

Introduction: witchcraft continued

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The study of witchcraft accusations in Europe during the period after the end of the witch trials is still in its infancy. The present volume, together with its companion *Beyond the witch trials*, intends to develop the field further by presenting a plethora of studies from across Europe and, most importantly, to inspire new research. Whereas *Beyond the witch trials* focused on the period of the Enlightenment, from the late seventeenth through to the end of the eighteenth century, here we pay attention to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Once again we have sought to bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars, whose contributions demonstrate the value of applying the analytical tools of sociology, anthropology, folkloristics and literary studies to historical sources. Above all they show that the history of witchcraft in the modern era is as much a story of continuation as of decline.

The nineteenth century stands out as the great unknown in witchcraft studies, although this differs from country to country. Flanked on one side by the eighteenth century, during which the pyres still flared occasionally in countries such as Germany, Switzerland and Hungary, and the Mediterranean Inquisitions were still active, and on the other by the twentieth century, during which anthropologists, folklorists and legal researchers generated volumes of new witchcraft material, the 1800s have often escaped extensive scrutiny.¹ This is at least the case when we look at witchcraft studies on a European scale. England is a notable exception, but compared with much of the continent it received little attention from twentieth-century fieldworkers.² The question is whether this primarily reflects the state of research or the actual historical situation. The English case is complicated, moreover, by the invention of witchcraft as a pagan religion during the 1950s, which, as Gustav Henningsen wrote, had ‘nothing to do with witchcraft in the traditional sense’.³

It is very plausible to argue that witchcraft as a modern DIY religion could only emerge when its namesake had become largely irrelevant. But then we have to bear in mind that most of the people who were and are

drawn to the religion came from social classes whose members had already largely abandoned witchcraft as a mechanism of accusation by the eighteenth century. A comparative approach may shed some more light on this, because at present the religion is hardly studied outside England. Continental instances nevertheless appear to be strongly influenced by the English paradigm, contradicting continuity with local traditions more clearly. The English example also indicates the possibility of several mutually exclusive meanings of the term 'witchcraft'. For instance, there were, and still are, thousands of magical practitioners of a great variety spread all over Europe, Britain included. They are sometimes addressed with terms that translate as 'witch', but it would be highly confusing to equate them with the women, and to a lesser extent men, who were accused of causing harm to their neighbours by spells or mere body language. We can also consider another contemporary usage of the term 'witchcraft' signifying ritual black magic, as in the newspaper reports that form the basis of Richard Jenkins's contribution to this volume. This takes the harmful aspect of traditional accusatory witchcraft and contaminates it with ideas about paganism. All three recent connotations of witchcraft have the 'craft' element in common, the peculiar notion in the English language that witchcraft should somehow be 'doable'. Again, this is a far cry from witchcraft as a device of ascribing misfortune to others, which is not to say that black magic cannot be ascribed or even practised. As it is, most of the contributions to this volume can be situated in the field of tension between story and action in which either the witch or the people bewitched play the main role.

The potential of future witchcraft research can be outlined by discussing the various aspects of the most prominent problem pervading witchcraft studies after the end of the witch trials: did witchcraft decline, and if so, how and why? In order to recognize a possible decline, it is necessary to establish how nineteenth- and twentieth-century witchcraft is best characterized. Physical violence against suspected witches stands out as one of the most prominent traits of witchcraft in the period. Taking it as defining, however, would give an overall picture that would be both distorted and exceptional. Only in particular circumstances does violence reveal an essential reaction to bewitchments and an important indicator of historical change. Indeed, asking whether witchcraft is slowly but inevitably disappearing in Europe implies focusing on possible changes. So far these have been found in the content of the accusations, the kind of people accused, those who acted as accusers, as well as in the contexts in which the accusations occurred. Far from constituting a monolithic, stable entity, witchcraft was subject to adaptation and alteration. But as our view is partly clouded by the nature of the sources documenting witchcraft, explanations have to remain tentative. Moreover, much depends on the specific angle from which witchcraft is approached and from the overall category it is placed in.

