

Witchcraft accusations in France, 1850–1990

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The continued widespread belief in witchcraft and magic in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France has received considerable academic attention. Yet little of the relevant work has been published in English and, moreover, no thematic historical survey has yet been attempted to trace the continued social significance of witchcraft over the two centuries. As well as discussing the extent and nature of witchcraft accusations in the period, therefore, this chapter also provides a general survey of the published work on the subject for an English audience. As the reader will find, this requires considerable interdisciplinary awareness. Although historians, folklorists and anthropologists often find themselves in the same field of study, they rarely follow the same path across it. Despite a wealth of information, historians have ignored the history of French witchcraft accusations beyond the nineteenth century, while anthropologists, folklorists and psychologists, who have built up an impressive body of analysis from oral interviewing, have largely failed to trace the historical context of the contemporary beliefs they have studied. Reading through the publications of the various disciplines it soon becomes obvious that if we are to understand fully the recent history of witchcraft accusations, then a flexible interdisciplinary approach is essential. This is certainly being done in the broader context of the social history of the period, but has yet to be applied to more specific cultural themes such as witchcraft. Finally, my approach to the subject is much influenced by my own work on English witchcraft in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This introduces the puzzling question as to why two countries separated by a narrow stretch of water have such different recent histories regarding the continuation of traditional witchcraft accusations.

Most of the historical studies on the continuance of witchcraft and magic in French society during the modern period have focused on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Matthew Ramsey's work on popular medicine between the years 1770–1830 has done much to highlight the profusion and diversity of magical practitioners and practices in that period.

Eloïse Mozzani's examination of the popularity of fortune-tellers, prophets, occultists and pseudo-scientists during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic years has provided further confirmation of the ubiquity of magical beliefs across French society at the time. Bernard Traimond's study of magic and religious politics in the *Landes de Gascognes* (1750–1826) gives us a detailed and vivid study of one serious witchcraft dispute that ended in court in 1826. The case illustrates the depth of popular feeling concerning the activities of witches in southern France. Judith Devlin's fascinating and impressive survey of witchcraft, magic and 'superstition' throughout the whole century has been widely cited by other historians, though it does present a rather static impression of popular belief over the century.¹ As well as these book-length studies, there are several articles by French historians that have made use of the criminal records of the period. Marie-Claude Denier has examined several late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century trials concerning unbewitching in Mayenne, a *département* in north-western France. Jean-Claude Sebban has analysed twenty-three trials involving magical practitioners in nineteenth-century Berry, and Benoît Marin-Curtoud has considered, in more general fashion, the prosecution of magical practitioners under laws against illegal medicine between 1870 and 1940.²

There have also been numerous related studies on folk medicine and popular religion that help broaden our contextual understanding of the social relevance of witchcraft and magic in the period.³ All these reveal the integral role of Catholicism in healing the bewitched and averting misfortune, either through the use of consecrated items such as herbs, holy water, rosaries and candles or through the action of prayer, mass, ritual and exorcism. Yet in nineteenth-century France there was considerable disquiet within the Church regarding clerical involvement in or tacit sanction of unofficial popular religious rites and rituals. There are numerous instances during the second half of the century of priests attempting to suppress customary activities, those centred on prehistoric sites and megaliths for example, and demolishing the shrines of local saints disapproved of by the Church.⁴ Some priests also refused to exorcise or provide succour to the bewitched as they saw it as perpetuating 'foolish' beliefs detrimental to true piety. But it was an uphill struggle. As the retiring *curé* of Rezay wrote to his successor in 1901, 'to report a general failing: superstition'.⁵ Furthermore, such policies only served to alienate the laity and encourage the resort to lay alternatives. During the trial of a *devin* or cunning-man named Shanly in 1845 it was heard how he had been consulted after the *curé* of Villegenon, Cher, had refused to bless the bewitched pigs of Jean-Baptiste Sénè.⁶ Much of what people like Shanly practised was little different from the services offered by the clergy, and it is no wonder people sought out such healers who were willing to use religion for practical rather than purely spiritual purposes.

Not surprisingly, some members of the clergy saw the installation of a

more sober, less participatory and inflexible relationship between priest and parishioners as being detrimental to the best interests of the Church. Evidence from surveys conducted by the Church during the second half of the nineteenth century indicated they were beginning to lose their grip on both the individual and the communal psyche, particularly in urban areas. Church attendance was declining, civil burial becoming more popular, and the Church's traditional ban on marriage during Lent and Advent was observed less and less, for example.⁷ It was not so much a process of secularization but of decreasing reliance on the spiritual support of the Church. The only way of maintaining popular participation was to accommodate folk beliefs, involve people in the manifestation of the supernatural, and promote the practical application of religion. A classic example of such a clerical response was Abbé Olive's *Association de Notre-Dame des Sept-Douleurs de Boulleret*, which was created to bolster parochial faith. The *Association* promoted a series of visions experienced by a female parishioner between 1875 and 1904. According to Olive she was inspired and chosen by the Virgin to reform sinners in the parish of Boulleret. Strange occurrences also happened in the parish. People vomited blood and some claimed they had been wounded by the devil in the guise of a man dressed in black. Under Olive's astute guidance, the *Association* became a national movement with membership mushrooming from 10,000 in 1887 to 302,452 in 1903. It also drove a thriving trade in devotional objects such as medals, rosaries and images that had protective properties.⁸

This conservative reflex within the Catholic Church undoubtedly helped maintain a religious environment into the twentieth century that accommodated popular concerns regarding witchcraft. Yet we should not jump to the conclusion that the continued strength of belief, compared to England, was largely *because* of the influence of Catholicism. More detailed comparative research is required looking at supernatural beliefs in French Protestant areas. In the mid 1870s only around 600,000 people out of a population of thirty-six million were Protestant,⁹ but did they think differently about witchcraft than the dominant Catholic population? Were they less concerned? Jacques Gutwirth's study of 'superstition' and religion in the predominantly Protestant Cévennes region during the mid twentieth century seems to indicate a comparative level of discourse regarding witchcraft and magic amongst more conservative Protestants.¹⁰ We can also look to Willem de Blécourt's work on witchcraft in Dutch Protestant and Catholic areas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for comparison. He found that the belief and fear of witchcraft seemed to be weaker in Protestant areas generally but remained strong in conservative Calvinist communities. As he concludes, 'the decisive factor connecting witchcraft discourse to the creed is not adherence to the main Christian denominations but the degree of religiosity itself'.¹¹ Still, we need to be careful about over emphasizing the

link between the prevalence of witchcraft beliefs and levels of religiosity generally. Both historical and ethnographic sources provide ample evidence that people can think in terms of witchcraft without being devoutly religious. The continued belief in witchcraft in modern French society, and elsewhere, needs, therefore, to be analysed within a framework of socio-cultural trends rather than religious persuasion, and consequently the role of conservative religious tendencies in maintaining witchcraft beliefs should be located in individual reflexes to social change.

