

History Department, Pennsylvania State University, 1997), esp. pp. 34–36. My thanks to William Pencak for sending me a copy of Byl's interesting essay.

81. Secretary of the Commonwealth, Executive Papers, Box 16, December 16–31, 1870, December 29 packet, Library of Virginia, Richmond. My thanks to Diane Sommerville for giving me copies of these documents. Gary Rowe showed me the Indiana case on the Internet.

## 6

GUARDIAN SPIRITS OR DEMONIC PETS  
THE CONCEPT OF THE WITCH'S FAMILIAR IN EARLY MODERN  
ENGLAND, 1530–1712

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*The image of the witch was made up of different elements, some of which, like the peculiarly English belief in animal familiars, remain largely unaccounted for.*  
—Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971)

On February 25, 1582, Thomas Rabbet, the eight-year-old, illegitimate son of Ursula (Ursley) Kemp, a widow of St. Osyth in Essex, testified before Brian Darcy, J.P., that his mother kept four spirits:

. . . the one called Tyffin, the other Tyttey, the third Pygine, and the fourth Jacke: and being asked of what colours they were, saith that Tyttey is like a little grey cat, Tyffin is like a white lambe, Pygine is black like a toad, and Jacke is black like a cat. And hee saith, hee hath seen his mother at times to give them beere to drinke, and of a white Lofe or Cake to eat, and saith that in the night time the said spirites will come to his mother, and sucke blood of her upon her armes and other places of her body.

Two local women also came forward and testified that Ursula Kemp had bewitched their children. Grace Thurlow, who happened to work for Justice Darcy, claimed that her infant daughter had broken her neck falling out of a cradle shortly after Thurlow rejected an offer from Kemp to nurse the child while she went to work. Agnes Letherdale, following a dispute with Kemp over some scouring sand, believed that the other woman had afflicted her daughter with a "great swelling in the bottome of the belly, and other privie partes" that resulted in the child's painful death.

The following day, apparently in response to a false promise of leniency from Darcy, Ursula Kemp confirmed her son's testimony by bursting into tears, falling on her knees, and confessing to the ownership of the same four spirits, "whereof two of them were hees and the other two were shees: the two hee-spirits were to punishe and kill unto death, and the other two shees were to punishe with lameness and other diseases of bodily harme, and also to destroy cattell." She also confessed to sending Tyrttey, her cat familiar, to punish Thurlow's wife, and Pygine the toad to kill Letherdale's child, as well as numerous other acts of malefice. In the process, she incriminated a number of other women as coconspirators.

In the end, a total of fourteen women were indicted for witchcraft at St. Osyth, of which at least two, including Ursula Kemp, were hanged. Most of those who were brought to trial were accused of keeping and using familiar spirits that appeared in the likeness of small animals—cats, dogs, ferrets, toads, a lamb, and, in one case, "a red thing like a lion."<sup>1</sup>

Although it has its own distinctive elements, the description of the witches' familiars at St. Osyth is reasonably typical of accounts found throughout the English witch trial literature of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although familiars rarely appeared as odd-looking people, the vast majority of those that were described manifested themselves as commonplace animals, usually creatures no bigger than a dog, and often much smaller, in the case of insects such as flies, bees, or moths. Occasionally, the same familiar could appear in a variety of guises. Elizabeth Francis's familiar "Sathan," a key figure in a famous 1566 trial, appeared first "in the likeness of a white spotted cat" but later transformed himself into a toad, and later still into a dog with horns on his head.<sup>2</sup>

Often referred to as "spirits" or "imps," familiars could be acquired from a variety of sources. Many were represented as gifts of the Devil, given in return for a promise of allegiance. Others, like "Sathan," were obtained from other witches, or passed around and shared between groups of witches, like some kind of useful household implement. Frequently, they just appeared out of nowhere, like stray cats, offering their services and demanding to be fed. Familiars also acquired a variety of interesting names, many suggestive of pet names. Sometimes these names were bestowed by the witches themselves, but in other cases the Devil assigned a name, or the familiar chose its own name. When communicating with its mistress on such matters, the familiar was occasionally said to speak "in a hollow voice."

In the overwhelming majority of trials, especially those in the south of England and the Home Counties, the familiar was represented as a relatively autonomous being whose function was to serve as the witch's magical agent or emissary in the performance of acts of *maleficium*; that is, harming other people, their livestock, or property by supernatural means. In return



1. A witch keeping her familiars in a box and feeding them. From *A rehearsall both straung and true . . . at winsore . . . 1579*.

for these services, witches provided their familiars with shelter, often in boxes or pots lined with wool (see figure 1), and food—occasionally milk, oats, bread, cheese, cake or other scraps, but more usually blood sucked from reddish spots or swellings on the witch's own body. In many cases, teams of women were delegated the task of stripping and searching the accused for such telltale marks. During the peak of the English witch persecutions in the mid-seventeenth century, the quest for this kind of circumstantial evidence of the existence of familiars became an almost mandatory part of the judicial process.<sup>3</sup>

The origin of this "peculiarly English belief" in familiars is obscure. In his 1933 study, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, C. L'Estrange Ewen conjectured that the idea originated in the pet-keeping habits of socially isolated women: "Scorned and shunned by their neighbours, the unhappy women were more inclined to make friends with animals as cat or dog, or more unusual pet, as chicken, ferret, rat, or toad. No doubt they were often heard talking to their favourites, and on the principle that birds of a feather flock together, the animals soon came to be looked upon as devils or familiars by the ignorant demonophobes."<sup>4</sup> In *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Keith Thomas also acknowledged that many of these apparent familiars were probably companion animals, perhaps even "the only friends these lonely old women possessed."<sup>5</sup> Later, he went on to suggest that the identification of unconventional pets as witches' familiars was an example of the early modern

propensity to regard pet-keeping itself as morally suspect because, like bestiality, it tended to blur the boundaries between animal and human.<sup>6</sup>

Although superficially plausible, these ideas linking belief in familiars with the phenomenon of pet-keeping raise a number of problematical questions; among them the fact that familiars are largely absent from all but a very few of the voluminous Continental narratives on the subject of witchcraft.<sup>7</sup> By 1566, the date of the first well-documented trial in England, periodic outbreaks of witch persecution had already been in progress for well over a century on the Continent of Europe. Yet it is difficult to find a single unequivocal reference to familiars of the English type in all of the Continental literature pertaining to witchcraft.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say, however, that animals played an insignificant part in Continental depictions of witchcraft. The Devil was widely reputed to appear to his disciples in the shape of an animal, usually a monstrous dog, cat, goat, or ram, and witches on the Continent made a habit of riding or flying to their Sabbats on the backs of demons disguised as animals (as well as on pitchforks and broomsticks) (figure 2). Continental witches were also credited with shape-shifting, the ability to transform both themselves and others into animals when occasion demanded (figure 3).<sup>9</sup> Two of these manifestations—the Devil appearing in animal form, and various instances of shape-shifting by witches—also made occasional appearances in the English trials.<sup>10</sup> But, despite the fact that England was unlikely to have had a monopoly on either pet-keeping or lonely old women, the notion of pet-like demons or spirits running malevolent errands in the guise of small animals seems to have gained little acceptance on the Continent, at least within official circles.

