

function of the primordial **shaman**, whose homoerotic orientation gave him special insights.

More concretely Winckelmann called upon German philology to focus its attention on the whole spectrum of the heritage of ancient Greece; his **Hellenism** helped to lay the foundations for a century of supremacy of German classical scholarship. He also had a salutary effect on the discipline of art history, which for a long time afterwards was virtually a German monopoly. He showed that the history of art need not restrict itself to connoisseurship or the biographical study of great masters, but could instead aspire to lay bare the governing laws which made art works what they were and not otherwise. Moreover, he held that art has a history in the most meaningful sense, a history that only a clear concept of organic development could explain. Thus, while Friedrich Nietzsche and others were to show a century after his death that his insights into the specific character of Greek art were incomplete, in that they overstated the elements of tranquility and equipoise, the ideals of scholarly dedication for which Winckelmann stood have remained of lasting significance.

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## WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft is the form of sorcery allegedly practiced in Western Europe between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. Sorcery itself is universal, found in almost every period and every human culture as a set of magical beliefs and practices intended to manipulate the phenomena of nature for the benefit of the sorcerer or his client. Most sorcery is operative, that is to say, the practitioner has the capacity, through spells and para-

phernalia, to compel occult forces to do his will. The medieval notion of witchcraft, however, was contractual: the witch had to elicit the patronage of a demon by making a pact with him. As contemporary legends and documents attest, this contractual relationship parallels the feudal bond between liege and lord.

### *Witchcraft and Christianity.*

**Christian** theology, taking **Old Testament** texts and **New Testament** stories of demonic possession as its point of departure, transformed the earlier notion of the sorcerer into that of the witch or wizard as the agent of Satan and accomplice of his infernal legions. It further made a logical connection between witchcraft proper and **heresy**, namely any belief obstinately held contrary to the orthodox teaching of the church.

The witchcraft delusion that obsessed European society from 1450 to 1700—hence from the end of the **Middle Ages** until the onset of the **Enlightenment**—is a major problem for the historian that has not yet been fully resolved. Many theories have been advanced to explain the reasons for the phenomenon and the real background, if any, of the belief system cherished by the witch hunters. Earlier investigators often were animated by a **Protestant** or anti-clerical bias that led them to place the blame solely on the Roman Catholic church and Catholic theologians. It is true that Pope Innocent VIII on December 5, 1484 issued the bull *Summis desiderantes*, confirming the support of the papacy for inquisitorial proceedings against presumed witches, and this text became a preface to the *Malleus maleficarum* (Witches' Hammer) published by two Dominican inquisitors in 1487 and reissued in 29 editions, 16 of them in German, down to 1669. The *Malleus* was far more influential in that it colorfully detailed the diabolical orgies of the witches and convinced a credulous public that a plot of cosmic dimensions hatched by Satan himself threatened the very foundations of Christian society.

Part of the problem posed by the witchcraft delusion is that an exotic belief system derived from the Bible and St. Augustine was superimposed upon the actual practice of sorcery in all the variants that the racial and ethnic diversity of late medieval Europe, and the particularism of its folk culture, had inherited from pagan, pre-Christian times. Every province had its own customs and superstitions, its enchanted springs and haunted dwellings, its survivals of Celtic or Scandinavian or Slavic lore.

*Sexual Aspects.* Perverse sexuality played a major role in the fantasies associated with the witchcraft delusion, but contrary to what has been alleged in some recent publications, homosexual relations between human beings and demons, or simply between human participants in witchcraft, do not figure prominently in the sources. The bisexuality and androgyny of demons and the preoccupation with change of sex suggest a psychological substratum of homoeroticism, but comparatively few homosexual acts are reported in the literature of witchcraft.

When sodomy does appear in the accounts of sexual union with the Devil, it is heterosexual sodomy (*peccatum contra naturam ratione modi*) that is usually meant, most often anal intercourse or the *osculum infame*, the kiss applied to Satan's posterior. One account of a witches' sabbat, it is true, mentions a gathering held atop Mount Tonale, in the Italian Tyrol, at which handsome youths were provided for the sexual pleasures of the all-male gathering.

There are several reasons for the absence of homosexual relations from the dossiers of witchcraft. The first is that the starting point for the belief system was the passage in Genesis 6:1-4, further developed in I Enoch and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, according to which the "sons of God," identified in later legend as fallen angels, took wives of the "daughters of men" and had offspring by them, the "men of renown." Hence the whole fan-

tasy of sexual intercourse between demons and human beings was rooted in a heterosexual and demonically procreative context, not a homosexual one. The second is that over the entire span of the witchcraft delusion women outnumbered men by at least three to one as objects of prosecution; in New England, for example, 80 percent of the accused were women. For the male theologians and witch hunters who promoted the delusion, the carnal aspect of woman was the heterosexual one—her power to entice and ensnare men. Lesbianism was then, as later, invisible to the male unconscious, hence it could play no role in the paranoid fantasies entertained by the authorities of church and state. The third is that the crimes blamed upon the witches had no homosexual content, but more often took the form of causing crop failures or other misfortunes that provoked the wrath of peasant communities.

In the treatise of Jean Bodin *De la Démonomanie des sorciers* (1580) there is a comparison between witchcraft and sodomy: "If one avers that one should not dwell upon the confession of something against nature, as some say, [then] the sodomitic buggers should not be punished who confess the sin against nature. But if one wishes to say 'against nature' for something impossible, that is false, for what is impossible by nature is not [truly] impossible, inasmuch as all the actions of intelligence and the workings of God that one often sees, go against the course of nature." In other words, the belief that sodomites had been empowered by the devil to commit "unnatural" acts matched the preposterous claim that witches could ride through the air on broomsticks and perform similar "impossible" feats because of their covenant with Satan.