Sources

During the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century many amateur folklorists and antiquarians collected and reflected upon the persistence of witchcraft beliefs in French society. Up until the 1930s the attitude of such authors was generally censorious, tempered with a confidence that the forces of modernity would eventually vanquish such 'old-fashioned' beliefs. The language was not quite as harsh as M. Hilarion Barthety's talk in 1874 of the 'imbeciles' who held such beliefs, but the word 'credulity' was used liberally.¹² One such author was Félix Chapisseau. Writing in 1902 of the area of La Beauce, in the plains south of Paris, he remarked that thanks to the eighteenth-century philosophers and the development of science in the following century, 'in our days there is hardly anybody other than very old folk who believe in witches'. But he tempered this confidence by admitting 'the terror has disappeared, but the influence remains. They speak about it rarely, but they think of it sometimes.' Nevertheless in those 'isolated hamlets' where there remained 'some vestiges of this credulity, it will be undermined by this disclosure: newspapers and time will do the rest'.¹³ In 1911, Charles Lancelin, a prolific author on the subject of the occult, posed the question, 'At the present time, do country folk still believe in witchcraft?' The answer was, 'Yes – in various degrees'.¹⁴ It was not so much the belief in witchcraft which annoyed Lancelin but the activities of those 'rogues' who cheated people out of money by pretending to be able to cure it. In the same year a country doctor from the Montagne Bourbonnaise in the Massif Central, was critical of his patients for believing in witchcraft. Although he believed such 'superstitions' had undoubtedly diminished in the region, they 'are unfortunately still too numerous'. The people remained 'credulous' because they lacked sufficient education, he thought. He noted some signs of progress though. The first response of farmers whose horses were sick was to disinfect their stables and call in a veterinary. However, under cover of darkness they still made their way to the local cunning-folk to lift the spells they believed were upon their horses.¹⁵

Such authors, like many folklorists at the time, were guided by their own sense of social evolution. Yes, witchcraft beliefs still existed fairly widely but

they were anachronisms. Their pervasive influence was on the wane and once the programme of state education was firmly established their demise would surely follow. Similar views were still being expressed after the Second World War. One commentator wrote in 1946 that although he was 'delighted with the progress of popular education', ignorance was still 'in our rural areas, the great auxiliary of superstition'.¹⁶ But the academic approach of the folklorist Arnold van Gennep in the 1930s, and his followers such as Claude and Jacques Seignolle and M. Leproux and other researchers like Marcelle Bouteiller did much to move the subject away from this patrician view of witch belief as a 'problem' and as a hindrance to social development in rural areas.¹⁷ Although Van Gennep still referred to such beliefs as 'erroneous', he nevertheless distanced himself from the nineteenth-century folklorists' preoccupation with survivals, with the view that 'superstitious' beliefs should be seen and studied as remnant artefacts of past societies. For Van Gennep popular beliefs regarding the supernatural were living aspects of current culture, albeit a 'traditional' one at odds with modernity, and to record and measure them required a subtle and systematic method of oral interviewing.¹⁸ As he found in the Dauphiné, for example, when people were first questioned about witchcraft they were 'unanimous in declaring that the belief in witches had disappeared nearly everywhere', but further patient probing usually revealed that the 'belief existed more than appeared at first'.¹⁹ When, several years later in 1935–36, the Seignolle brothers conducted an oral folklore survey in Hurepoix, on the southern edge of Paris, they found that a 'reluctance to talk has been most strong regarding magic and popular medicine'.²⁰ Those who provided instances of witchcraft 'considered it good taste to display a certain scepticism and consigned them to the past'.²¹ All the cases of witchcraft they collected were located in the second half of the nineteenth century, and were either childhood memories or stories received from older family members. They assumed that belief had declined significantly over the previous three decades: 'if this research had been done according to our extensive method at the beginning of the twentieth century the list [of witch legends] would, without doubt, have been longer still.'²²

While recognizing the value of the work of this new breed of folklorist, the problem still remains as to how representative are the results of such oral surveys of the strength and relevance of witchcraft in France between the world wars. As folklorists and ethnographers both before and after have found, it is a common defensive reflex for people to situate their knowledge and experience of witchcraft a generation or so in the past. It was, as Willem de Blécourt has put it, 'using the past as a device to obscure the present'.²³ After all, those being interviewed knew full well that the people interviewing them almost certainly did not share their feelings on the subject, and they were sensitive about appearing 'credulous' or 'foolish' to others. Yet in their totality the various oral surveys conducted in the two decades either side of

the Second World War certainly demonstrate that witchcraft continued as an integral aspect of rural popular discourse.

It was not only folklorists who were interested in the contemporary belief in witchcraft during the first half of the twentieth century. The role of witchcraft in popular aetiology and magical cures also caught the attention of the medical fraternity. This is not surprising considering that as a profession they, along with the clergy, were most exposed to popular concerns regarding witchcraft or satanically inspired illness. George Raviart, a clinical psychiatrist writing in 1936, recalled how one of his colleagues was consulted in the case of the exorcism of a man from a hamlet in northern France, who had once been convicted for practising illegal medicine.²⁴ In his memoirs, Cyrille Kaszuk, a doctor who set up practice just after the Second World War in the Sundgau, a rural area in the south of Alsace, recommended, 'witches should not be considered lightly, if one wants to practice medicine with impunity around here'.²⁵ He observed that in 1947 there were only three doctors in the region of haut-Sundgau but by 1990 there were twenty-eight. Nevertheless, Kaszuk's comments suggest the increasing access to orthodox medicine did not have a profound effect on the local population's resort to witchcraft diagnoses and counter-magic. Away from parochial general practice, the medical fraternity also maintained a strong academic interest in the subject. The continued belief in witchcraft and the practice of healing magic were the subject of a number of student theses during the early twentieth century, motivated in part by the need to 'know one's rivals' and better to counter the adherence to popular medicine.²⁶ The manifestation and cause of possession was another continued focus of attention, which represented the extension of a nineteenth-century tradition of medical investigation into the psychological aspects of possession influenced by the work of Jean Esquirol (1772–1849) and Jean Martin Charcot (1825–93).²⁷ Both attempted to explain away the sensational early modern outbreaks of mass possession as 'demonopathy' or 'hysteria'. Such phenomena were rooted not in the bowels of Hell but in mental illness. As cases of multiple possession effectively disappeared by the early twentieth century, however, the psychiatric emphasis shifted from the concept of contagious 'demonopathy' to the psychopathology of the bewitched individual.²⁸

One of the most interesting of the post-war doctoral psychiatric studies was conducted by Jean Morel, who examined the medical records of the psychiatric hospital of Alençon, in the department of Orne. Taking a fifteen-year period between 1949 and 1963 he looked at the cases of forty-three men who were admitted as being delirious following witchcraft disputes. He produced a sociological breakdown of these men. He found that thirty-five were rural dwellers while the other eight came from local towns. Twenty of the people were over forty years old; thirteen were between thirty and forty, and the rest under thirty. Twelve were farmers, sixteen were agricultural

workers, seven general labourers, four were skilled workers, and there was one craftsman and one tradesman. Eighteen were classified as mentally subnormal and a further twenty as possessing poor intelligence. In fourteen cases the 'delirium' of bewitchment was attributed to alcoholism, eight men were described as being schizophrenic and five suffered from clinical paranoia.²⁹ Although such analyses of psychiatric cases provide useful case studies concerning the dynamics of accusations, and a valuable window on to the way in which witchcraft was projected by the mentally ill, they also create the misleading impression that the continued profound belief in witchcraft amongst people in the twentieth century can be explained solely in terms of mental illness. In other words, it suggests that witchcraft belief is a pathological rather than a sociological expression. In this respect, the ethnologist Dominique Camus has been particularly outspoken in his criticism of the work of Morel and like-minded colleagues, describing their work as 'an approach so limited by value judgements that it can but only impede the understanding of the phenomenon of witchcraft'.³⁰