Nevertheless, reading nineteenth- and twentieth-century witchcraft reports can easily convey the impression of extreme, sometimes even deadly, violence. As the essays in this volume show, witches were scratched in England, swum in Germany, beaten in the Netherlands and shot in France. In her seminal review of witchcraft studies concerning the continuation of witchcraft after the end of the witch trials, Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra made a similar observation. She introduces her itinerary through European witchcraft research with a number of cases 'from Ireland to Russia' in which witches were burned as a result of lynching, and she cites numerous other violent incidents. It has become abundantly clear that, more often than not, the witch trials were instigated 'from below', though allowed and sometimes even stimulated by the secular authorities. Is it possible, then, to interpret the later manifestations of communal violence as a mere continuation of the early modern persecution? Continuing the same line of thought, should we interpret more individualistic acts of violence against witches as yet another step in the declining support for physically exterminating them? There are several caveats to this line of reasoning, such as the problem of representativity and the relation between magical and physical solutions to a bewitchment. Both points of caution are raised by Gijswijt-Hofstra, but a little more can be said about them.

We can safely assume that instances of violence against witches were 'tips of the iceberg', and they are thus only the extreme expressions of a much wider dispersed witchcraft discourse – a shorthand note denoting the whole complex of 'thinking and acting in terms of witchcraft'. Violent incidents come to the fore because they were, by their very nature, more prone to publicity than cases that ended more peacefully. Sensationalist press reporting of such cases is already identifiable in the early modern period, if sensationalism was not already part and parcel of the very development of the press itself. The ingredients of witchcraft and popular justice, which were condemned by journalists and deemed offensive to middle- and upper-class norms, curiously mixed with a certain condoning through the provision of detailed descriptions, provided a cultural weight that exceeded mere numbers of incidents. Cases of violence, we argue here, thus had a greater impact on the sense of witchcraft's place in history, be it contemporaries' or later historians', than all those instances that have remained largely hidden from the public gaze. Whether that place is justified, remains to be seen.

The other point concerns the relation between violence and unwitchment. As Gijswijt-Hofstra put it: 'Whether taking the law violently in one's own hands represented a last resort, after self-medication, counter-magic and/or consulting healers or unwitching specialists – in so far as they were available – had all come to nothing, cannot always be discovered, although this seems likely'.⁴ This statement, however, presumes violence to be outside the witchcraft discourse, as something 'non-magical'. This is debatable when it

concerned the witch trials, which certainly had their numinous dimensions. It is also debatable in the case of the water test, which grew out of a divine ordeal without becoming more material in the process. There is also an additional complication with swimming, as in many cases it was performed at the behest of those suspected of bewitchment in order to clear their names. We can also question the statement with regard to those unwitchment rituals in which both the luring of the witch and having her bless the victim pervaded the physical aspect to such an extent that it is hard to point out any clear boundary. Blood too may have been extracted by force, but its healing qualities put it squarely in the magical domain. This all makes it difficult to classify violent reactions as mere violence or as a 'last resort'. Furthermore, violence was used all the time after the witch trials, and considering these had already largely ended in some regions like the Dutch Republic by the early seventeenth century, it surely cannot be seen as a sign of witchcraft's continuous decline. Moreover, as de Blécourt discusses, it seems that in the Netherlands orthodox Protestants reacted more violently to bewitchments than orthodox Catholics. This probably indicates a much more profound European difference between the two Christian denominations where witchcraft is concerned. And while it certainly shows that the range of counter-measures was much wider for Catholics, it does not follow that Protestants had depleted the available options; they simply did not have any other. Violence thus emerges as a course of action embedded in a religious repertoire – the distinction between religion and magic evaporates here. Only in the case of violent Catholics may it be suggested that a withdrawal of their clergy from the discourse seriously hampered access to the Catholic collection of counter-magic. So, if we still want to understand violent behaviour in the course of unwitchment as a sign of a decline of the discourse, then we have at least to consider the religious context in which it was acted out. This leads to the conclusion that only in very specific, transitional circumstances was violence connected with witchcraft's demise.