The possibility that the familiar was purely a product of the English judiciary's attempts to create a home-grown, legal definition of witchcraft also seems unlikely. Although a series of acts against witchcraft, conjuration, and sorcery were passed during the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, none of the relevant legal statutes mentions anything resembling a familiar until the 1604 Act of James I, when it became a felony, punishable by death, to "consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked Spirit, to or for any intent or purpose."<sup>11</sup> Familiars, however, appeared regularly in trial evidence and confessions from 1566 onward, so the concept was clearly well established in the popular imagination long before it acquired formal, legal recognition. Perhaps, as Keith Thomas implies, the English judiciary harbored more negative attitudes to pet-keeping than their Continental counterparts, and were therefore more likely to emphasize evidence of this nature. But if so, some explanation needs to be found for this peculiar cultural difference in judicial sensitivities.



2. A witches' Sabbat, with a witch shown riding on a demon in the form of a goat (Hans Balding Grien, Strasbourg, 1514).

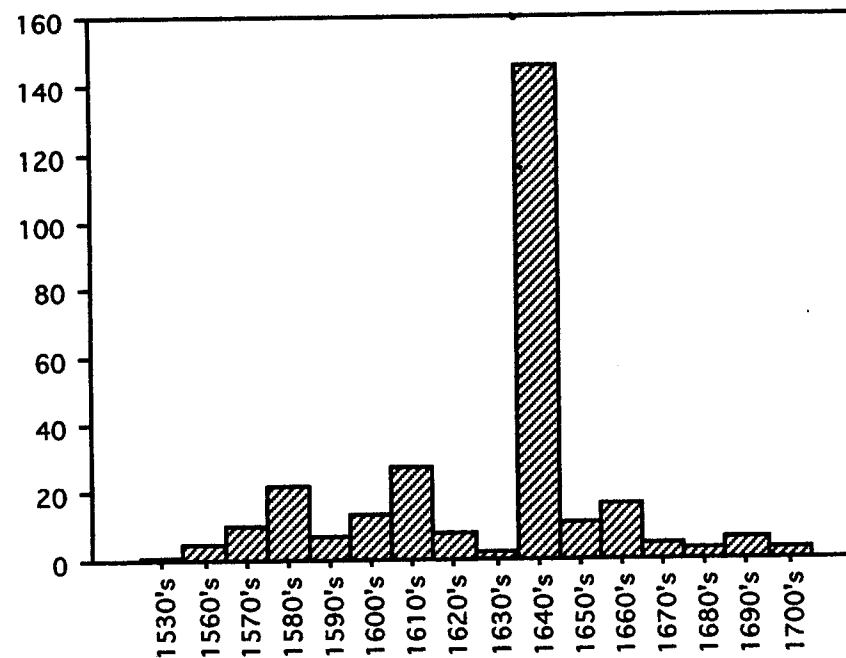


3. Witches transforming into animals on their way to a Sabbat. From Ulrich Molitor, *Von den Unholden und Hexen* (Constance, 1489).

### THE EVIDENCE

To address some of these questions, the present study examined the evidence concerning familiars as it is represented in both judicial and popular accounts of the period from 1530 to 1712, the earliest and latest dates for which familiars are recorded in trial evidence. For quantitative analyses, the study makes use of a computerized database containing contemporary accounts and official records of 322 English witch trials involving animal-related evidence. These data were obtained primarily from three comprehensive secondary sources—C. L'Estrange Ewen's two surveys of 1929 and 1933, and Macfarlane's 1970 study of the Essex witch trials<sup>12</sup>—with additional reference to primary source materials, mainly chapbooks or pamphlets, whenever appropriate. For each case, the year of the trial, the name and gender of the accused person, the geographical location, and the species, types, and names of the animals involved is recorded (if known), to-

gether with other relevant details of the case. The temporal distribution of these cases is illustrated in figure 4. Although there were many more witchcraft cases in England during this period than are represented here, the peaks and troughs in the frequency distribution closely parallel those obtained by Macfarlane for the temporal frequency of witchcraft indictments in the county of Essex.<sup>13</sup> Trials involving evidence of familiars are therefore not atypical, at least in terms of their temporal distribution. The comparison with Essex does, however, suggest that animal-related evidence was overrepresented in the 1645–46 prosecutions brought by the self-styled witch finders, Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne. As various authorities have pointed out, the extraordinary number of prosecutions initiated by Hopkins and Stearne, and the extreme methods they used for finding evidence and extracting confessions, have given them a unique position in the annals of English witch persecution.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, the material obtained from these trials is treated separately in the discussion that follows.



4. Distribution by decade of 322 witchcraft cases involving evidence of familiars or other "animal" manifestations. The peak during the 1640s is mainly due to the activities of the witch finders Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne.

Because of the sketchy nature of most of the assize records, it is virtually impossible to obtain an accurate estimate of the proportion of English witch trials that actually included evidence of the use of familiars, although Ewen's 1933 study, based on reasonably detailed depositions and testimonies, generates a figure of 60 percent (270 out of 450 cases), of which roughly half were brought by Hopkins and Stearne. The material contained in chapbooks or pamphlets—contemporary “eyewitness” accounts of witchcraft prosecutions whose titles suggest that they were written for the sensation-loving London literary market—tends to give an even higher figure. Macfarlane went to some pains to test the reliability of the pamphlets pertaining to the Essex trials by comparing them with appropriate assize records. On the basis of this he concluded that pamphlets were “a vital and reliable source, providing otherwise inaccessible material and correcting the somewhat narrow impression of witchcraft prosecutions provided by indictments.”<sup>15</sup> Of the five pamphlets referred to by Macfarlane, all contain extensive references to witches' familiars.

#### DEMONIC PETS

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a pet as “any animal that is domesticated or tamed and kept as a favourite, or treated with indulgence and fondness.” To what extent did the witches' familiars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries come close to fitting this definition? The practice of keeping animals purely for fun or companionship was certainly not unknown among the common people of England during this period. In his 1646 diatribe against the activities of Matthew Hopkins, the Rev. John Gaule, vicar of Great Staughton in Huntingdon, clearly alluded to pet-keeping among elderly women when he lamented that “Every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furred brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue, having a rugged coat on her back, a skull cap on her head, a spindle in her hand, and a dog or cat by her side, is not only suspected, but pronounced for a witch.”<sup>16</sup> Thomas Ady, another articulate critic of the witch craze, used the widespread existence of pet-keeping as grounds for dismissing testimonies concerning the keeping and feeding of so-called imps:

. . . for it is lawful to keep a Rat, or Mouse, or Dormouse, or any Creature tame, as to keep a tame Rabbit, or Bird; and one may be an Imp as well as another, and so may a Flea or Louse by the same reason; and so the Devil need not go far for a bodily shape to appear in, or to suck mens or womens flesh in; and if these were material Oathes, who

then may not be proved a Witch? and yet there was an honest woman (so always formerly reputed) executed in *Cambridge* in the year 1645. for keeping a tame Frogge in a Box for sport and Phantasie, which Phantasie of keeping things tame of several species is both lawful and common among very innocent and harmless people, as Mice, Dormice, Grashoppers, Caterpillers, Snakes; yea a Gentleman, to please his Phantasie in trying conclusions, did once keep in a Box a Maggot that came out of a Nut, till it grew to an incredible bigness.<sup>17</sup>

