, 126.

²⁹⁵Ibid, 127.

²⁹⁶Ibid, 132.

Two sisters, Elizabeth and Deborah Pacy, displayed possession symptoms in 1663. Like the other girls in the previous cases, Elizabeth and Deborah would eventually appear in court to act out their symptoms. Deborah's possession began in the typical fashion, which was to manifest a physical illness. She had stomach cramps after her father had an altercation with the accused witch Amy Duny. After the girl had suffered with stomach cramps, she began to display other symptoms. She began to have fits and claimed she saw the apparition of Duny.²⁹⁷ After these phenomena had gone on for a while, her sister Elizabeth began to suffer problems as well. Eventually, both girls were seeing apparitions of both accused witches, Amy Duny and Rose Cullender. Both girls suffered lameness, deafness, blindness, and dumbness. They also vomited pins and had swooning fits. Probably the most disturbing feature of their problems was that they would fall into fits when the names Lord or Jesus Christ were mentioned. They claimed that Amy Duny's apparition told them they were not to say either name.²⁹⁸ Both girls eventually went to court to perform, and their actions helped send both women to the gallows.

Children and Adolescents Who Feigned Possession

Occasionally, some children who pretended to be possessed were proven to be frauds, and as twenty-first century readers, we probably hope to read that they received punishments worth the crime. This rarely if ever occurred, because if anything happened to children once they were proven fraudulent or confessed to lying, they were usually sent to some minister's house for religious training. Cases of counterfeits were evenly divided between males and females.

Children seemed to fake possession for various reasons, but most had encouragement from outside sources, usually adults. Rachel Pinder seemed to have initiated her acting on her own. However, her friend Agnes Biggs pretended to be possessed because she heard Rachel's

²⁹⁷ *A Tryal of Witches, at the Assizes held at Bury St. Edmonds*, 9.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

mother describing Rachel's case to a Master Foxe. Agnes admitted she had heard the details of the other girl's affliction and "determined to practi[s]e the like."²⁹⁹ Thomas Darling started his fakery on his own, but intensified his feigned possession when John Darrell appeared on the scene with the intention of exorcising the boy. Samuel Harsnett exposed both Thomas and Darrell. Katherine Malpas' grandmother taught her "various tricks" to feign possession. This case drew the attention of King James, and he investigated it. Katherine Malpas' Case sealed James I's skepticism regarding witchcraft, even though it was not enough to drive him to repeal his witchcraft statute.³⁰⁰

The first recorded imposters were two girls in London in 1574, Rachel Pinder and Agnes Briggs. Rachel was found out because while she was pretending to be possessed, one of the observers asked "Satan" to put out a candle. Apparently unable to do this, Satan asked for a thread instead. "Immediately the child rose up, and held up her hands, and said, "He is gone, he will come no more."³⁰¹ The ministers also put a language test to Rachel. One man spoke to her in Latin, and she was unable to respond. Next she was asked to speak Dutch and she refused. All the ministers knew that evil spirits were fluent in various languages, and therefore the child must be an imposter. After the ministers exposed Rachel, the other girl, Agnes, confessed to what she had done, and explained that she had gotten the idea to fake her possession from hearing about Rachel. Both girls were forced to confess their wrongdoing before their churches in public.³⁰² However, no punishments are listed.

Thomas Darling (The Burton Boy) was another well-known example of a false accuser. John Darrell, a Protestant minister with a history of being able to dispossess demoniacs, jumped

²⁹⁹ *The Disclosing of a late couterfeyted Possession by the Devyl of two Maydens ... 1574.*, 237.

³⁰⁰ Rosen, 159.

³⁰¹ *The Disclosing of a late couterfeyted Possession by the Devyl of two Maydens ... 1574.*, 237.