But again we need to be cautious and refrain from hasty conclusions. For why should we suppose a steady decline of the witchcraft discourse over the centuries? Indeed it seems more accurate to consider fluctuations. That is to say, as far as the peaks and troughs that have been found in the witch trial statistics were related to changes in the occurrence of bewitchments then there is no reason why this should have stopped when bewitchments ceased to be considered as criminal by the authorities. Specific ways of dealing with bewitchment, and even the diagnosis of bewitchment itself, may have been related to either the dearth or abundance of the witchcraft discourse in a certain period. This makes every current conclusion about decline premature, given the state of research into nineteenth- and twentieth-century witchcraft. For at present we can argue that witchcraft was still a relevant force in modern western society and so counter broad and imprecise notions of

disenchantment. As Enrique Perdiguero puts it in this volume, we are interested in whether 'magic' was still an 'essential part of cultural repertoires', a significant element in the conception and treatment of illness, and also seek to extend this to misfortune in general. But before it is even possible to show fluctuations in its occurrence it is necessary to differentiate between kinds of magic and single out witchcraft. Statistical methods are unproductive in this endeavour, which becomes especially clear when the kind of information is correlated to the kind of source and the depth of research. A good example of this is provided by Henningsen in his attempt to establish the basic rules of Danish witchcraft discourse, the so-called 'witchcraft catechism'. 'We can read through hundreds of folklore or witch trial records without ever finding these articles of faith', he observes.⁵

Witchcraft's transformations and their importance in relation to other means of addressing misfortune need to be identified in several important ways. To start with, subtle changes in the content of local witchcraft discourses may be observed when considering the perceived objects of bewitchments. Signs of decline may, for instance, be indicated when industrial products stop being targeted. On the other hand, there are also instances of bewitched engines, which indicate adaptation rather than diminution. As well as content, participants can also be subject to change. In the course of time one social group after another has left the discourse and in some places men seem to have dropped out altogether. Next, unwitchment experts were not always the same kind of people. As already shown, Catholic clergy sometimes refused to answer to the demands of their clientele and in some instances their position was taken over by laymen. Witches themselves have been diminished from being notorious throughout whole villages to being more private personal evil-doers. Sometimes witchcraft even became completely depersonalized as human agents were no longer considered, as in cases where cunning-folk suggested general counter-measures rather than provided the means to identify the witch. Together the participants constitute the witchcraft triangle of bewitched, unwitcher and witch, and changes in its composition reflects on each. Again, witchcraft's resilience is shown in the counter-examples of people starting to apply the discourse anew where earlier they apparently had not done so, as twentieth-century cases from France and Germany reveal. More fundamentally, changes in the 'catechism' need to be revealed, in the ways bewitchments are thought to work, in the ways witches can be identified, and in the ways the capacity to bewitch is deemed to be transmitted from one generation to the next. As this differs from country to country, indeed from region to region or even from place to place, we first have to find out the geographical, temporal and social boundaries of clusters of basic rules and basic contents, so as to avoid, among other things, the danger of mistaking regional differences for indicators of change.

Yet another sign of changes in the witchcraft discourse, if not of its actual

decline, is presented when witchcraft accusations become mixed up with other supernatural phenomena. Possession is a borderline case in this respect, as its link to witchcraft hinges on local traditions which blame humans rather than the Devil directly for the affliction. When this tradition is not present, witch-inspired possession may be considered as an alteration of the discourse. In a more general sense this applies to most instances in which the Devil is involved, since the theological interpretations that formed the official justification for most of the witch trials were hardly absorbed by the general populace. Nineteenth- or twentieth-century incidences where the Devil is promoted as an evil force behind the witch may very well be recent additions, inspired by the orthodox Christian climate in which accusations were then beginning to concentrate. Again, these distinctions can sometimes be hard to see and in any case have to be based on a thorough knowledge of all the available local source material. It is perhaps easier to recognize the blurring of witchcraft motifs, therefore, when they concern an obvious nineteenth-century phenomenon such as spirit rapping, as in a mid nineteenth-century French case in Davies's contribution, or when poltergeist manifestations are ascribed to a witch, as in Hoyle's case from Stratford-upon-Avon. However, as witchcraft discourses are known to have incorporated local traditions while gaining in strength, to take the above instances as examples of decline involves taking account of overall changes in their tradition. This further underlines that we may surmise a certain interpretation of particular modern cases but that we can be far from sure about it.