Some particularly well-known pets acquired reputations as familiars within their own lifetimes. A white poodle called “Boye” belonging to Charles I's flamboyant nephew, Prince Rupert, provides a much publicized case in point. The prince used to sit Boye on the table beside him in Council meetings, as well as kissing the dog from time to time during debates. During the Civil War, Boye became a sort of Royalist mascot, a lucky charm who bounded along beside the dashing young prince as he rode at the head of the Royalist army. Among the Puritan Roundheads, Boye was viewed as the unnatural embodiment of Royalist success, and soon rumors began to circulate that the dog was a familiar with supernatural powers.<sup>18</sup> In a satirical pamphlet published in 1643, an unnamed Royalist writer played up to these Protestant superstitions by attributing all sorts of occult powers to Boye, including prophesy, invisibility, the ability to find lost goods, the gift of tongues, and the capacity to render himself and his master impenetrable to weapons.<sup>19</sup> Another good-humored pamphlet published in London in the same year used the device of a fictional dialogue between Boye and an oafish Roundhead dog called Pepper to lampoon the Protestant cause.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately for the Royalists, the joke backfired the following year when Boye was shot and killed at the battle of Marston Moor, a landmark defeat for the Royalists, and a turning point of the war (figure 5). To celebrate, an anonymous Puritan writer penned an extravagant work of doggerel entitled *A Dog's Elegy or Rupert's Tears*, in which it was claimed that Boye was killed by a “Valiant Souldier, who had skill in Necromancy”:

Sad Cavaliers, Rupert invites you all  
That doe survive, to his Dogs Funerall.  
Close-mourners are the Witch, Pope, & devill,  
That much lament yo'r later befallen evill.

Lament poor Cavaliers, cry, howl and yelp  
For the great losse of your Malignant Whelp,  
Hee's dead! Hee's dead! No more alas can he  
Protect your Dammes, or get Victorie.<sup>21</sup>

# DOGS ELEGY, <sup>17</sup>

## OR RUPERT'S TEARS.

For the late Defeat given him at *Marston-  
moore*, near *York*, by the Three Renowned  
Generalls; *Alexander Earl of Leven*, *Generall of the Scottish  
Forces*, *Ferdinando Lord Fairefax*, and the *Earle of Man-  
chester Generalls of the English Forces in the North*.

Where his beloved Dog, named *BOY*, was killed by a Val-  
liant Souldier, who had skill in *Necromancy*.

*Likewise the strange breed of this Shagg'd Cavalier, whelp'd of a Malignant  
Water-witch; Wish all his Tricks, and Feats.*



*Sad Cavaliers, Rupert invites you all  
That doe survive, to his Dogs Funerall.* } *Close-mourners are the Witch, Pope, & devill,  
That much lament yo'r late befallen evill.*

Printed at London, for G. B. July 27. 1644.

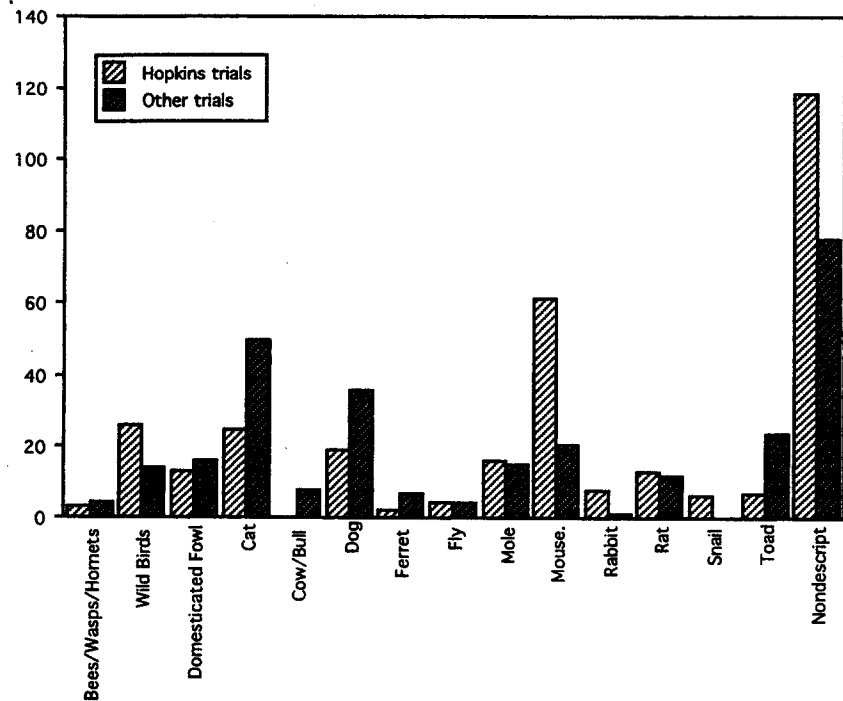
5. Dog's Elegy or Rupert's Tears.

Attributing occult powers to famous pets was not, however, confined to England. According to a contemporary legend that survived for many centuries after his death, Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), the eminent German astrologer, philosopher, and scholar, derived all of his occult knowledge from a dog called “Monsieur” who wore a collar decorated with magic symbols. When Agrippa lay dying, he is said to have removed the collar with the words: “depart, unhappy beast, the cause of eternal damnation”—at which Monsieur fled and drowned himself in the Saône.<sup>22</sup> In reality, according to Agrippa’s own pupil, Johann Weyer, Monsieur was a thoroughly ordinary dog. “I cannot stop wondering” he wrote in 1563,

... how people of high esteem can talk and write such unadulterated foolishness, unless it be just mean and empty blabber. I knew that black dog very well when I was in Bonn. It was a dog of moderate size and his name was *Monsieur*; quite frequently when Agrippa was out walking, I would accompany him leading the dog on a rope. It was a common, human dog and his master provided him with a companion, a bitch of the same colour and stature; he acquired her while I was there and gave her the name of *Mademoiselle*. As I see it, the cause for all this insane gossip was Agrippa’s almost childish love for that dog, which is quite usual with some people.<sup>23</sup>

### FAMILIAR TAXONOMY

Although familiars occurred in a variety of different forms, the range of species represented was limited, and may provide further clues concerning the origins of the concept. Analysis of trial evidence reveals that the largest single descriptive category of familiars is “Nondescript”; that is, cases where the familiars are simply not described (see figure 6). A typical example would be the 1645 trial of John Chambers in the village of Bramford in Suffolk in which the defendant eventually confessed to receiving three imps from the Devil, and using them to kill a bullock, a horse, and a child. No description of the familiars is offered, although we are told that two of their names were “Richard” and “John.”<sup>24</sup> The most obvious explanation for this preponderance of undescribed familiars is that the courts’ aggressive pursuit of evidence concerning familiars led some witnesses and defendants to fabricate evidence where none was otherwise forthcoming. Child testimonies often provided some of the more fanciful accounts.<sup>25</sup> The young son of Ellen Smythe, who was executed for witchcraft in 1579, testified that his mother kept three nondescript spirits: “Great Dicke, enclosed in a glass bottle:



6. Frequency with which different "animals" are represented in trial evidence for the period 1530-1705. (Categories represented fewer than six times in total are omitted.)

Little Dicke in a leather bottle; and Willet in a wool pack."<sup>26</sup> When the bottles and pack were located and examined, however, "the spirits were vanished away."