³⁰² *Ibid*, 239.

on the case when he heard about Darling. In 1596, after a hunting trip, Thomas became ill and had odd hallucinations. A doctor's suggestion of worms was rejected and other explanations were sought for.³⁰³ Apparently he had had an altercation with an old woman named Alice Gooderidge, and his family believed she was responsible for Thomas's troubles.³⁰⁴ Alice was convicted, and was sentenced to twelve months. Samuel Harsnett finally was able to obtain a confession of fakery from Thomas, but not before Alice Gooderidge died in prison while serving her sentence.³⁰⁵ However, Thomas did suffer trouble later in life. While he was a student at Oxford University, Thomas was sentenced to be whipped and have his ears lopped off for libeling the vice-chancellor.³⁰⁶

William Somers, the Boy of Nottingham, was another possessed victim Samuel Harsnett outed. John Darrell was also involved in this case. When Somers' possession began, neighbors invited Darrell to exorcise the boy. William eventually accused thirteen women of bewitching him.³⁰⁷ Somers came to the notice of Harsnett, and he investigated the case. He questioned witnesses who authorities had deposed regarding Somers' behavior. One man had first claimed he saw Somers turn his face around to face his back, his eyes were as great as a beast's and that his tongue enlarged to the size of a calf's tongue. Upon questioning by Harsnett, the man admitted that the boy had really turned his head toward his shoulder, his eyes were "goggling" a bit, but otherwise looked normal. Also, the witness admitted that Somers' tongue might have looked larger only because he saw Somers by candlelight, and the shadows may have affected his vision.³⁰⁸ Based on Harsnett's work, authorities proved Somers to be a fraud. As a result of

³⁰³*The Most wonderful and true story of a certain witch named Alse Gooderige of Stapenhill*, 3.

³⁰⁴*Ibid*, 7.

³⁰⁵*Ibid*, 12.

³⁰⁶Robbins, 66.

³⁰⁷*A Discovery of the Fraudulent practices of John Darrel... 1599.*, 299.

³⁰⁸*Ibid*, 299 - 300.

the Somers' case, authorities declared Darrell an imposter, defrocked him, and sentenced him to jail for a year.³⁰⁹

Anne Gunter was probably the most famous faker because she gained the notice of King James I. As the result of an argument with neighbors, Anne began to display signs of possession, and she accused the wives of men who had offended her father. Her case lasted for several months, and people from all over the community came to watch her antics. She would lie in a stupor, allow pins to be pushed into her breasts, she would void pins, and the laces of her clothes would "untie" themselves.³¹⁰ Finally her father, Brian Gunter, was able to take the case to court. However, he was unsuccessful in getting a conviction against the accused witches. The case would have died there, but King James I was traveling through their county and had learned about the case. He investigated the event, and Anne eventually admitted that she had been feigning the whole thing and her neighbors had never tormented her.³¹¹

As a result of their trickery, Anne and her father Brian Gunter were brought before the Star Chamber to answer for their crime of false accusation. As the trial proceeded, the court found out that Anne and her father had learned how to act possessed from the witchcraft pamphlets. Unfortunately the results of the Star Chamber trial were lost, so the outcome of Anne's trial is unknown.

ENGLISH CHILDREN VERSUS CONTINENTAL CHILDREN

The experiences of English and continental children varied based on the demonology that was prevalent for the region where they lived. Both English and continental children were

³⁰⁹ Robbins, 118.

³¹⁰ Sharpe, James. *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A Horrible and True Story of True Deception, Witchcraft, Murder, and the King of England*. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 45.

³¹¹ Levack, Brian. "Possession, witchcraft, and the Law in Jacobean England." *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: Volume 3, Witchcraft in the British Isles and New England*. (Routledge: New York, 2001), 45.

supposed to be victims of bewitchment, and witches allegedly caused their deaths. What is different about their deaths is that continental children were often the victims of midwives who killed them to dedicate the children to Satan, whereas when English children died their murder was just another crime in the witch's list of *maleficia*. Also, in English witchcraft, witches did not use children as material for flying unguents or cannibalize them like they supposedly did in continental Europe.