To complicate matters further, vague boundaries of witchcraft also occur in relation to the particular time and place chosen for study, or they can be part of the research strategy selected by present-day students. As this is the case in a number of contributions to this volume, we want to draw the readers' attention to the various fields that can be involved, especially healing, religion, 'magic' and its counterpart 'superstition'. Concerning the latter, Nils Freytag remarks in his recent book that it is a 'stigmatizing assignment from outside'.⁶ It always involves others, people of another denomination, of another usually lower social class or of another gender, who somehow do not think in the dominant way and exhibit 'irrational' behaviour. We can better consider 'superstition' as part of the outlook of those who are ascribing it to others, rather than as some genuine, free-floating kind of 'world-view'. In this it resembles a witchcraft accusation (although the latter usually involves 'others' outside the household), which also concerns more a process of ascription than the observation of a practice. More often than not what is presented as a certainty is guided by selection within the framework of the ascription. 'Superstition' more than 'witchcraft', however, can be used as an overall category and it is questionable whether its various constituents have any relation to each other in any way different than this. That is to say, witchcraft, mesmerism, astrology or pilgrimages may be connected in the mind of

Protestant authorities, for example, but probably not for those directly involved. Ultimately, then, the label 'superstition' may reveal more about those applying it than about those to whom it is applied.

Magic, on the other hand, has become a much more neutral overall denominator for anything 'supernatural' that cannot be designated to either science or religion (we disregard professional magicians here). But as magic as a category can sometimes be seen as a reification of the former 'superstition' – at least the two exhibit a considerable overlap – we have to take into account that historically magic may not be as neutral as we would like it to be. What we clearly need is a cultural history of the concept of 'magic' alongside 'superstition', and to examine them as something that is specific to particular historical situations.⁷ Furthermore, different parts of magic may have their own temporality. 'Magical beliefs were not all bound up with each other like some monumental cultural artefact', Owen Davies has written. 'Specific magical practices declined, continued or even advanced depending on different and often localised social trends'.⁸ And like 'superstition', magic appears as something to tell tales about as well as to practise. How do we assess the place of witchcraft in all this? Some aspects of the answer have already been mentioned: witches are only related to other 'magical' or 'superstitious' beings when their stories start to interfere, or when they are pressed into the same overarching pigeon-hole. This makes it more attractive to widen the category beyond magic and to consider religion and medicine.

Although it is often reported by people who position themselves outside the discourse, who do not believe in it, witchcraft can only be reasonably studied from 'below', as part of the mental outlook and the actions of the people constituting the witchcraft triangle. This is not to say that the parts that make up this outlook are necessarily combined in such a way that they make an impregnable whole. Even witchcraft narratives may not always form a 'unified system'.⁹ Different discourses and different repertoires can be applied in different contexts by the same people. When a particular situation calls for using one particular kind of speech or action, then another may require something totally different. From the perspective of actual historical actors it may be perfectly understandable to appear religious or scientific at one moment and 'superstitious' at another. Separating these fields beforehand, because a Church has decreed that religion stands apart from magic, or has outgrown it, or because science has decided magic to be nonsense, may thus hamper understanding on the level of those who are immediately involved in it. Seen from the people bewitched, or from the point of view of an unwitcher, a diagnosis of witchcraft is a choice to interpret events in a particular way and to resolve misfortune. Religion and medicine come in at this level, for it may very well have been considered that the affliction had a natural cause, or that resorting to a particular saint, or just praying and trusting in God would have brought relief. As Susan Hoyle argues in her

chapter, the end of witchcraft may set in when the witchcraft story was replaced by a rational one. In other words, when a scientifically medical or agricultural solution was chosen to tackle problems previously ascribed to witchcraft. Witchcraft, however, has been too little studied as the result of a process of selecting options and answers, which can, of course, be blamed on the sources, since they usually stem from the moment when the choice has already been made.