During the second half of the century, while folklorists such as Claude Seignolle continued to provide the valuable service of recording oral beliefs and legends,³¹ anthropologists of witchcraft, whose interests had long been dominated by a fascination with witch accusations in colonial Africa, realized that there were communities on their own doorsteps where the witchcraft discourse was as strong. The pioneer in this new wave of research was Jeanne Favret-Saada who, between 1969 and 1971, immersed herself in the world of parochial witchcraft suspicions and accusations in the *Bocage* (hedged countryside) of western France.³² She was dismissive of the previous analytical efforts of the folklorists, stating that 'anthropology is a discipline infinitely more sophisticated than folklore', and her research and publications certainly moved the study of French witchcraft on to a whole new level.³³ Not surprisingly, her work was initially embraced within the established context of African research,³⁴ but soon the ethnography of contemporary French witchcraft became a subject area in its own right. Further regional studies appeared, though few researchers followed Favret-Saada's approach of immersing themselves fully in the popular discourse.³⁵ The area of western France where she conducted her research was later the subject of several revisionist doctoral studies,³⁶ and more recently the ethnologist and sociologist Dominique Camus has become something of a media presence appearing on television, radio and in newspapers discussing his own insightful research on witchcraft and magic in western France.³⁷ The importance of such anthropological work will become apparent later.

As well as folklorists another target of Favret-Saada's scorn was journalistic reporting on contemporary witchcraft. Journalism's contribution to the study of witchcraft in modern France is certainly rather mixed, but cannot easily be dismissed. Newspaper reports of relevant court cases are an

invaluable source of information on witchcraft accusations for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, yet at the same time newspaper reportage has often been shaped not by the sober objectivity of the academic but by sensationalism, mockery and gross value judgements. Numerous journalistic exposés have proclaimed they have ‘discovered’ or ‘uncovered’ a ‘shocking’ or ‘surprising’ continued belief in witchcraft, despite the fact that academics and folklorists have long written and published widely on the subject.³⁸ René Crozet, for example, in a book that received a good deal of media coverage in the early 1990s, wrote with implicit racism, ‘like many, I imagined that witchcraft was the exclusive domain of the folklore of blacks or Haitians’.³⁹ But at the same time the immediacy of journalistic work has also helped highlight areas of recent developments in magical practice that the anthropologists and folklorists have yet to explore in detail, such as immigrant urban magic.

Manifestations of witchcraft

1850 has been chosen as the chronological starting point for this discussion not only for reasons of tidiness but also because in that year there occurred one of the most sensational cases of witchcraft in nineteenth-century France. The events in Cideville, a village of around 270 people in the Normandy *département* of Seine-Maritime, provide a detailed snapshot of the continued strength of the discourse concerning witchcraft across a wide cross-section of French society.

One day in March 1849 Father Tinel, *curé* of Cideville, paid a visit to an ailing parishioner. On learning that the parishioner was being treated by a local *sorcier*, or cunning-man, named Gosselin, Tinel condemned the cunning-man and urged that a proper physician be consulted. Not long after, Gosselin was arrested for practising medicine without a licence and sentenced to two years in prison. It was rumoured in the village that Tinel had orchestrated his arrest. It seems that a friend of the cunning-man, a shepherd named Thorel decided to exact revenge on the priest. During a local auction in the village Thorel espied the presence of two of Tinel’s lodgers, Gustave Lemmonier and Clement Bunel, boys aged twelve and fourteen respectively. He approached them and touched them in the back, a strange action, which was subsequently interpreted as an act of witchcraft. In November 1850 the two boys began to complain of rapping noises in their study. Soon after, furniture and other objects were reportedly thrown around the parsonage. These disturbances went on for two months until the archbishop of Paris ordered that the two boys be removed from Tinel’s care. The priest believed Thorel’s witchery was the cause of the trouble and exacted his revenge. Tinel had a word with Thorel’s master, and the shepherd lost his job. Not long after the priest and the shepherd got into a physical altercation that ended with Tinel

beating him with a walking stick. On 7 January 1851 Thorel lodged a formal complaint of assault against the priest. When the case came to court Thorel demanded 1000 francs damages for the imputation of 'witchcraft' and a further 200 for the assault. He lost the case and ended up out of pocket. The Normandy press reported little on the extraordinary events, undoubtedly conscious of the mockery the Parisian press would heap upon the region's rural population. It was the accounts provided by the occult explorers Charles Jules, Marquis de Mirville, and Henri Gougenot des Mousseaux, which brought the Cideville affair to wider attention. The case coincided with the sensational development of spiritualism and table-rapping, and the noisy manifestations in the presbytery, whose origins lay in a classic witchcraft dispute, were assimilated into the educated empiric quest to prove the reality of the spirit world. The case later found its way into the work of the influential occultists Eliphas Levi (1810–75) and the founder of Theosophy Madame Blavatsky (1831–91).⁴⁰

The Cideville affair was, however, by no means an isolated sensation. Only a few years later, in 1857, hundreds of miles away in the village of Morzine, near the Swiss border, a lengthy outbreak of mass possession attracted considerable attention.⁴¹ Several adolescent girls and young women in the village claimed they were bewitched, several of them by male witches. One girl said she had been possessed after a witch made her eat some of his bread. Another's illness began after drinking some wine in the company of a witch. A local priest, Abbé Pinguet, performed several collective exorcisms but was forced to cease his active involvement in 1860 by the new French authorities (the region having been recently annexed), who were concerned by the destabilizing consequences of such 'superstitious' practices. A year later the number of females supposedly possessed in the village peaked at around 200. Events in Morzine were reported nationwide, and the case attracted the considerable attention of the medical and clerical professions, as well as the spiritualist movement in the shape of Allan Kardec. The case highlighted the divisions within the Church regarding participation in such popular manifestations of supernatural belief, with some clergy conducting exorcisms, including some Capuchin missionaries, while others like the government appointee Monsignor Magnin, refused to exorcise and was subsequently beaten up in the church by some villagers. For the medical establishment the mass possession was a classic demonstration of hysterodemonopathy. Roy Porter ironically observed that Morzine truly was the 'Devil's gift to psychiatry'.⁴² As the affair slowly died down, further north a new possession sensation was developing. Between 1864 and 1869 two young boys, this time from Illfurth (Illfurth), a village in southern Alsace, began to exhibit the classic symptoms of the possessed. Thiébaut and Joseph were the sons of a pedlar named Joseph Burner and his wife Marie-Anne. As in so many such cases the origin of the affair lay in a classic witchcraft scenario.