Because the dynamics of English trials were different than continental trials, the English trials lacked the mass accusations that were a hallmark of some of the continental trials. For instance, in some of the continental trials, the denunciations involved so many people that children fell victim to the accusations.³¹² This never occurred in English trials. continental children confessed to attending the sabbat, and Briggs records accounts of continental boys who confessed to attending the sabbat.³¹³ This is another feature lacking in English witchcraft. The sabbat was not part of the demonology associated with English witchcraft, so children attending the sabbat did not appear in any trial literature. The only time anything resembling a sabbat occurred was in the 1612 Lancashire case. Nine-year-old Jennet Preston told the court about a great feast she attended. However, this meeting never took on any of the lurid descriptions that were standard for the continental sabbat.

Both English and continental children appeared as witnesses in court. Both groups of children testified against their parents. However, something that was unique to continental children is that they testified against their peers. In England, no child testified against another person in his or her age group. Another unique example of continental children in court is that a large group of them testified against a group of witches. In England this never occurred. In a

³¹² Ibid, 144.

³¹³ Briggs, 45, 46, 47.

mass trial that occurred in Sweden between 1668 and 1876, a large group of children testified how witches had taken them to the fantastical mountain of Blåkulla. Eventually in this trial, a small active group of children testified against half of the accused witches.³¹⁴ In English trials, typically one child testified against one person, usually his or her relative. In the Lancashire case of 1612, Jennet Device was the only child to testify against more than one person. She testified against her mother, her brother and one neighbor, but nothing on the scale of the trials in Sweden.

In continental Europe, authorities also were concerned that witches were leading children into witchcraft. During the one large hunt in Spain in 1610, Valle reported that the Devil had apparently recruited twelve children into his service.³¹⁵ This concern was something that was unique to continental Europe. The only child to confess to being a witch was Alizon Device, who admitted she had let her grandmother's familiar suck on her. Alizon also acknowledged that she had lamed a neighbor.

WITCHCRAFT AND SOCIAL REWARDS FOR CHILDREN

What compelled children to participate in the witch trials at all? Did they not understand the dark forces they were apparently dealing with when they pretended that Satan inhabited their bodies? Had some of them internalized their Christian belief of the devil so deeply that they were just physically manifesting their thoughts? Did some of them crave attention so badly that they were willing to risk attracting the attention of the devil in order for their parents to acknowledge their existence?

Perhaps children who testified against their parents were seeking some sort of misplaced revenge. Jennet Device gave evidence against her mother and seemed happy to do it. She

³¹⁴ Ankarloo, 302.

³¹⁵ Henningsen, 53.

produced all sorts of detailed information about familiars and specific charms for procuring alcohol.³¹⁶ Joan Cuny's two illegitimate grandsons testified against her and their mother.³¹⁷

Unless these children thought they were taking part in some game there does not seem to be any other explanation for why they were testifying against their parents. They had to have known that their mothers were in trouble for something, and perhaps they were angry with their mothers for something.

Another reason children may have made accusations was to make their lives more exciting. The Throckmorton girls were able to go live with relatives at different times. Elizabeth Throckmorton was able to visit her Uncle Pickering for a few months, and while she was there, she was able to sit by the pond on the family's property for hours a day.³¹⁸ Also, children who lived in the countryside were able to make a trip to a town when their cases finally went to court. When the Fairfaxes went to court, the entire family went on a trip to the city of York.³¹⁹

Something the children probably particularly enjoyed was that they were able to reverse the social order and to reproach adults.³²⁰ Given that some of their behavior was particularly nasty, a number of the children may have been using the witches as surrogates for what they may have preferred to do to their parents. The Throckmorton girls were particularly abusive to Alice Samuel, berating her for her manner of living, and how she had reared her daughter.

Finally, the most obvious reason children pretended to be possessed or testified in witch trials is that they received so much attention. This is probably why female children and adolescents figured so prominently as victims of possession and witnesses in trials. When these young girls had their fits due to possession, they had the full attention of grown men, who were

³¹⁶Potts, 214.

³¹⁷*The Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches... 1589.*, 185.

³¹⁸*The Most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys... 1593.*, 249.

³¹⁹Fairfax, 126.