When it concerns choices, witchcraft, medicine and religion may be mutually exclusive in the end. On a different level, however, they may be integrated. This is especially the case with religion, which is more often than not such an essential facet of the life of the bewitched, that it also informs the witchcraft discourse and presents justifications for it. Lay unwitchers often call upon the help of God or the Holy Trinity. Religious artefacts are applied as prophylactics against witches. Lines from the Bible, such as St John's Gospel, are used as counter-magic or used as evidence for the existence of witches – Exodus for example. It thus makes perfect sense, as Sabina Magliocco stresses in her chapter, to see witchcraft within the context of 'vernacular religion' and to study its 'entire range'. It is also evident that people from different religious denominations have a different outlook on witchcraft, but precisely how remains largely a matter for future enquiry. Catholicism with its focus on ritual presentation probably provides for a kind of witchcraft that is more actively practised. Protestantism, as noticed above, can invite its adherents to violence, although both observations are possibly too broad and in need of precision. Even more interesting is the interplay between denominations, as when an occasional Protestant resorts to Catholic 'magic' to counter witches, or, as Éva Pócs relates in her chapter on Transylvania, when Roman Catholics seek the help of Orthodox priests. Similar positions can be ascribed to medicine, although we will have to look primarily to psychiatry or to medicine's 'irregular' variants. Adherents of animal magnetism, for instance, acknowledged witchcraft, if only to usurp the martyrs of the prosecutions for their own cause, while some psychiatrists claimed to 'understand' witchcraft. As in the case of religion, patients may very well have related to this to strengthen their use of the witchcraft discourse. Or to descend to the practical level once more, unwitching is in most cases only one of the possible cures a healer has to offer. Having an overview of the supply side of the medical market can help us to uncover the extent to which witchcraft as a diagnosis is favoured over other explanations. This is abundantly stressed by Enrique Perdiguero in the case of Spain, but it also applies to any other European country or region.

Transformations or fluctuations in local witchcraft discourses can be seen as the result of the sum of the choices people made when confronted with misfortune. The choices, in their turn, may have been governed by changes in available options and by changes in the religious or ideological outlook.

The little discussion that has taken place, however, has concentrated on witchcraft's decline rather than on its transformations, and has been related primarily to changing economic circumstances. At the moment we have not proceeded beyond the question why witchcraft disappeared earlier in one area of Europe than in another, and how this is possibly linked to the rationalization of infrastructure. This was, according to Nils Freytag, exactly what the Prussian government already suggested in the mid nineteenth century: improved education, better distribution of scientific medical knowledge and better communications would lift the remote parts of the country where superstition was linked to isolation. When we compare the situation in France with England it is evident that industrialization took an earlier hold in the latter country, and that the countryside emptied there much sooner. If witchcraft is intrinsically tied up with agriculture and foreign to urbanization, and there is evidence that it is not, this may explain why accusations have disappeared in England and are still much alive in France. The counter-example is presented by the western Netherlands, a much smaller region, but one that experienced urbanization and industrialization back in the seventeenth century, and where agricultural communities were far from self-sufficient. It therefore remains theoretically possible that witchcraft also survived in Britain, but that it is just poorly recorded or not at all. The witchcraft chronology of the western Netherlands is actually akin to England, as in both areas the last known cases happened before the Second World War. The eastern parts of the Netherlands, with traces of witchcraft accusations in the 1950s and 1960s, bears more resemblance to Germany and Denmark. There is too little substantial information about the rest of Europe to extend this map.¹⁰

A new element in this discussion is presented by Owen Davies in this volume when he supersedes the economic explanation by focusing on the typically French *mentalité paysan*. Witchcraft accusations are convincingly presented as belonging to a lifestyle that clings to traditional values and a regional rather than national identity. This may have wider relevance for the rest of Europe, that is, if a similar kind of lifestyle can be identified in nineteenth-century England or in mid-twentieth-century Germany for instance. Again we lack the research to answer these musings. Another question is whether these kind of comparisons have any relevance. They presume general rules on a European level,¹¹ while it may very well be the case that different explanations apply to different situations or different geographical entities. If the content of a witchcraft accusation and the repertoire of counter-measures are in any way related to the more encompassing ideologies that help inform them, then we should indeed expect one explanation to be valuable in only one locality. But how, for instance, a typically English custom such as scratching witches to draw blood relates to a specific regional rural economy and English identity has yet to be discovered. Comparisons can

serve both to find out basic rules – if there are any, and to understand local particularities. To minimize complications they can better be kept between neighbouring countries or within the broad umbrella of Christianity in the case of Europe.