One day the boys had eaten an apple given to them by a poor old woman with a bad reputation who had been chased out of her old village, presumably for being a witch although this was not made explicit in the detailed account provided by Paul Sutter the *curé* of Wickerschwihr, near Colmar.⁴³ The evil spirits, Orobas, Zolaethiel and Ypès, who possessed the boys, had many a lengthy conversation with the doctors, clergymen and local dignitaries who interviewed them in various languages including Latin and English, though German was the preferred medium. The devils naturally expressed their hatred of Catholicism and Napoleon III, but were enthusiastic about Protestantism and the masons.⁴⁴ Professor Hoppe of Bale University considered the case to be one of hysteria coupled with St Vitus's dance. The Bishop of Strasbourg was also sceptical about the boys' possession, but in April 1869 local pressure led him to set up an ecclesiastical investigation into the affair. Its report was inconclusive but the Bishop reluctantly sanctioned an official exorcism, which apparently succeeded. Thiébaud died two years after his exorcism on 3 April 1871 at the age of sixteen. His brother died in 1882 aged twenty-five.⁴⁵

Moving into the twentieth century, exactly one hundred years after the events at Cideville began, a major witchcraft disturbance occurred across the other side of the country in Merlebach, a town on the German border. In November 1949 a district of the town was thrown into a state of great agitation by the claims of several people that they had been bewitched by the 49-year-old wife of a Polish immigrant coal miner. As recorded by the regional press, for several evenings in a row an effigy of the woman was paraded around the neighbourhood in an attempt to drive the couple out of town. Jean Schober, a 'Lumpendoktor' from the nearby German village of Lauterbach, and a self-styled 'Master of Witches', was consulted, and confirmed the suspicions of the townsfolk. The Polish couple made a formal complaint to the police who set about diffusing the tense situation. A local newspaper, the *Républicain Lorrain*, ran its account of the story under the headline, 'Malevolence or hallucination? Accused of witchcraft by her neighbours, a Merlebach family escape being lynched'.⁴⁶ Twenty-seven years later a trial took place at Argentan, which graphically exposed the continued strength of witch belief and the integral role of popular religion in the witchcraft discourse.

In 1977 Léontine Esnault, a 74-year-old fabric shopkeeper of Savigny-le-Vieux, a village in the west of Lower Normandy, was arrested for fraud and failing to assist someone in danger.⁴⁷ In the local dialect she was a *désencraudeuse*, an unbewitcher, a cunning-woman. The story recounted in court started back in the 1950s when Guy, one of the sons of Pierre and Léontine Esnault, was sent home ill from National Service in Morocco. It was suggested at first that he had reacted badly to vaccination jabs. They consulted numerous doctors and healers but none helped improve Guy's

condition, so they approached l'abbé Noury, a renegade priest who had built his own chapel near Lisieux, from where he cured the sick and sold various religious protective charms. Noury divided illness into two sorts: those that could be cured by a doctor and those caused by witchcraft and evil spirits. He diagnosed that Guy was possessed by a demon and had been bewitched by one of Pierre's competitors, Pierre being a rather unsuccessful sheep-trader. At the beginning of 1955 Guy died and their other son Henri fell ill. The witchcraft was evidently directed at the whole family. Léontine wrote to the local bishop asking him to intervene and he sent her a copy of the popular exorcism against Satan and the rebel angels published by Leon XIII (1878–1903) for use by the laity as well as the priesthood. Next she wrote to a Parisian medium and *désenvoûteur* named Maurice Martini. For a fee of 500 francs he agreed to visit the Esnaults and put an end to the witchcraft. To their great shock he identified Pierre's mother as the witch and using various religious paraphernalia proceeded to cast a spell over her to force her to stop. Henri's condition improved, and impressed by Martini's powers he spent some time in Paris receiving instruction in the occult arts – for a fee of course. His mother too, was seduced by the lure of professional magic.

On the night of 3 January 1956, the first anniversary of Guy's death, Léontine claimed to have had a visitation from Christ, who announced that he had chosen her to be one of his servants and conferred upon her the gift of healing by prayer. Word soon spread around the locality and Léontine began to be consulted by the sick and bewitched in the sacred confines of Guy's bedroom. Unlike the various cunning-men and healers she had engaged, Léontine did not charge a direct fee but encouraged gifts in kind. Besides, she soon developed other moneymaking sidelines. One day a client fainted and Léontine gave her some tap water. The client subsequently believed that the water had healed her complaint, so Léontine began to market it as 'eau de Savigny', though she was careful not to claim that it was 'miraculous'. She also made money by arranging buyers for bewitched land, farms and livestock. Later, she teamed up with a notary clerk from Paris who dispensed financial advice to her bewitched clients. In 1968 and 1969 Léontine prophesied that Guy would shortly rise from the dead and two high-profile pilgrimages were organized to herald the event. On the first occasion 500–600 people filed slowly through Guy's bedroom and then made their way to his tomb in the local churchyard. The local press was highly critical of these events and of the activities of the Esnaults, but it was another seven years before the law intervened and suppressed her activities and the cult that surrounded her. It is worth noting that over the twenty years of Léontine's practice the local priest, l'abbé Mauduit, made no attempt to set his authority against her. Some of his neighbouring colleagues expressed their concern about her activities and tried to persuade their parishioners from consulting her, but Mauduit maintained a complicit silence, even regarding her very

public pilgrimages.⁴⁸ Like some of his nineteenth-century colleagues, he presumably maintained a sceptical silence while welcoming the upsurge in religious devotion that Léontine's activities encouraged.

The above cases are snapshots of substantial communal expressions of witchcraft and the integral role of the Church in resolving related conflicts, but in the intervening years many other court cases and serious individual incidents occurred. Assaults on suspected witches were certainly not rare and tragic deaths periodically resulted from such encounters. On 24 January 1868, for example, M. Gouache, priest of la Loupe in the *département* of Eure-et-Loir, died after being stabbed in the leg by a man who had beseeched him to cure him of witchcraft. The man openly confessed to the arresting police that he had been bewitched for three years and he had gone to confession in a highly excited state to ask Gouache to take the spell off. When the priest turned away to deal with another matter the man stabbed him. 'I killed him to free myself,' he said, which suggests that Gouache was suspected of being involved in the bewitchment.⁴⁹ In 1880 the Vendée assizes heard how several neighbours had murdered a seventy-year-old *sorcier* named Joseph Cléon. Witnesses testified that Cléon boasted of his ability to transfer milk from his neighbours' cows to his own. Six years later the assizes at Blois dealt with a case where an old woman suspected of causing a series of agricultural misfortunes on a neighbouring farm was deliberately pushed into a fire to prevent further acts of witchcraft. The woman burned to death. The farmer was executed and his accomplices sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour.⁵⁰ Such tragic witchcraft-inspired incidents continued well into the following century. In July 1902 a man named Lanzeral, of Beauvais (Tarn), shot a neighbour and his son one night believing they had cast a spell upon him. A cunning-man had confirmed as much.⁵¹ Twenty years later the Parisian newspapers reported on a case from the Vendée where a young *paysan* shot a neighbour who he believed had bewitched him.⁵² January 1926 witnessed the trial of two men, members of a small Catholic association called *Notre-Dame-des-Pleurs* founded by Marie Mesmin, a former Bordeaux concierge, who seriously flogged the priest of Bombon because they believed he cast spells upon them. One of the men, a 27-year-old street-sweeper accused the *abbé* of spreading diseases in Bordeaux by means of birds. The birds dropped their excrement in Mesmin's garden giving rise to fungi of obscene shapes, which omitted a foul odour and the said diseases.⁵³ In 1938, in the Vosges in eastern France, a farming couple accused a sexagenarian neighbour of having cast a spell on their farm animals. They beat the man so mercilessly that he died from the assault.⁵⁴ Morel's study on witchcraft and psychiatric illness in the *département* of Orne reported several similar serious incidents in the years following the end of the Second World War. In 1948, for instance, a farmer of Saint-Maurice-du-Désert, near Domfront, shot dead his neighbour and seriously injured another who he believed had

cast a spell on his animals by making the sign of the cross the wrong way whenever he passed his property.⁵⁵