*Modern Revivals.* In the 1970s the emerging gay movement overlapped with certain phases of neo-paganism, including a revived interest in witchcraft understood as part of the archaic "nature religion" that has been supplanted by Christianity. Some lesbians took part in

the revival of Wicca, or the Craft, which emphasized the spiritual and thaumaturgic power of the feminine as it had been embodied in the traditional healing art of the witch, and also emancipation from the oppressively patriarchal aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In like manner, the gay-male Radical Faeries, who held their first gathering in 1979, stressed the distinctive insights of the personality that is neither male nor female, yet partakes of both and throughout human history has played a role as mediator between the divine and the human. The cultivation of a gay spirituality as a dimension of contemporary neo-paganism has for some held the promise of a release from the constricting taboos of Judaism and Christianity and a rediscovery of the enduring values of the homosexual experience in the religious sphere.

*Some Comparisons.* The witchcraft delusion, as it has been analyzed by historians in modern times, does offer several lessons of paramount importance for the understanding of the attitude toward homosexuality in Christian Europe—a mentality that has far outlasted the belief in witches and their pact with Satan. The first is that the religious mind scorns true motivation and causality, preferring magical influences, even where empirical investigation can find none. This is the attitude that sees in AIDS divine retribution for “immorality,” and rejoices in the “death of the wicked.”

A second crucial point is that witchcraft began like sodomy as a sacril offense but was transferred in time to the secular courts, for the reason that capital crimes came increasingly to be the domain of the state rather than the church. The ecclesiastical courts were denied the right to impose the death penalty, but convicted offenders were relaxed to the secular authorities who had no qualms about inflicting it—on witches or sodomites.

A third consideration is that in trials for witchcraft it was most often the prosecutors and the witnesses for the prose-

cution, not the defendants, who were mentally ill, were in the grip of paranoid beliefs grounded in a magical understanding of the origins of the misfortunes which had befallen the community. The analogy to this in the case of homosexual sodomy is that while the acts committed by the defendants were harmless and even pleasurable, the prosecutors imagined them a source of potential divine retribution that would overtake the whole of society if the “unnatural” acts were left unpunished.

A fourth issue is that in many trials for witchcraft the principal witnesses were children who later were proven to have made the charges without foundation or out of sheer malice. This historical precedent is relevant to the problem of the uncorroborated testimony of children in cases of child abuse, particularly of homosexual **pedophilia**. Both the prosecution and the defense in such cases are often bedeviled by the suggestibility and unreliability of children as witnesses who, because lacking the adult’s clear perception of the dividing line between truth and fiction, can be manipulated in a variety of ways scarcely conducive to ascertaining guilt or innocence. It is just this element of immaturity in the child’s character that is used to deny minors the right to give valid consent to sexual acts, even when psychological willingness is present, just as civil law withholds many rights from the child simply because it is said to have not yet reached the age at which the majority of normal individuals are capable of exercising such empowerment.

A fifth consideration is that even at the height of the witchcraft delusion there were observers who fulfilled Rudyard Kipling’s condition “if you can keep your head when all about you/ are losing theirs and . . . make allowance for their doubting too.” That is to say, even in a still medieval society there were educated men who saw through the whole belief system that obsessed their contemporaries, and to the best of their power sought to calm the ignorant and superstitious masses whom

fanatics had goaded into paroxysms of irrational fury. A subtle interaction between the authorities in church and state who manipulated the credulity of the uneducated, and the folk upon whose superstitious fears and anxieties they played, maintained the belief in witchcraft. The analogy with modern right-wing demagogues who exploit the lingering **homophobia** of those who are still in the grip of traditional attitudes is self-evident.

*Conclusion.* The witchcraft delusion has vanished from European society, apart from a few provincial backwaters where it occasionally inspires acts of violence against persons suspected of being witches. In such cases the police naturally proceed against the superstition-ridden perpetrators of the violence, not against the victims. But what the author of this article has termed the sodomy delusion held sway until the middle of the twentieth century, and has only in the last two decades begun to recede. "Moral panics" provoked by an unsophisticated community's discovery of a homosexual underworld in its midst persisted into the not distant past, and in such cases the police acted to enforce superstition and intolerance, while the victims suffered public humiliation and imprisonment, if not worse. Sporadic violence against homosexuals is often sanctioned by the mores of the heterosexual society, a form of intimidation that has been exacerbated by the epidemic of AIDS with the irrational fear of the "bearers of contagion" that it inspires. In the politics of conservative and clerical parties fear and aversion in regard to homosexuality still play a baleful role, giving them a hold over segments of the electorate whom they cannot win by more rational appeals. The record of the struggle against the witchcraft delusion may afford valuable lessons for planning the future campaigns of the gay liberation movement, and for analyzing the psychological and social processes that—even at the close of the twentieth century—keep such false

notions alive in the face of the empirical evidence that contradicts them.

The history of the witchcraft delusion in Western Europe is a dark chapter in the annals of civilization, but the success achieved by reformers in purging the collective mind of the paranoid beliefs with which Christian theology had infected it must give heart to all those who even now struggle for the same goal in regard to homosexuality.

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### WITTGENSTEIN, LUDWIG (1889–1951)

Austrian-British philosopher. The son of a millionaire industrialist in Vienna, Wittgenstein came to England at nineteen with the intention of studying aeronautics at the University of Manchester. Finding his bent more theoretical, he transferred to Cambridge University, where he immersed himself in logic courses taught by Bertrand Russell. In November 1912, at the behest of his fellow student John Maynard Keynes, Wittgenstein was elected to the elite secret society known as the Apostles. At that time the group was closely knit and suffused with homoerotic atmosphere. Always prickly, Wittgenstein proved a difficult member and soon stopped attending meetings.