The relative overrepresentation of nondescript familiars in the Hopkins and Stearne trials is also to be expected, given the evident zeal with which the witch finders gathered evidence of the possession and use of familiars. Although the use of physical torture as a means of extracting confessions from witchcraft suspects was not permitted under English common law, various forms of psychological coercion were widely employed. In addition to the frequent practice of "swimming" witches (if they sank, they were innocent), Hopkins is known to have employed sleep deprivation or "walking" as a means of wearing suspects down, and inducing them to confess. One of Francis Hutchinson's informants in the early eighteenth century

stated that Hopkins and Stearne arrested a poor woman in Suffolk, and, by keeping her fasting and without sleep, induced her to confess that she had an imp called Nan. Concerned neighbors eventually drove the witch finders away, gave her something to eat, and allowed her to sleep. Afterwards she couldn't remember what she had confessed to, and said that the only thing she sometimes called Nan was one of her chickens. The unfortunate Parson Lowes of Brandeston in Suffolk, who confessed in 1645 to suckling three undescribed familiars, and sending them to sink a ship, was also, according to Hutchinson's sources, kept awake by running him backwards and forwards across the room until he was out of breath; "thus they did for several days and nights together, till he was weary of his life, and was scarce sensible of what he said or did."<sup>27</sup>

If "nondescript" familiars can be discounted, mice form the second largest category of imps, followed, in descending order, by cats, dogs, toads, wild birds, poultry, moles, and rats. As is evident from table 1, however, marked differences existed between the Hopkins and Stearne trials and the rest. In particular, mice and wild birds are overrepresented in the former, while cats, dogs, and toads are underrepresented.

Notwithstanding one commentator's claim that keeping tame rats and mice was common practice in seventeenth-century England,<sup>28</sup> the unusually high frequency of mice in the Hopkins trials may again be attributable to the unorthodox methods the witch finders employed to obtain evidence against those accused of witchcraft. Hopkins and Stearne made extensive use of "watching," a procedure that involved assigning people to observe the accused person throughout the day and night while incarcerated or under house arrest awaiting trial. The assumption behind this practice was that sooner or later the suspect would be visited by one or more hungry familiars seeking nourishment. No doubt mice and rats were the ubiquitous inhabitants of early modern jails and cottages, so it is unlikely that the "watchers" needed to wait long before seeing a rodent scuttling across the floor towards the accused. Thomas Ady, writing in 1655, considered evidence of rats or mice appearing or creeping under someone's clothes inadmissible for this reason: "foolish and senseless arguments, not grounded in the Word of God."<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, the witch finders thought otherwise. A woman called Margaret Bayts of Framlingham in Suffolk was apparently incriminated by this method in August 1645. According to the account of her trial, she "was seen during a watching to be sucked by a thing in the likeness of a mouse that ran under her coats."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, a pamphlet from the same year records how the Devil appeared to Joan Williford of Faversham in Kent, initially in the shape of a little dog called "Bunne," but that he later reappeared to her twice in prison, and sucked her in the form of a

mouse.<sup>31</sup> The practice of watching suspects in damp jails may also, perhaps, help to account for John Bysack's bizarre confession in 1645 that he had suckled six snail familiars named "Sydrake," "Jeffry," "Peter," "Ayleward," "Sacar," and "Pyman" for a period of twenty years.<sup>32</sup>

Livestock animals, apart from chickens, are conspicuous for their absence in trial accounts. Although "cows" occur at a low frequency in table 1, their presence can be wholly explained by a single case involving the dubious testimony of a child. In 1582, seven-year-old Agnes Dowsing testified that her mother, Annis Herd of Little Oakley in Essex, had "a box with six spirits like cows, as big as rats, with short horns that lie upon a bed of black and white wool." She then went on to say that her mother had given her a black and white cow called "Crowe," and her brother a red and white cow called "Donne," and that they were fed on straw and hay, and provided with water and beer to drink.<sup>33</sup> Happily, her mother was acquitted. This dearth of livestock is scarcely surprising. Identifying farm animals as familiars would have had the undesirable effect of potentially incriminating most of the farmers in England.

The removal of undescribed familiars from the original data set, together with most of the mice and rats, leaves us with an array of species more consistent with the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of a pet. Cats and dogs now predominate numerically, followed by wild birds, toads, chickens, and moles. According to Keith Thomas, dogs, cats, and cage-birds were the most popular companion animals in the early modern period, just as they are to this day,<sup>34</sup> and chickens may also have been objects of affection, given that they were kept chiefly for their eggs rather than their meat. But what of moles and toads? Its burrowing habits, and prodigious appetite for worms and other invertebrates, renders the mole a difficult and unrewarding pet, to say the least. So its moderately frequent appearance as a familiar requires some other interpretation; perhaps related to superstitions deriving from the mole's earthy, subterranean affinity with graves, corpses, bodily corruption, and so on.<sup>35</sup>

The same may also be said of toads,<sup>36</sup> although toads are readily tamed, and were sometimes kept as pets. In a letter to Thomas Pennant dated June 18, 1768, the Rev. Gilbert White relates an anecdote concerning some ladies "of peculiar taste" who "took a fancy to a toad, which they nourished summer after summer, for many years, until he grew to a monstrous size, with the maggots which turn to flesh flies. The reptile used to come forth every evening from an hole under the garden-steps; and was taken up, after supper, on the table to be fed."<sup>37</sup> Pennant evidently responded with an account of a Devonshire household that kept a toad as a family pet for thirty-six years, despite local prejudices against these animals.<sup>38</sup>

## TOADS, UGLY AND VENOMOUS

In addition to its companionable characteristics, a wealth of literature suggests that the toad occupied a special place in ideas concerning witchcraft and traditional healing throughout Europe during this period. Toad's blood and other secretions, together with henbane, belladonna, thorn apple, mandrake, and other "witch herbs," were among the staple ingredients of the proverbial witches' brews, potions, love philters, and hallucinogenic "flying ointments" supposedly concocted by witches and sorcerers during the Middle Ages.<sup>39</sup> Toads were also used to kill people.

According to one fourteenth-century chronicler, a sorceress in the employment of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine sent vampire toads to suck the blood of Henry II's mistress, the Fair Rosamund.<sup>40</sup> In his *Materials towards a History of Witchcraft*, Henry Lea describes a case from Soissons in France in 1460, when someone called Yves Favins was approached by a poor woman who gave him a toad that she had been keeping in a pot. She then tells him "to baptize it and feed it on a consecrated wafer, which he did, giving it the name of John," following which the toad was killed and used to murder an entire family.<sup>41</sup> Jean Bodin in 1580 also makes passing reference to the practice of keeping toads in pots which he regarded as a suspicious circumstance, but not sufficient grounds for condemnation to death.<sup>42</sup> The diabolical association between toads and the consecrated Host resurfaced in the Normandy witch trials of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Here, the typical victims of prosecution were male shepherds, and their magical spells were commonly thought to involve the use of toads and toad venom, together with fragments of stolen Eucharist.<sup>43</sup>

Toads featured prominently in some famous witchcraft prosecutions from the Basque region of France and Spain. The witches of Labourd in 1609 confessed to baptizing toads at their Sabbats, and dressing them in red or black velvet, with bells around their necks and feet. Witches danced with their toads, it was claimed, and children were given the task of tending entire crèches of toads while their owners attended the Sabbat. At Zugarramurdi in 1610 the witches confessed to receiving toads from the Devil as a sort of rite of initiation. The toads accompanied the witches to their meetings, and also provided them with a source of deadly poison. Ingredients for the witches' "flying ointment" were collected by whipping the toad with a switch until it swelled up, and took on a poisonous color. It was then squeezed under the witch's left foot until "excrement burst out of it at both ends." The resulting greenish-black fluid was carefully preserved in little bowls, and used as a salve.<sup>44</sup>