In February 1954, near Lillebonne, Seine-Maritime, a car was found in the river Seine with the bodies of three people. Police investigations revealed that the driver was a local farmer who had suffered repeated livestock losses. He came to believe he was bewitched, sank into a terrible depression and resolved to kill himself. He took his wife and a farmhand with him to his death.⁵⁶ The following year a farming couple in Venzins, Manche, suspected their farm servant had '*jeté un sort*' (cast a spell) over their livestock. They locked him in his room and beat him with large crucifixes. He managed to escape and called the police. The farmer was taken to a psychiatric hospital.⁵⁷ In February 1961 a 63-year-old postman, of Guislain, Manche, lodged a complaint of defamation against his neighbour, a 42-year-old woman who had accused him of bewitching a number of animals in the vicinity.⁵⁸ In February 1976 Jean Camus, a fifty-year-old single man of Hélop, Orne, was found shot dead in his bed. The police investigation and subsequent trial revealed that his killers, Michel and Daniel Hérisson, aged twenty and twenty-eight respectively, believed Camus had bewitched their family. During the trial the men's mother defended them, telling the judge that Camus had cast a spell on them and that there was no other solution but to kill him.⁵⁹ In 1984 a trial took place in Haute-Savoie in which a small farmer was prosecuted for shooting his neighbour after a boundary dispute developed into accusations of witchcraft.⁶⁰

In the last decade or so those accused of witchcraft have continued to lodge formal complaints with the police. I have been informally notified of at least two such instances in the environs of Le Havre and Rouen during the early 1990s. In May 1990 the newspaper *Paris-Normandie* interviewed the head of police in the small town of Valmont, Seine-Maritime, about witchcraft disputes in the area. The police officer said that in most cases the local priest or the local healer settled such disputes: 'We intervene at the moment when a complaint is lodged or simply when there is a disturbance of public order.' The procedure he and his men followed in such instances was first to confiscate any guns, then to listen to the complaints from both sides in the presence of the local mayor. They then tried to find a rational explanation for the supposed bewitchment to present to the supposed victims. In the case of animals they called in the local vet to provide a diagnosis. Finally, if the person accused of witchcraft wanted to take the complaint of intimidation further, they would send the case to the public prosecutor's department. By way of example, in November 1989 the Valmont police dealt with a witchcraft dispute in one of the villages in the surrounding district. Martin Sueur, who ran a small farm with his sister, fired some shots in the direction of his neighbour Régine Dubourg. She called the police who followed their usual procedure in such matters. The Sueurs accused Dubourg

of having cast spells over their farm. Their guns were confiscated and no further disturbance occurred between the two neighbours. However, the Sueurs continued to experience misfortunes. Martin went blind and could no longer drive a tractor or maintain the farm, so two years later the sister wrote a letter to the local authorities beseeching them to stop four of their neighbours from destroying them by witchcraft. She told how she had consulted numerous priests and several *magnétiseurs* but to no avail. She also complained that the local mayor had refused to help restrain their neighbours. Following the receipt of this letter the local police were once again called in to try and pacify the Sueurs.⁶¹

As well as demonstrating the continued presence of violent witchcraft disputes in provincial France, these examples also highlight the ubiquity of gun ownership in rural French communities over the twentieth century, which contrasts significantly with the situation in England. They may also help explain the predominance of men in witchcraft-related violence in the period. Turning guns on suspected witches can be seen as an aspect of a continuing strand of French male culture where shooting is not only an important Sunday pastime but also held up as a customary right. It is defended as a key element of a traditional French way of life against the forces of modernity, as represented by environmentalists and the European Union. The wider significance of this observation will become apparent later on.

In France, as in England, cunning-folk drove a thriving trade during the second half of the nineteenth century. While the involvement of such practitioners sometimes averted the violent resolution of witchcraft disputes by providing magical-medical remedies, their service of identifying witches also instigated physical confrontations between witch and bewitched. Judith Devlin has provided numerous instances of the activities of cunning-folk culled from the work of folklorists and the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, but many other court cases were reported in the newspapers of the period, some of which also found their way into the national and regional English press, and even American newspapers. In September 1882, for example, the English *Daily News* recounted the details of the trial of Adèle Mathieu, who was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for false pretences by the tribunal of Lisieux. Mathieu claimed to be able to unbewitch and exorcise evil spirits. One of the cures she employed consisted of burning toads in a cauldron. To cure the seventeen ailing cattle of one farmer she burnt 570 toads in the presence of the locals. In her defence she told the judge that although she charged more than the doctor, she had done them more good.⁶² Sebban's analysis of twenty-three such prosecutions in nineteenth-century Berry reveals that two-thirds of practitioners were male, the majority having an artisan or trade background. While they could be prosecuted under a variety of laws such as those concerning fraud and public decency, it was the statutes regarding the practice of illegal medicine that were most frequently invoked. One

such victim was Henri Blancher who was arrested in 1875. He had no medical training, and claimed that he had received his magical healing gift from an apparition that had appeared to him one day at the age of twelve as he helped serve the Mass. The investigating police commissioner estimated that Blancher gave more than thirty consultations a week and earned the tidy sum of 1500 francs a year.⁶³ It is no surprise, considering the continued strength of feeling about witchcraft in the twentieth century, that unbewitching remained a service much in demand long after the trade had gone into terminal decline in England. Lancelin cited numerous prosecutions from the early decades of the century in which sums of as much as 14,000 and 30,000 francs (in old money)⁶⁴ were handed over to specialists to cure witchcraft.⁶⁵ The work of anthropologists and folklorists confirm the continued existence of cunning-folk and witch-doctors throughout the rest of the century.

The paysan and the culture of witchcraft accusations

Having given an impression of the depth of the continued belief in witchcraft, and described the limitations of the various disciplinary methodologies, it is time to get back to the central issue of *why* the belief in witchcraft remained so relevant and so vibrant in twentieth-century France? To tackle this question, however, it is first necessary to consider wider developments in French economy, society and culture over the period. In particular we need to consider the central role of the *paysan* or 'peasant'. Fortunately for the witchcraft historian there is a large body of academic work, particularly by American historians, on the changing nature of French society during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,⁶⁶ while anthropologists and sociologists have picked up the baton of studying post-Second World War change in the French countryside.⁶⁷ These studies focus on the modernization of rural France, and in particular the relationship between the *pays* and France and the *paysans* and the French: in other words, the conflict between regional and national identity, and traditional rural society and urban modernity. Before embarking on such a discussion it is necessary first of all to clarify the definition and usage of the French term *paysan* and its literal English translation as 'peasant'. The two words have quite different connotations. While in England 'peasant' has long been used as a derogatory term denoting a backward, lowly, subservient agricultural labourer, in France *paysan* has become a badge of honour. The *paysan* is a bastion of honourable, independent-minded communal rural life, the upholder of the traditional values of 'old' France. The significance of this distinction is central to the argument that follows, and so I shall stick to the French rather than the English usage.