As already hinted, we also have to take the kind of source into account when trying to formulate provisional conclusions. If available, a different source does not immediately undermine findings, but rather puts them into perspective. In itself a case of witch assault taken from newspaper reports would not become less violent when a rare folklore account or an even rarer diary entry has transmitted other aspects of it. But other sources may indicate the presence of other cases with less violent endings. Laura Stark makes a remark to this extent about the folklore records she used as the basis for her chapter on Finnish witchcraft. Retribution in cases of bewitchment ‘tended to assume the form of counter-sorcery rather than physical violence’. There was ‘no need’ to cause bodily harm. Elsewhere, folklore material does occasionally reveal violent unwitchments, but the bulk, however, show non-violent reactions. This material concerns not so much narratives, stories with a clear structure such as fairy tales, but legends, narrated memories interviewees had heard from others or even experienced themselves. These kind of texts are, on the whole, to be found more in twentieth-century collections than in nineteenth-century ones. The earlier witchcraft stories are usually too much selected and polished and published as autonomous examples of ‘folk’ narrative art. Only in the twentieth century did folklorists really begin to note down in shorthand most of what their informants told them, and even then not everything was published. As a result, the general image of the folk narrative text has remained one that resembles more a fairy tale than a fragment of daily speech. Folklore archives all over Europe, though not in England, are waiting to be explored to adjust this image. And as Willem de Blécourt shows in the case of the western Netherlands, it may be useful to consult a variety of local publications to counteract the geographically coincidental and thus limited range of folklore interviews, even though they did produce hundreds of texts for the places that were covered.

Next to this, much more use can be made of trial material, whether it concerns cruelty to animals, slander, assault, unlicensed medical practice, fraud, manslaughter or other misdemeanours and crimes. When almost a hundred cases featuring witchcraft can be collected in Germany for the thirty years between 1925 and 1956, then this provides promising prospects for other areas where the discourse was still vibrant, or for that matter for nineteenth-century Germany. And most of the German cases still await analysis. Furthermore, novels and movies have hardly been used as sources for nineteenth- and twentieth-century representations of witches. Like the pagan witches, the fairy-tale witches depicted in various forms of fiction may have little to do with the kind of witches accused of causing misfortune, but

they are still part of the overall picture. On the basis of television series, for instance, we may even question whether witchcraft has really declined.

The contrast between stories and images on the one hand, and real-life witchcraft accusations or even practices on the other, can also be found on an everyday level. It is, in fact, in different ways one of the main themes of this volume. When we describe the witchcraft discourse as 'thinking and acting in terms of witchcraft' it refers to the process from formulating an event as witchcraft to witnessing the outcome of counter-measures. More abstract forms of the discourse are bound by specific geographical or social clusters, like any language or dialect. Although this implies the priority of the accusation, the ascription of someone as a witch, which is, in itself, a speech act, also includes other actions such as threatening a witch or ostracizing him or her. Other active forms of witchcraft, such as love magic, constitute the pendant of an accusation. They are, however, not always easy to establish and often stay within the realm of speech. People talk about putting pins in a doll or putting menstruation blood in coffee but the act itself may remain hidden, if it is ever performed at all. Witchcraft is more often than not restricted to texts, to stories, rather than put into practice. This applies to the participants in the witchcraft triangle as well as it does to the historian. Field work by Éva Pócs and her students also revealed, 'not so much practice as the narratives about it'. As long as we do not linger on historical 'facts', such as acts of violence, but also concentrate on what Laura Stark calls 'the narrative field which encoded and transmitted cultural thinking about magical harm', this should be an advantage rather than a hindrance.

The tension between narrative and practice is also noticeable within the discourse. Sabina Magliocco suggests using the label 'folkloric witch' for those that figure primarily in stories: 'many activities attributed to witches were folkloric in nature', she writes in her chapter on Italy; 'that is, no living member of any community, even traditional magic-workers, practised them'. As she indicates, the problem is that this 'folkloric witch' and the ascribed or practising witch 'overlapped considerably in people's minds'. Stories, for example, about flying or animal metamorphosis could easily become attached to a member of the community. How then should we evaluate the principle of ostention which is central to Stephen Mitchell's interpretation of the 1808 Izzard case? This principle refers to the possibility of people acting out stories, but how did they perform broomstick riding or change into an animal? A very special example of making stories into physical reality is provided by Richard Jenkins in the case of Northern Ireland, where 'evidence' of black magic rituals was fabricated. Here, however, the meaning of the relics was based on movies and novels rather than on an indigenous Irish tradition, and the effects they produced were, in their turn, also narratives. As Mitchell demonstrates, ostention can be very useful if one wants to argue that when a 'doable' story circulates it may well be put into practice by someone, even

when it concerns merely a suggestion of a practice. But it has to be used with caution. To see witchcraft stories as simply guides for violent action amounts to the denial of a previous process in which choices have been made and implies that what is narrated is also feasible. It thus undermines the position of the story on the one hand and the possibility of historical change on the other. It still does not follow that when only a story survives, it necessarily points to a past event and it does not make witchcraft less subject to ascription.