In Shakespeare's day, the association between toads, poison brews, and witchcraft was evidently common knowledge:

Toad, that under cold stone,  
 Days and nights hast thirty-one  
 Swelter'd venom sleeping got,  
 Boil thou first i' the charmed pot.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to numerous references to toad imps or familiars, evidence for the occult use of toads in England can be found in the *Examination* of the self-confessed Dorsetshire cunning man, John Walsh, who claimed in 1566 that witches keep toads which they give names to, and train to come when called: "Which Todes being called, the Witches strike with two withie Sperres on both sydes of y head, and saith to the Spirit their Pater Noster backward. . . . And when he is stricken, they commaunde the Tode to hurt such a man or woman as he would have hurted. Whereto if he swell, he will goo wher he is apointed. . . ." <sup>46</sup>

Like the later Basque testimonies, the account has a ring of authenticity to it, insofar as the description of toads swelling or puffing themselves up when struck on the head is entirely consistent with the defensive behavior of real toads. Further confirmation may perhaps be derived from a curious story published anonymously in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1832 concerning William Harvey, Charles I's personal physician, who is reputed to have investigated a local witch on the borders of Newmarket Heath in Suffolk. Claiming to be a wizard himself, Harvey gained the woman's confidence, and asked to see her familiar, whereupon she made a chuckling sound, and summoned a toad out from under a chest which she then fed from a saucer of milk.<sup>47</sup> Intrigued, Harvey persuaded the woman to leave her home on an errand, and, as soon as she was off the premises, seized the poor toad and summarily dissected it, thereby establishing that it in "no ways differed from other toades."<sup>48</sup>

The basis for much of this medieval and early modern toad lore probably lies in the pharmacological characteristics of toads and their by-products. The skin and glandular secretions of toads (genus: *Bufo*) have been the subject of a surprisingly extensive ethnopharmacological and biochemical literature, stemming largely from the notion that some of these substances have hallucinogenic properties that have been exploited for shamanistic purposes by Central and South American cultures since pre-Columbian times.<sup>49</sup> The topic also gained particular notoriety during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s following tabloid press reports of episodes of "toad licking" and "toad smoking" among America's recreational drug users. In response to these rumors, the Food and Drug Administration included bufotenine, a minor constituent of toad venom, in Schedule 1 of the Controlled Substances Act in 1967,<sup>50</sup> while possession of the species *Bufo marinus* became a

criminal offense in the United States, subject to the same sanctions as possession of heroin and crack cocaine.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, and notwithstanding official belief in the societal hazards posed by illicit toad use, it appears that bufotenine has no mind-altering properties, and that the skin and glandular secretions of the majority of *Bufo* species, including *Bufo marinus* and the common toad of Europe, *Bufo bufo*, contain no hallucinogenic or psychedelic compounds. The only known exception to this rule is *Bufo alvarius*, the Sonoran desert toad, which secretes an extremely psychoactive derivative of bufotenine (5-MeO-DMT) that induces vivid hallucinations when smoked.<sup>52</sup>

Although bufotenine does not induce hallucinations, it does, along with several other compounds in toad skin, such as bufagenins and bufatoxins, exert powerful pharmacological effects on the heart and blood vessels, and on the peripheral vascular and nervous systems. These effects, comparable to those of the drug digitalis, are highly toxic, and can induce heart failure in humans and other animals at high doses. Medications based on toad venom have also a long history of use in Europe and Asia for the treatment of a wide variety of ailments including dropsy, heart failure, and nose bleeds, and as diuretics, expectorants, local anesthetics, and aphrodisiacs. Bufotenine and related compounds are also known to have antibacterial and anti-fungal properties.<sup>53</sup>

Toads are known to synthesize and make use of these biochemical agents as protection against predators and infections, actively secreting them from the paratoid glands on either side of the head when threatened or irritated. Medieval and early modern herbalists and cunning folk were evidently aware of the toxic and medicinal properties of these substances, and knew how to obtain them by striking toads with sticks until they puffed themselves up and exuded venom.

This common substrate of European toad lore does not, of course, exclude the possibility that some toad familiars were no more than pets, but it does suggest that toads in general belong in a separate category from cats, dogs, and birds, even if they were sometimes "treated with indulgence and fondness."

#### FAMILIAR (AND LESS FAMILIAR) NAMES

As Claude Lévi-Strauss once suggested, the kinds of names people give to animals are often an expression of their relation to human society.<sup>54</sup> As objects of economic production, cows and other livestock animals tend to be given descriptive, impersonal names. Pets, on the contrary, tend to acquire either personal "pet" names, or human names and nicknames. Many of the

familiars described in witch trial records and pamphlets had names (see table 1) that may provide clues to the relationships that existed between them and their owners.

The earliest of these named familiars was "Sathan," the superannuated cat of Elizabeth Francis of Hatfield Peverill in Essex who was tried for witchcraft in 1566. According to her testimony, she acquired the familiar from her grandmother who urged her to "give her blood to Sathan (as she termed it), which she delivered her in the likeness of a white spotted cat." Elizabeth Francis made use of Sathan for sixteen years, according to her own confession, for the performance of various acts of malefice, before passing him on to another woman called Agnes Waterhouse whom he continued to serve for a further fifteen years. During this second period, his mistress kept him in a pot of wool but, "being moved by poverty" to use the wool, she prayed "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost that it would turn into a toad, and forthwith it was turned into a toad, and so [she] kept it in the pot without wool." Later still, according to the testimony of Agnes's daughter, Joan Waterhouse, Sathan also began appearing "in the likeness of an ill-favoured dog with horns on his head."<sup>55</sup>

Apart from a few notable exceptions, such as Rutterkin or Mamillion, subsequent familiars were rather less versatile than Sathan, and generally more prosaically named. As illustrated in the table under "Other Trials," most familiars tended to be given either standard (for the period) animal names, such as Pusse, Gibb, or Ball, or a reasonably consistent range of "diminutives": Jack, John, Bunne, Tibb, Minny, Will, Tom, Dick, Harry, Robin, Bess, Nan, and so on. Chicken familiars, like Lévi-Strauss's cows, were generally given either descriptive names—White, Blew, Calico—or imitative names that resembled the clucking of hens. In short, if toads, moles, mice, rats, and nondescript familiars are discounted, we are left with a collection of names that could readily be applied to animal companions.

As always, however, the Hopkins and Stearne trials are exceptional. Hopkins and Stearne displayed particular inventiveness when it came to the names of familiars. Hangman, Holt, Pease, and Germany were, one imagines, unconventional names for cats in the seventeenth century, as were Jarmara, Vinegar Tom, and Elimanzer for dogs, or Joweare and Naturall for mice. In his own 1647 account of the Essex witchcraft discoveries at Manningtree, Hopkins uses the exotic sounding names of the witches' familiars as further evidence of diabolical involvement, claiming that "no mortal could invent" names as bizarre as "Elemauzer, Pyewacket, Peck in the Crown, Griezle Greedigut, etc."<sup>56</sup> In fact, the evidence suggests that Hopkins may have invented them himself (see figure 7). According to the record of indictment of Elizabeth Clark of Manningtree, only four familiars were orig-