The demise of the *paysan* has long been a subject of historical debate. Eugen Weber's impressive and influential book *Peasants into Frenchmen* placed it in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Under the onslaught of

economic and social modernization a nationalized French culture was forged, usurping regional cultures and identities. But the evidence from the various twentieth-century sources outlined earlier suggests that Weber's thesis is premature in its chronology. The late nineteenth century certainly heralded the end of English rural cultures but not France's. It is quite obvious that France experienced industrialization and massive urbanization some fifty years later than England, and in terms of environment, economy, landscape and culture continued to be a rural-dominated society for much longer. In 1846, 75 per cent of the population was considered rural, and although France followed the general drift towards the cities from the mid nineteenth century onwards, by 1931 some 48 per cent of the population was still counted as rural. By way of contrast, in England by 1901 only 22 per cent of the country was counted as rural. In 1911 some 15.1 million French people were still listed as living from agricultural pursuits.⁶⁸ In 1931 only 7,500,000 French people lived in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants. Of these, five million were concentrated in Paris and its suburbs.⁶⁹ Even allowing for different methods of statistical calculation there is no doubt that France remained a rural country of small communities decades longer than England. The pattern and character of agriculture did not follow the same developmental path either. The industrialization of agriculture, which involved the shift from polyculture to monoculture farming, the use of fertilisers and silage, the rationalization of landholding, and the marginalization of the subsistence farmer were all still ongoing processes in France during the mid twentieth century.

A comparison with England highlights further important cultural differences such as language. In England by 1850 the whole population by and large spoke recognizable English. The Celtic Cornish language had already died out, and although there were certainly strong regional dialects, in general everyone spoke a common tongue. In France in 1850 over a quarter of the population spoke no French. For many more it was only a second language.⁷⁰ A Parisian could travel through large parts of the country and fail to understand the local *paysans* and fail to be understood. In some areas it was a matter of dialects that were so strong they bore little relationship to standard Parisian French, such as some Occitan dialects in southern France. Elsewhere completely different languages were spoken: Catalan in Roussillon, Breton in Brittany, Flemish in Northern France and German in eastern areas such as Alsace. Of course the setting up of a state system of education, in particular the measures of compulsory and subsidized schooling introduced by Jules Ferry during the 1880s had the inevitable impact, albeit slow. The strong sense of regional and communal identity which language defined and reinforced began to break down. But to a certain extent being 'Frenchified' was a personal choice as much as a social determinant. As a Breton man explained to his grandson shortly after the First World War,

who had complained of being taught in French at school, 'With French, you can go everywhere. With only Breton, you're tied to a short rope, like a cow to a post. You have to graze around your tether, and the meadow grass is never plentiful.'⁷¹

The spread of French has been viewed as part of a much larger process whereby local communities became part of a national community. The conscious decision-making about becoming part of a national French culture, about leaving or breaking the cultural ties with the *pays*, about shedding the *paysan* life, about dropping dialects, was and still is an aspect of an individual, regional and national discourse concerning identity. It is in the strains between these contrasting and conflicting identities, which continued to exist throughout the 1960s, 1970s and even 1980s, where we can situate explanations for the continued relevance of witchcraft for many people. A dissatisfaction and disillusionment with modern society led to the idealization and hankering after the *paysan* lifestyle, a 'traditional' existence that for many was in its death throes, threatened by the forces of modernity.

In France the *paysan* under any economic definition ceased to exist by the 1960s, but as a cultural construct it remains a strong, symbolic reality to this day. As the anthropologist Susan Carol Rogers, writing in 1987, put it, 'Peasants survive in contemporary France largely as a potent cultural category referring to various sets of ideas having little or no direct relationship with classic definitions of peasant tillers ... but having a great deal to do with central tensions in French society.'⁷² What this means on the ground is that some people brought up in rural communities before the large-scale modernization of agriculture from the 1960s onwards, continue to see themselves as *paysans* even though they no longer work the land or even live in the countryside. As Geneviève Delbos has suggested, the inability or unwillingness to participate in and adapt to the post-war agricultural 'revolution' has led to the paradoxical situation where some *paysans* 'actually left the land so as to remain "peasants", thereby constituting a distinct social group maintaining the old-established values of traditional society'.⁷³ She has identified this phenomenon by studying five villages in different parts of France between 1972 and 1977. These self-defined *paysans* see a stark difference between the 'old' agriculture they cherished and the 'new' agriculture they despise. Amongst these men and women Delbos found that 'the role and function of agriculture was defined in moral terms'; 'they remain rooted in the older social order which no longer exists and which confines them within the mystified view of a "more sociable" agriculture in comparison with another rebuilt so as to be "less sociable"'.⁷⁴ As part of that traditional lifestyle and values we can include a belief in witchcraft and magic.

As Yves Dupont observed in a little known collection of essays on witchcraft and magic in the *Bocage*, Favret-Saada was working in just such a 'traditional' community but she never properly attempted to assess the

relationship between the witchcraft she studied with such insight and the wider impact of contemporary social and economic developments. For Dupont, Favret-Saada concentrated too narrowly on the psychoanalytic and symbolic dimensions of witchcraft, and he suggested that broader sociological research would further help us develop hypotheses to understand the continued relevance and function of witchcraft in modern French society.⁷⁵ The work on witchcraft which has paid attention to the social as well as the symbolic, suggests that the key reason for the continuance of bewitchment in post-war rural France lies in the socio-cultural friction created in rural communities by agricultural change, and the associated self-conscious defence of the *paysan* lifestyle and mentality against the forces of modernity, as described in a different context by Delbos.

The study of witchcraft in parts of Anjou and the Vendée during the early 1980s by the 'ethnopsychiatrist' Patrick Gaboriau is one such piece of research that places contemporary bewitchment in sociological context. Not surprisingly, of thirty cases he investigated, nearly all of those complaining of bewitchment were *paysans* or people 'close to the *paysans* by their way of life or their geographical situation'.⁷⁶ They expressed profound nostalgia for the past, and were devout in their religion. They all devalued reading as an activity. They associated it with sloth and illness, and described it as 'annoying' or as time wasted. Those concerned, whether in town or country, also shared a profound pessimism concerning the state of society in general, with some expressing apocalyptic views of the future. The background context to all this was the large-scale change in local society and economy that had occurred over the previous three decades. The majority of the population of the department of Maine-et-Loire, which contained a large portion of Gaboriau's survey area, had remained largely rural right up until the mid 1960s. From this point on, though, the fading rump of the *paysan* way of life was thoroughly undermined. The number of farmers in the department dropped from just over 102,000 in 1954 to just over 48,000 in 1975. In his smaller zone of study nearly 700 farms went out of business between 1972 and 1980. The result amongst certain sections of the local population was a feeling of insecurity, disillusionment and disorientation. During the same period the shop-keepers and small manufacturers, amongst whom Gaboriau found several cases of bewitchment, were experiencing a similar assault on their way of life and social values from the growth of supermarkets and corporate manufacturing industries in the region.