³²⁰Sharpe, 206.

the representation of power in their culture (particularly the clergy). Also, these children received visits from doctors and relatives. The Throckmorton girls received a visit from their Uncle Gilbert.³²¹ Two of the more unfortunate bids for attention come from the Fairfax girls and Ann Gunter. Fairfax recorded that he believed all that he saw. However, he wrote, “They add an end my children should aim at in this – to be more cherished.”³²² Brian Gunter was also accused of not thinking very much of his daughter before she fell ill.³²³

³²¹*The Most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys...* 1593., 245.

³²²Fairfax, 124.

³²³Sharpe, 207.

CONCLUSIONS

Children played a significant and disturbing role in the witch beliefs of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries. The witchcraft statutes of 1563 and 1604 laid the foundation for the witch trials, and lax court procedures allowed children under the age of fourteen to testify. As the trials progressed, writers produced pamphlet literature that narrated the trials and created patterns that appeared in later trial literature. Children obviously learned about witchcraft beliefs from pamphlets because when they displayed bewitched symptoms their behavior often mirrored those from previous pamphlets. During the first trial in 1566, the child-witness complained about physical symptoms of paralysis or lameness, and the witness claimed that the witch's familiar tormented her. In later pamphlets this theme of physical complaints and familiars appeared again: Warboys 1593, St. Osyth 1582, Anne Gunter 1604, Fairfax 1623, and St. Edmonds 1664.

Children fulfilled five roles in English witchcraft

- victims who died
- child or adolescent-witches
- witnesses for the prosecution
- victims of bewitchment or possession
- children and adolescents who feigned possession

Children appeared most frequently as the anonymous victims of murderous witches. They were often listed as if they were property of the parents, and were included in the inventory of the witches' other crimes. The deaths of children served to strengthen people's belief in *maleficia*, and that witches could strike people and their children down at any time.

Child and adolescent-witches were anomalies. Only three of them appeared in all the pamphlet literature. Each one of these children had an apprentice-type relationship with an older witch, so the child probably would not have engaged in *maleficia* without the direction of the

older witch. Alizon Device and Joan Waterhouse were related to older witches in their families. They were examples of the belief that witchcraft was hereditary.

The disturbing phenomena of children testifying and performing in court demonstrated the reality of children turning the social hierarchy on its head. They were able to take control of the adult world and take their revenge on a society that either ignored them or more typically put them at the bottom. On the other hand, by using children to testify against their neighbors and parents, the authorities were using individuals who could be easily manipulated.³²⁴ This was an effective means for the authorities to gain easy evidence so parents could dispose of marginal members of the community.

In cases of possession, children again turned society's rules to their advantage. They were able to act out behavior that would have been totally unacceptable in any other circumstance. They screamed, they writhed, and they flopped in their beds. Especially for girls this type of physical behavior was seen as very inappropriate. However, if children did this in the context of being possessed, adults could do nothing but accept it. Children received much attention for this behavior, and they probably took as much advantage of this as they could. Their crazy behavior also allowed them to terrorize adults, which they probably enjoyed doing on some level.

However, the adults were getting something out of possession cases as well. Possession re-enforced their belief that Satan existed and was capable of inhabiting a human body. Then when the ministers, friends, and family joined to pray and fast they were playing out their faith. Finally, when the young person was dispossessed, adults confirmed their belief that God was real and concerned with human activities. The whole pattern affirmed the Christian idea of evil: Satan was alive and could torment God's followers, but God could and would deliver the faithful.

³²⁴ Sebald, 229.

Children and adolescents who feigned possession were serving the same roles as those who testified and those children whose possessions were “real.” They were able to turn the social hierarchy upside down and take control of adults’ lives. While the possession was occurring, the adults’ lives were focused on dealing with the possessed child. The fakers were also able to take advantage of being able to act inappropriately and to do what they wanted. Attention was the most obvious reason for children feigning possession. People said that Brian Gunter did not pay much attention to his daughter Ann before she pretended to be possessed. Edward Fairfax said the only reason he could understand why his daughters behaved the way they did was to be more cherished.

Children were important to the English witch trials and witch belief because adults allowed them to influence events. Children were able as the powerless in society to use the tools at their disposal to make the powerful do what they wanted. However, the true responsibility resided with the adults who chose to listen and believe what the children said.

CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS, AND WITCHCRAFT: AFTERTHOUGHTS

Historians have shown that people had definite ideas about children and childhood in the early modern era. Unlike the early theories of Philippe Ariès, who felt that people of the Middle Ages had no concept of childhood, historians of the seventies and eighties proved that between the Middle Ages and Enlightenment people recognized children as a special group. Humanists, Protestants, and parents in England saw children as a separate category of people who

- passed through developmental stages
- indulged in play
- needed care and protection
- needed guidance, for example by education and discipline³²⁵

As children passed through their developmental stages, they were exposed to both work and education. Depending on children's social status, they attended grammar school then university. By the seventeenth-century, girls also attended school in larger English cities. However, schools did not teach girls academic subjects. They learned domestic skills like needlework and cooking. Children of the lower classes helped supplement the family income by working as early as the age of four.

The historical record regarding children is spotty, and one area of research that is lacking is children and witchcraft. Children participated in witchcraft belief and the witch hunts in continental Europe and England. The majority of research has focused on the adult experience of the witch trials. Children usually feature anecdotally in books and articles about the witch hunts.

What work historians have done has focused on the continental witch trials. However historians have not synthesized regional information to compare the experiences of children from different states in continental Europe or during various decades in the early modern period.

³²⁵ Pollock, 98. (Pollock uses the word organism instead of people.)

Historians have shown that the experience of children mirrored continental demonological theory. Authorities accused midwives of murdering children for body parts. Children acknowledged attending the sabbat. Children also admitted to having conversations with the Devil. They did not confess to having made a pact with him, but they were getting close to danger. Children also had a more dangerous experience in the continental witch trials. They sometimes became victims of accusation, if hunts grew large. In Sweden authorities used large numbers of children to testify, and these children were separated from their parents and intimidated into giving the authorities information. Also, in Spain, large numbers of children were suspected of joining covens.

In England children's experiences of witchcraft and the witch trials mirrored the English idea of *maleficia*. Children were victims of murder, bewitchment, and possession, but these were results of *maleficia* on the part of the witch. Because England had little idea of the pact with the Devil, children's body parts were not necessary, children never talked to the Devil, and they never attended sabbats. Because England had no large hunts (except for the Hopkins debacle), children never became victims of denunciations. England only produced three young witches. Children participated in the trials as witnesses for the prosecution, but only in small numbers.

In England children most often appeared as murder victims from *maleficia*. They were the anonymous property of their parents, and their voices are silent. Children and adolescents also emerged as bewitched and possessed victims. Their cases began as regular physical illnesses that progressed into symptoms that physicians were unable to cure, and eventually the doctors labeled the children as possessed. Children and adolescents for whatever reasons also feigned possession. Finally, children testified in court against family and neighbors and sent these people to prison or to the gallows.

Children had many motivations for their behavior. Most likely they hoped to gain the attention of adults. Young women probably featured so frequently in the pamphlet literature as possession victims and as testifiers because they were on the bottom of the social scale. By making themselves actors in the culture of the witch trials and witch belief, they gained the attention of adult males, particularly the clergy. These men represented the most important part of their social strata, and they were paying attention to these girls, who may have frequently been ignored. Parents admitted that perhaps their daughters acted possessed so they would receive more attention from their fathers.

Finally, children turned the social hierarchy on its head when they testified against adults or acted possessed. When children testified, they might have had the power of life and death over an adult, when normally circumstances were the other way around. They were now able to direct events in a world that normally dictated to them how they would live. Whether children believed they were really possessed or were faking, they were able to act in unacceptable ways. They shrieked, they thrashed, and twisted their bodies. Especially for females, this behavior would normally be far outside the bounds of tolerable behavior. However, when children were in this state, the world stopped for them, and they were in control, even when their bodies seemed out of control. Adults ran about trying to find a solution to fix the child, and the adults worried about a problem outside the adult world.

Regardless of the reasons for their behavior, children served to make English witch belief and the witch trials significant in English history. However, they would not have been able to manipulate events as they did if the adults had not chosen to listen and trust what they heard and saw. Without their behavior and testimony, perhaps much of the tragedy of the witch trials and subsequent executions could have been avoided.

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