Table 1. Names Given to Familiars in the English Witch Trials

Hopkins & Stearne Trials	Other Trials
	<i>Cats</i>
Tomboy x 2, Hangman and Jacob, Holt, Newes, Tissy, Mouse, Besse, Pease, Germany	Sathan, Jill, Jenny, Titty, Jack x 2, Robin, Will, Tibb, Kart, Pusse, Gibbe, Puppet (alias Mammet), Giles, Dick, Jude, Bess, Inges, Fillie, Russoll, Bunne, Rutterkin, Mamillion
	<i>Dogs</i>
Jarmara, Vinegar Tom, James, Elimanzer, Pretty x 2, Lilly and Priscill, Grizzel and Greedigut	Sathan, Suckin, Tibb, Minny, Dandy, Ball, Tom, Robin, Dunsott, Bunne, George, Mamillion
	<i>Toads</i>
Richard and John	Sathan, Great Browning and Little Browning, Bonne, Pygine, Tom, Robin, Vizett
	<i>Mice</i>
Tibb, Joan, James, Prickeares x 3, Robin, Bird, Teates, Jack x 2, Rugge, Susan, Jockey; Touch, Pluck and Take, Joweare, John and Naturall; Littleman, Prettyman, and Daynty	Swear (Sweet?), Rug, John and Robert, Will
	<i>Rats</i>
Tom, Will and Harry	Philip, Catche
	<i>Moles</i>
Tom, Nan, Jack and Will; Margaret, Amie and Susan; Wynowe, Jeso and Panu	Hisse Hisse, Tom, Pygine
	<i>Poultry</i>
Nan; Touch, Pluck and Take; Giles, Alice and Bess; Great Turkey and Little Turkey	Nan, Pluck, Catch, White, Blew (Blue?), Calico, Jack and Hardname
	<i>Wild Birds</i>
Robin, Harrie, Sparrow, Tom, Will x 2, Tibb; Tom, Robert and John	Tewhit (owl)
	<i>Miscellaneous</i>
Sydrake, Jeffrey, Peter, Aylewood, Sacar & Pyman (snails); Anthony and Blackfast, Sacke and Sugar (rabbits); Jake (hog); Frog (frog); Joan (spider); Newes (ferret); Zezebel (woman); Beelzebub and Trullibub (pieces of wood); Meribell, Jesus, Jockey, Sandy, Christ, Mounsier, Collyn, Dick, Tom, Kit, Will, Nan; Jackly and Pybold; Tit, Gray, Tray and Rob; Bess, Nan and Joan; Sis and Kate; Elemauzer, Pyewacket, Griezle, Greedigut, and Peck in the Crown (nondescript)	Bidd (ferret); Fancie (bear); Jack and Jill (frogs); Crowe and Bonne (cows); Grissil, Ball and Jack; Sothrens, Mercurie, Hercules and Jack; Jockey, Jack and Will; Great Dicke, Little Dick and Willet; Nicholas, Ned (nondescript)

Note: A few familiars appear more than once as different animals; "Sathan," for example, appears three times as cat, dog, and toad.



7. Frontispiece of Matthew Hopkins's *The Discovery of Witches* . . . 1647.

inally involved: "Holt" (a young white cat), "Vinegar Tom" (in the likeness of a greyhound), Jeremarye (a sandy-colored spaniel), and "Sacke and Sugar" (a black rabbit).<sup>57</sup> Reference to a white dog familiar called "Elimanzer" appeared in the confession of Ellen Clarke, another accused witch some three weeks later, but the other three names—Pyewackett, Peck in the Crown, and Griezell Greedigutt—were published by Hopkins two years after the event when he also added the name of a ferret called "Newes."<sup>58</sup> In Stearne's account of the same trial published in 1648, the spaniel is named "Jerma-rah" and the cat is named "Lought," while the greyhound, rabbit, and ferret

are mentioned but not named.<sup>59</sup> Both of these later accounts also added strange peculiarities to the animals that are not mentioned in the trial records. Hopkins, for example, described Jarmara as being "without any legs at all" whereas Stearne said that it had "legs not so long as a finger." The greyhound was described by Stearne as having "legs as long as a stag," while Hopkins claimed it had "the head of an ox" and that it abruptly transformed itself into the shape of a headless four-year-old child before vanishing at the door.

The witch finders also recycled some of these unlikely names. Mouse familiars called "Prickeares" appeared in three entirely separate Hopkins and Stearne trials, and, while Hopkins refers to "Griezell Greedigutt" as the nondescript familiar of one of Elizabeth Clark's cronies in 1645, "Grizzell" and "Greedigutt" are later named as the familiars of Jane Wallis of Keyston, Huntingdon, which appeared "in the shape of dogs with great bristles of hog's hair on their backs" in 1646.<sup>60</sup> Hopkins and Stearne were also more likely to find names for their miscellaneous or nondescript familiars—including snails and bits of wood—and these appellations more often had an exotic or fanciful quality.

#### VAMPIRE PETS

Perhaps the weirdest characteristic of familiars, and the strongest indication that they were other than mere pets, was their habit of drinking or sucking their owners' blood. In the introduction to his 1933 survey, Ewen seems content to give credence to the notion that early modern witches actually allowed their pets to drink their blood: "There is nothing incredible in the fact that human beings trained or permitted animals to suck or lick their blood, much more horrible forms of bestiality are known to the psychopathist and the criminal jurisprudent."<sup>61</sup> Such a literal interpretation of the evidence, however, seems unjustified.

An examination of the trial evidence in chronological sequence suggests that the whole idea of the blood-sucking familiar evolved from the older and simpler concept of rewarding, or sealing a pact with, a helpful spirit with a drop of one's own blood. As early as 1510, a teacher called John Steward, who was accused of conjuring spirits for the purpose of detecting buried treasure, denied giving his blood to spirits in the form of bumble bees.<sup>62</sup> John Walsh, the cunning man of Netherbury in Dorset, admitted in 1566 to employing a familiar that appeared to him in the form of either a dog or a pigeon, and which helped him to locate lost or stolen objects. Upon receiving this familiar he gave it "one drop of his blud, whych blud

the Sprite did take away upon hys paw."<sup>63</sup> At her trial of the same date, Elizabeth Francis testified to rewarding "Sathan" with a drop of blood every time he did anything for her: "which she gave him by pricking herself, sometime in one place, and then in another, and where she pricked herself there remained a spot which was still to be seen."<sup>64</sup> At another well-publicized trial, of four witches at Windsor in 1579, one was accused of feeding a toad familiar with blood, "which she causeth to issue from her own flank"; another was said to have a black cat familiar called Jill, "and she daily feedeth it with milk, mingled with her own blood"; the third fed a kitten familiar called Jenny with "crumbs of bread and her own blood"; and the fourth fed her rat familiar, Philip, "with blood issuing from her right-hand wrist, the marks whereof evidently remain."<sup>65</sup>

By this stage, it seems to have become normal practice to search the accused for such marks. The jury of the Court Leet at Southampton in 1579 proposed that half a dozen honest matrons be found to strip a suspected witch and determine whether she had "eny bludie marke on hir bodie which is a common token to know all witches by." This, however, points to some confusion with the well-established Continental idea of the "Devil's mark," a special blemish with which Satan marked his disciples, and which could be recognized by its insensitivity to pain and its failure to bleed when pricked.<sup>66</sup>