From his interviews with those who felt themselves to be bewitched, Gaboriau found that witchcraft was not necessarily an expression of intense conflict between individuals in isolated dramas, but signified, 'all the social apprehensions of the *paysans* towards the world today and of tomorrow'.⁷⁷ André Julliard's work amongst the small polyculture farmers of l'Ain revealed a similar outlook where witchcraft was more than an attack on the individual

or his or her farm, but an attack on a way of life.⁷⁸ Becoming bewitched, then, was both a conscious and subconscious response to broad social developments, a withdrawal into the traditional past. However, the bewitchment-inducing conflict between tradition and modernity should not only be seen in a broad social context, in other words as a psychosomatic response to the helplessness felt in the face of socio-cultural change, but also in terms of more intimate clashes with the personification of those forces of modernity. In particular, the clash between the *paysan* and the new breed of entrepreneurial *novateur* farmer. Yves Dupont outlined how in the *Bocage* of western France from the 1960s onwards, the impact of *novateurs*, schooled by such bodies as the *Centre National de Jeunes Agriculteurs*, backed up by substantial bank loans, and driven by productivity – developments alien to *paysan* culture – was conducive to witchcraft conflicts at the time. Tensions were further created by several laws allowing the seizure of land in certain circumstances. The *paysans* considered this to be another attack on their way of life by the state and its agents.

Paradoxically, the accusations of witchcraft generated by such antagonisms were not only the response of the *paysans* – as Gaboriau's work might suggest. Dupont recounts the experience of a young *novateur* farmer from outside the *bocage* who bought a farm in the area, which had been managed along traditional lines. Characteristic tall hedges bound the farm's small fields, and there were a number of woods on the property that local hunters valued for their pigeons, boar and deer. The young farmer motivated by the desire to increase productivity ripped out the hedges and woods to create more land for cultivation. The locals saw this as a transgression of local norms and traditions, and he was ostracized. A series of misfortunes subsequently beset the farmer, and he gradually became convinced that he had been bewitched. Prior to his moving into the area, witchcraft was not something he had ever considered, but once enmeshed in a community where witchcraft was part of the popular discourse, he began to think in their terms even if he had not acted as they did. He associated witchcraft with the *paysan* culture, and saw his misfortune as being the result of communal ill will towards him and his farming methods rather than the work of any one individual.⁷⁹

Despite her impressive perspicacity, in some respects Favret-Saada's micro-study of witchcraft engendered a narrowness of perspective, though, to be fair, this has become more obvious with the benefit of hindsight. She asserted, for example, that 'unbewitchers are today exclusively ruralites' and subsequent researchers have continued to concentrate on rural areas.⁸⁰ We should be very wary, however, about drawing such exclusive links between 'traditional' rurality and the continued belief in witchcraft and magic. Yes, such agricultural societies as have been discussed are conducive to certain types of witchcraft accusation and magic, but urban communities play their part as well. It is from urban areas that numerous unbewitchers and

fortune-tellers operated and continue to operate. In 1938, for example, the *prefecture* of Paris calculated there were 5,200 such practitioners in the capital.

During the 1980s the influx of African immigrants to French urban centres generated a new and vibrant magical culture that has yet to be studied properly, but which seems to have fused to a certain extent with the 'indigenous' discourse on witchcraft and the practice of counter-magic. Central to this new magic service industry are the Islamic *marabouts* or cunning-folk from North and West Africa – Senegal in particular. As various prosecution cases have revealed, it would seem that most of them profess to have been *marabouts* back in their homeland to boost their prestige, but have in fact adopted the trade while in France. According to police figures by the end of the 1980s there were around 500 *marabouts* practising in Paris and many more in other French towns and cities.⁸¹ Their core customer base would seem to be from African ethnic groups but they have also built up a white French urban and rural clientele as well. This is evident from a case heard by the Rennes tribunal in August 1986. A Bretonne woman from a small village in the region suspected her rabbits had been bewitched. She looked in a local free newspaper and found an advert for 'le grand marabout Touré'. She consulted him and he promised to remove the witchcraft for the sum of 7100 francs. The woman paid, and apparently happy with his magic she subsequently asked him to provide her with a spell to protect her from all misfortune. Touré informed her that such a great spell would cost the huge sum of 64,500 francs, partly because he said he would need the help of his father who lived in Senegal. The woman agreed to the price and the *marabout* escorted her to her bank to pick up the cash. The bank clerk, suspicious of the large sum involved, called the police and Touré was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison.⁸² The case was by no means unique. Several years later a *marabout*, originally from Guinea, who had successfully established himself in the small Normandy fishing town of Fécamp, was arrested after defrauding a local woman who had consulted him about her ill daughter.⁸³ On a more elevated level a recent book has caused a media stir by claiming with some substance that Jacques Chirac's entourage hired some Senegalese *marabouts* to work against his former political rival Edouard Balladur when they were competing for the Gaullist party presidential candidacy.⁸⁴

The journalists who have reported on the rise and activities of the *marabouts* echo the journalistic censorial tone of the nineteenth century regarding cunning-folk and their clients. They feel a certain sense of shock that people could still be 'duped' in such a way. The growth of the *marabouts* is accordingly 'most mysterious and also most worrying'.⁸⁵ Another sensationalist wrote more generally, 'the problem of witchcraft in France is serious. It is even more serious than that posed by drugs.'⁸⁶ Concern at this period can be seen as an aspect of the wider fears regarding immigration and crime

that have dominated recent elections. Any crude linkage that the *marabouts* are somehow responsible for a recrudescence of belief cannot be substantiated. They have merely positioned themselves exceptionally well in an existing 'native' market for unbewitching and other magical services. *Marabouts* make up only a small percentage of the practitioners offering similar services throughout France, the majority of whom are white. For the 1980s various unsubstantiated figures have been bandied about. One author estimated there were 30,000 *désenvoûteurs* in practice, charging 250 francs on average.⁸⁷ Others have put the figure for the broader category of *voyants* at between 30,000–50,000.⁸⁸ Explanations for the popularity of *marabouts* and other occult practitioners are no longer linked directly to a lack of education – that connection has been patently undermined – but rather to a pervasive and irresponsible mass media. Journalists writing on the subject in the late 1980s like Edouard Brasey, were critical of the attention the press, radio and television gave to supernatural beliefs in general and the way they promoted astrologers, healers, mediums and occultists in particular.⁸⁹ There is always *something* to 'blame' for the continued belief in witchcraft and magic and the existence of those professionals who service that belief, rather than accepting that it as aspect of the human condition.