In witchcraft, stories and actions may be indiscernible from each other in the sense that the story can be the main observable action. As Jonathan Barry commented regarding the early modern period: 'the line between fact and fiction, history telling and storytelling, will be blurred, not just for the subsequent historian but also for the contemporary participant, above all when dealing with as elusive a subject as witchcraft. This very circumstance is itself of crucial importance to an understanding of witchcraft's history.'¹² What needs to be elaborated is the distinction between kinds of story, inside and outside the discourse. Susan Hoyle's chapter stresses the replacement of witchcraft by non-witchcraft stories and considers different interpretations of a witchcraft event as competitive. We can also ponder the difference between accounts of fully remembered events and vague reminiscences, between narratives about bewitchments and unwitchments and those about mere shape-shifting, for the vaguer stories may be a sign of the decline of the discourse. As Owen Davies concluded, 'the witch figure disappeared before the belief in witchcraft', that is, the practice of accusing someone of witchcraft dwindled earlier than the circulation of witchcraft stories.¹³ But as long as the stories remain, witchcraft has not disappeared.

Notes

- ¹ See the seminal articles by Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, 'Witchcraft after the Witch-Trials', in Willem de Blécourt, Ronald Hutton and Jean La Fontaine, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century* (London, 1999), pp. 95–189; Willem de Blécourt, 'The Witch, her Victim, the Unwitcher and the Researcher: The Continued Existence of Traditional Witchcraft', in Willem de Blécourt, Ronald Hutton and Jean La Fontaine, *Witchcraft in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London, 1999), pp. 141–219.
- ² See Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999); Owen Davies, *A People Bewitched: Witchcraft and Magic in Nineteenth Century Somerset* (Bruton, 1999). Two notable exceptions for other countries are, Judith Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind: French Peasants and the Supernatural in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1987); Christine D. Worobec, *Possessed: Women, Witches and Demons in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, 2001).
- ³ Gustav Henningsen, 'Witchcraft', in Thomas A. Green (ed.), *Folklore: An Encyclopaedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art* (Santa Barbara, 1997), p. 842. On modern pagan religion see, for example: Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History*

- of *Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford, 1999); Susan Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Oxford and New York, 2000).
- 4 Gijswijt-Hofstra, 'Witchcraft after the Witch-Trials', p. 183.
 - 5 Gustav Henningsen, 'The Catechism of Witchlore in Twentieth-Century Denmark', in Jawaharial Handoo and Reimund Kvideland (eds), *Folklore in the Changing World* (Mysore, 1999), pp. 137–49.
 - 6 Nils Freytag, *Aberglauben im 19. Jahrhundert. Preußen und seine Rheinprovinz zwischen Tradition und Moderne (1815–1918)* (Berlin, 2003), p. 363.
 - 7 See Laura Stark-Arola, *Magic, Body and Social Order: The Construction of Gender Through Women's Private Rituals in Traditional Finland* (Helsinki, 1998).
 - 8 Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, p. 271.
 - 9 This appears, for instance, from Willem de Blécourt's work on metamorphosis narratives which refer partly to a sexual domain rather than to a witchcraft discourse. See, for example, his forthcoming book *Werewolves*, especially part 2.
 - 10 See the references in de Blécourt, 'The Witch, her Victim, the Unwitcher and the Researcher'.
 - 11 For a recent discussion with a global perspective see Ronald Hutton, 'The Global Context of the Scottish Witch-Hunt', in Julian Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 16–32.
 - 12 Jonathan Barry, 'Keith Thomas and the Problem of Witchcraft', in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 44.
 - 13 Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, p. 280. See also de Blécourt, 'The Witch, her Victim, the Unwitcher and the Researcher', p. 215.