The first recorded mention of bloodsucking familiars comes from Ursula Kemp's 1582 trial when she confesses to allowing her toad familiar, Pygine, to suck blood from a place on her thigh. From here on, however, the concept became increasingly stereotyped and exaggerated, and the search for bloody marks or spots began to expand to include lumps, boils, hernias, warts, excrescences, supernumerary nipples, or any accessory protuberance on the body that could be construed as the site of a familiar's recent gustatory attentions. The corpse of Alice Samuel, one of the notorious witches of Warboys, executed in 1593, was found to bear a lump of flesh resembling a teat about half an inch long "adjoining to so secret a place which it was not decent to be seen." Undeterred, however, by the constraints of decency, the jailer and his wife "made open show thereof onto divers that stood by. After this, the jailer's wife took the same teat in her hand, and seeming to strain it, there issued out at the first as if it had been beeenings (to use the jailer's word), which is a mixture of yellow milk and water: at the second time there came out in similitude as clear milk, and in the end very blood itself."<sup>67</sup>

Needless to say, these grotesque ideas and practices reached their nadir under the puritanical ministrations of Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne. Most of the witches they brought to trial—women, men and, in one case, a nine-year-old boy—confessed to suckling familiars several times a week

from accessory teats, paps, or "biggs" on their bodies, often close to their "secret parts." Usually some form of appropriate blemish was detected following a strip search, but if not, it was simply assumed that the witch had been forewarned, and had cleverly concealed her "teat" from view. After being forced into early retirement by adverse public opinion, John Stearne published a long and tendentious defense of the witch finders' methods which included an extraordinarily detailed, seven-page anatomical guide to the differences between the witch's teat and "natural marks" such as flea bites, warts, wens, moles, rents, and hemorrhoids.<sup>68</sup> Fortunately, this contrived attempt to elevate witch-finding to the level of an exact science found relatively few adherents.

#### FAMILIARS AS HYBRID CREATURES

Judging from the historical record, the concept of the witch's familiar, as it developed in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had complex origins, and cannot easily be explained in terms of a simple theory of misconstrued pet ownership. Rather, it represented a gradual conflation of several different ideas and phenomena, of which pet-keeping was only a component, albeit an important one.

Throughout Europe, a strong association between toads and witchcraft seems to have existed based on the pharmaceutical properties of these animals' secretions. The many descriptions of people nurturing toads, and naming them, suggests that toads may have been husbanded by witches, cunning folk, traditional healers, and so on, as sources of these "medicinal" compounds.

Belief in the spiritual origins of sickness and misfortune also appears to have been prevalent during this period. The tendency of English trial witnesses either to "invent" familiars when no pets were available to incriminate, or to attribute supernatural agency to the chance appearance of rats, mice, birds, snails, or insects in the vicinity of accused persons, reveals a widespread popular superstition regarding the existence of malevolent supernatural beings or "spirits" that assisted or represented witches in their magic, and preferentially adopted the physical form of animals while doing so. The fact that these beings were usually referred to as "imps" (literally "grafts") also indicates some ambiguity in the popular mind concerning whether such creatures existed independently of the witch, or were alien offshoots of her own persona.

Such ideas, according to anthropologists, are nearly universal among "shamanistic" cultures throughout the world.<sup>69</sup> For example, contemporary Mayan

peoples living in the Mexican province of Chiapas believe that everybody possesses a "soul animal" (*chanul*) that exists independently of the body, and, in some senses, on a different, supernatural plane, but which is nevertheless indistinguishable from a real animal. These *chanul* are assigned to each person at birth by the celestial powers, and share reciprocally every stroke of fortune that their human counterparts experience. Most illness is thought to be the result of an injury inflicted upon a person's *chanul*, either deliberately by witchcraft, or by another person mistaking one's *chanul* for an ordinary animal and hurting or killing it. The only traditional remedy for such illnesses is to employ the services of a shaman who will use various rituals, and the influence of his own, more powerful soul animals, to discover the source of the affliction and counteract it. According to Mayan folklore, shamans and witches also possess the ability to adopt the material form of their *chanul* in order to gain access to the supernatural realm.<sup>70</sup>

In West Africa, the Banyang people of West Cameroon hold that people have the ability to transform themselves into, or to send out as extensions of themselves, "were-animals" (*babu*) which in this form are possessed of supernatural powers. Although occasional stories are told of people actually experiencing bodily transformations into animals, the Banyang usually speak of the were-animal as having a separate existence, mystically linked to, but materially independent of, the person who "owns" it as an attribute. Were-animals are also capable of performing acts of maleficent magic against other people, and whatever befalls the were-animal also befalls its "owner" wherever he or she happens to be.<sup>71</sup>

Shamanistic concepts such as these are clearly unique to the cultures and contexts in which they evolved, and are not intended to serve as models of European peasant ideology during the fifteenth, sixteenth, or seventeenth centuries. Nevertheless, these examples contain some striking echoes of medieval and early modern ideas related to shape-shifting, parallel injury, and spirits/souls adopting the form of animals, as well as suggesting a similar connection between witchcraft (or shamanism) and the use of an animal "alter ego" as a magical emissary. In the case of the Mayan *chanul*, it also demonstrates the remarkable tenacity of such beliefs, despite the coercive influence of nearly five centuries of Central American Christianization.<sup>72</sup>

Overlaid on this core of traditional beliefs and practices was the increasingly widespread habit of keeping animals such as dogs, cats, songbirds, ferrets, squirrels, hares, and so on, purely for companionship; a practice that was likely to have been more common among the older, less popular, and more antisocial members of rural English society at this time.<sup>73</sup>

Combined together and embellished with the occasional, imaginative fabrication, this coincidence of different historical factors produced a sort of

composite or hybrid creature—the "imp" or "familiar"—a malignant, though otherwise commonplace, animal with supernatural powers that depended on the witch for care and nourishment in the same way that a pet is dependent on its owner, or a child is dependent on its parent. The comparison with a child seems particularly apt, since the familiar, as it came to be understood in the seventeenth century, was also a sort of demonic infant; not just dependent on the witch, but actually "nursing" from her in an obscenely distorted inversion of the normal mother-child relationship.<sup>74</sup> This image of the postmenopausal crone giving suck to her demonic animal companion—this grotesque mixing of animal and human categories, reproductive roles, and body fluids—was virtually tailor-made to provoke horror, revulsion, and sanctimonious outrage in the puritanical minds of early modern Englishmen. As many authors have noted, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestants and Puritans were especially eager to suppress the growling of the "beast within,"<sup>75</sup> and any form of intimacy with domestic animals, whether sexual or maternal, was certain to be viewed as profoundly morally degrading, particularly when, in this case, it was combined with other lurid abominations, such as bloodsucking and diabolism.

Explaining the absence, or near absence, of familiars from Continental accounts of witches and their activities is in some ways more difficult. The habit of treating small animals "with indulgence and fondness" may simply have been less prevalent among the lower social orders of Continental Europe, and therefore numerically less likely to attract adverse attention from the authorities. Keith Thomas implies that pet-keeping proliferated more in England, and over a wider range of social strata, than it did elsewhere in Europe during the early modern period. However, he seems to base this claim largely on contemporary references to the excessive number of dogs that roamed England's streets and countryside.<sup>76</sup> Reliable comparative figures on the relative numbers of pets in England and elsewhere are simply nonexistent. Companion animals were considered to have little or no economic value as property at this time, and so tended to go unrecorded.<sup>77</sup>

A second possibility is that English prosecutors of witchcraft were more prejudicial and puritanical regarding the phenomenon of pet-keeping than their Continental counterparts, and were consequently more likely to view the activity as morally obnoxious. The problem with this conjecture is that, if we are to believe Keith Thomas, it leads to the paradoxical conclusion that pet-keeping proliferated to the greatest extent in the country where it was viewed with the greatest intolerance. In addition, we have Johann Weyer's observation of the public suspicions of witchcraft aroused by Agrippa von Nettesheim's "childish" affection for his dog, Monsieur. Not only does this reveal an isolated Continental instance of popular belief in an

animal familiar, it also suggests that German antipathies regarding affection between people and animals were similar to English ones.