A sociological survey of the French population's belief in the 'paranormal' published in 1986 suggested that 18 per cent believed in witchcraft. Compare this with the 23 per cent who believed in horoscopes and the 33 per cent who believed in UFOs.⁹⁰ But that 18 per cent cannot be portrayed as a rump of traditional witchcraft. Witchcraft is not a timeless, unchanging cultural phenomenon. Accordingly, considerable differences can be detected in witchcraft beliefs and the social context of accusations between 1850 and 1990. There has been a general diminution in the scope of witchcraft. Contagious possession disappeared by the early twentieth century, although individual cases still occur. The number of priests willing to perform exorcisms and unbewitchments are few these days. One journalist researching the subject in the mid 1990s found only ten or so willing to talk, though the numbers who have performed exorcisms is undoubtedly greater.⁹¹ Some of the misfortunes formerly attributed to witches were no longer being made by the mid twentieth century. Favret-Saada's comparison of her experience of witchcraft in the *Bocage* with the detailed depiction of witchcraft beliefs in Jules Lecœur's 'sketches' of *Bocage* life published in the 1880s, highlighted the demise of weather-related witchcraft accusations such as storm-raising.⁹² Witchcraft directed at cottage industry activities such as baking, brewing, butter- and cheese-making rarely appears in sources concerning the second half of the twentieth century. Yet we should not assume that the activities of witches were restricted to objects and activities of 'traditional' ways of life. Witchcraft is an adaptable explanation for misfortune. While misfortunes long associated

with witchcraft disappeared, new ones emerged. Léontine Esnault dealt with bewitched cars and fridges, for example, and a couple of decades later one clergyman exorcist had to deal with a possessed fax machine.

As with witchcraft *beliefs*, witchcraft *accusations* should not be viewed as static phenomena either; they too reflect social change. The classic scenarios of neighbourly witchcraft conflicts certainly still continue, as shown by the Valmont dispute outlined earlier. But in modern France the unstable subsistence existence in which many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century witchcraft accusations can be situated no longer exists. Yet new fears and insecurities have emerged during the second half of the twentieth century. The threat is less precise, more general, no longer parochial but global. The witch has become symbolic of unwanted social forces rather than the malice of the individual.

Notes

- 1 Matthew Ramsey, *Professional and Popular Medicine in France, 1770–1830: The Social World of Medical Practice* (Cambridge, 1988); idem, 'Magical Healing, Witchcraft and Elite Discourse in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century France', in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Hilary Marland and Hans de Waardt (eds), *Illness and Healing Alternatives in Western Europe* (London and New York, 1997), pp. 14–37; Eloïse Mozzani, *Magie et superstitions de la fin de l'Ancien Régime à la Restauration* (Paris, 1988); Bernard Traimond, *Le pouvoir de la maladie: Magie et politique dans les Landes de Gascogne, 1750–1826* (Bordeaux, 1988); Judith Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind: French Peasants and the Supernatural in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1987).
- 2 Marie-Claude Denier, 'Sorciers, presages et croyance magiques en Mayenne aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de L'Ouest* 97 (1990) 115–32; Jean-Claude Sebban, 'La sorcellerie en Berry au XIXe siècle', *Cahiers de l'institut d'histoire de la presse et de l'opinion* 2 (n.d.) 137–61; Benoît Marin-Curtoud, 'Les process de sorcellerie pendant la IIIe République', in Jean-Baptiste Martin (ed.), *Le défi magique: satanisme, sorcellerie*, vol. 2 (Lyon, 1994), pp. 161–73. See also Tessie P. Liu's discussion on bewitchments and household gender politics, 'Le Patrimoine Magique: Reassessing the Power of Women in Peasant Households in Nineteenth-Century France', *Gender and History* 6 (1994) 13–36.
- 3 For example, Nicole Edelman, *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France 1785–1914* (Paris, 1995); Thomas Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Brunswick, 1983); idem, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton, 1993); B. Plongeron (ed.), *La religion populaire: Approches historiques* (Paris, 1976); M. Bouteiller, *Médecine populaire d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1966); Jacques Léonard, 'Les guérisseurs en France au XIXe siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 27 (1980) 501–16; René Luneau, 'Monde rural et christianisation: Prêtres et paysans français du siècle dernier', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 43 (1977) 39–52; Marie-Véronique Le Meur, 'Le culte des saints dans le diocèse de Blois aux environs de 1840', *Cahiers de l'institut d'histoire de la presse et de l'opinion* 2 (n.d.) 9–25; Eugen Weber, 'Religion and superstition in nineteenth-century France', *Historical Journal* 31 (1988) 399–423.
- 4 See Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernisation of Rural France 1870–1914* (Stanford, 1976), ch. 20.

- 5 Sebban, 'La sorcellerie en Berry', 158.
- 6 Sebban, 'La sorcellerie en Berry', 158.
- 7 See, for example, James R. Lehning, *Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France during the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1995), ch. 7; Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife*, ch. 3.
- 8 Sebban, 'La sorcellerie en Berry', 157–8.
- 9 Weber, *Peasants*, p. 339.
- 10 Jacques Gutwirth, 'Superstition, ancêtres et piétisme en Cévennes', in Françoise Loux (ed.), *Panseurs de douleurs: Les médecines populaires* (Paris, [1978] 1992), pp. 199–214. See also Philippe Joutard, 'Protestantisme populaire et univers magique: Le cas cévenol', *Le Monde alpin et rhodanien* 1–4 (1977) 145–71.
- 11 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 and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century* (London, 1999), p. 206. See also his contribution in this volume.
- 12 M. Hilarion Barthety, *Pratiques de sorcellerie, ou superstitions populaires du Béarn* (Pau, 1874), p. 7.
- 13 Reprinted in [unauthored], *Contes populaires et légendes du Val de Loire* (Paris, 1976), pp. 224–6.
- 14 Charles Lancelin, *La sorcellerie des campagnes* (Paris, [1911] 2nd edn, no date, c. 1920s), p. 189.
- 15 Docteur Brisson, *En Montagne Bourbonnaise* (Roanne, 1911), pp. 156, 157, 227.
- 16 Ernest Sevrin, 'Croyances populaires et médecine supranaturelle en Eure-et-Loire au XIXe siècle', *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 32 (1946) 304, 303.
- 17 See, for example, Arnold Van Gennep, *Le folklore de la Flandre et du Hainaut français*, 2 vols (Paris, 1935–36); M. Leproux, *Contributions au folklore charentais* (Paris, 1954); Claude Seignolle, *En Sologne, enquête folklorique* (Paris, 1946); Marcelle Bouteiller, *Sorcières et jeteurs de sort* (Paris, 1958).
- 18 On the development of French folklore studies see Charles Rearick, *Beyond the Enlightenment: Historians and Folklore in Nineteenth-Century France* (Bloomington and London, 1974). For an appraisal of Van Gennep's approach see Nicole Belmont, *Arnold Van Gennep: The Creator of French Ethnography* (Chicago, [1974] 1979); idem, 'Ethnologie et histoire dans l'œuvre d'Arnold Van Gennep', *Ethnologie française* 5 (1975) 184–9.
- 19 Arnold Van Gennep, *Le folklore du Dauphiné*, 2 vols (Paris, 1932–33), vol. 2, p. 467.
- 20 Claude and Jacques Seignolle, *Le folklore du Hurepoix: mœurs et coutumes d'Ile de France* (Paris, [1937] 1978), p. 13.
- 21 C. and J. Seignolle, *Le folklore du Hurepoix*, p. 204.
- 22 C. and J. Seignolle, *Le folklore du Hurepoix*, p. 206.
- 23 De Blécourt, 'The Witch, her Victim', p. 161.
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