Alternatively, it is possible that the familiar failed to evolve on the Continent, at least as a judicial entity, because there was no niche for it within the official versions of witchcraft that emerged from the various episodes of European persecution. As several historians have pointed out, the model(s) of witchcraft that came to be accepted by ecclesiastical and judicial authorities on the European mainland was substantially different from the one that eventually became current in England.<sup>78</sup> From the fifteenth century onwards, Continental witchcraft was increasingly depicted as an organized, heretical religion or cult that existed in direct opposition to the established Church; a sort of sinister, inverted burlesque of Christianity.<sup>79</sup> Like witches everywhere, Continental witches used their occult powers to harm people, domestic animals, and other property, but they did this as instruments or servants of the Devil, to whom they surrendered themselves body and soul, just as good Christians surrendered themselves to God's will. As a token of Satanic allegiance, the Devil branded his disciples with the so-called "Devil's mark," and required them to gather together periodically to worship him at secret, nocturnal ceremonies known as Sabbats. During these ceremonies, the witches were said to perpetrate various abominable or obscene acts, such as kissing the Devil's posterior (figure 8), having sex with succubi, incubi, or Satan himself, sodomizing each other, engaging in cannibalistic feasts, saying the Lord's Prayer backwards, and spitting the Eucharist on the ground.<sup>80</sup> In England, by comparison, the witches were predominantly solitary. They did not join together to attend Sabbats, or worship Satan, and only rarely were they implicated in carnal relations with the Devil or his minions.

Both Norman Cohn and Richard Kieckhefer have argued, independently, that the English model of witchcraft was closer to the belief systems that existed at the popular level of European culture. In contrast, the official, "learned" or elite version that developed on the Continent was essentially a creation of the Inquisition whose agents were authorized to extract confessions under torture. To escape death and the pain of physical torture, most suspects freely admitted to anything suggested by the inquisitors, as well as readily divulging the names of their confederates. In this way, witches multiplied until substantial conspiracies eventually emerged, complete with all the trappings of a heretical religion.<sup>81</sup>

This elite conception of witchcraft did not erase the shamanistic animal-witch affiliation alluded to earlier. Rather it emphasized and elaborated different elements of that belief, in particular, shape-shifting—the notion of witches transforming themselves into animals in order to enter buildings or



8. Kissing the Devil's posterior. From Francesco Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* (Milan, 1608).

travel to their Sabbats unnoticed—and the idea of Satan and his attendant demons assuming the guise of animals for similar purposes. As the story of Agrippa von Nettesheim's dog implies, the idea of the familiar spirit in animal form may have been just as prevalent at the level of popular culture on the Continent as it was in England. But such an introverted, individualistic concept had little chance of survival within the grandiose, orgiastic representation of witchcraft promulgated by the continental Church and judiciary. As Barbara Rosen has suggested: "The element of affection in the alliance, which, on the Continent, took the form of surrender and worship, and bestiality with demons, was in England expressed by the cosy, slightly perverted relationship of a lonely poverty-stricken women to her pet animal."<sup>82</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Robin Briggs has recently argued for a common European substrate of popular witchcraft belief during the medieval and early modern periods.<sup>83</sup>

The survival of a coherent body of pre-Christian religious traditions in Europe during these periods has been difficult to demonstrate convincingly,<sup>84</sup> although evidence of the roles that animals played in European conceptions of witchcraft suggests that this common substrate included at least vestigial traces of shamanism. In particular, the apparent belief in the witch's (or shaman's) ability to shape-shift, or to perform magical acts by sending his or her spirit out of the body in the form of an animal, was quintessentially shamanistic.

Regional and local differences in sociopolitical, ecological, and judicial forces seem to have produced differences in how the information percolating up from this underlying substrate was filtered and interpreted by the prosecuting authorities. The different "animal" aspects of European witchcraft, including that of the English familiar, provide a striking illustration of the effects of this historical process.

#### NOTES

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1. *A true and just Recorde, of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at St. Oses in the countie of Essex. . . . Written orderly, as the cases were tryed by evidence, by W. W.* (Imprinted in London at the three Cranes in a Vinetree by Thomas Dawson, 1582).

2. *The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensford in the Countie of Essex before the Quenes majesties Judges, the XXVI daye of July Anno 1566*, reproduced in B. Rosen, *Witchcraft* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), pp. 72–82.

3. C. L'E. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism* (London: Heath Cranton Ltd., 1933), pp. 155–64; B. Rosen, *Witchcraft* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), pp. 30–32; K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 446.

4. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 69.

5. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 525.

6. K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), pp. 39–40. This idea was also developed more fully in J. A. Serpell, *In the*

*Company of Animals*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 158–59.

7. The "Continent" refers here primarily to Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain. With respect to evidence of the use of familiars, it could also be said to include Scotland (see C. Lerner, *Enemies of God* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981]).

8. Pope Innocent VIII's bull of 1485 makes no mention of familiars at all, and the 1487 *Malleus Maleficarum*, probably the most comprehensive and authoritative Continental text concerning the activities of witches, barely mentions them, apart from passing references to a witch in Basle who sent a familiar of indeterminate shape to afflict "an honest laborer" with leprosy, and another whose familiar accompanied her in the form of a raven to her place of execution, and prevented the wood from burning until it was driven off. The fanatical witch hunter Jean Bodin was virtually silent on the subject of familiars in his 1580 treatise *Demonomanie*, though he described the practice of keeping toads in pots as a suspicious circumstance, albeit not grounds for condemnation to death (cited in G. L. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* [New York: Russell & Russell, 1958, p. 182]). In his *Daemonolatreia* of 1595, Nicholas Remy of the Supreme Judicial Court of Nancy wrote of witches being visited in prison by familiars in the form of birds, crabs, hares, and mice, although, given the date, he may have acquired this information from English sources. He also claimed that witches were given the power to enter houses by means of their familiars. In the *Compendium Maleficarum* of 1608, Guazzo observed that newly initiated witches were each assigned personal demons who, in the form of goats, transported them to their Sabbats, but the description is suggestive of incubi and succubi rather than subordinate familiars.

9. N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), pp. 99–102.

10. Accounts of shape-shifting in England derive mainly from the northern counties of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Northumberland, and usually refer to so-called "witch-hares," the preferred animal form adopted by witches when engaged in the theft of milk from their neighbors' cattle. The separation between this category of creatures and more typical animal familiars is somewhat ambiguous, however, since many folktales relate instances of witch-hares being pursued and wounded in one location while the witch herself is engaged in other activities elsewhere. In such cases, the witch invariably suffers an equivalent parallel injury, and is thus identified. Reference to parallel injury is extremely scarce in trial accounts of "typical" English familiars, although intimations of shape-shifting are occasionally encountered. In the notorious case of the Walkerne witch, Jane Wenham, in

1712, several witnesses not only testified to being visited and "tormented" by her cats, but also reported that one of these cats had the face of Jane Wenham (Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 384-89).

11. The relevant section of the 1604 Act of Jas. I is reproduced in full in C. L'E. Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials* (London: Heath Cranton Ltd., 1929), pp. 19-21.

12. Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials*; Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*; R. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

13. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, pp. 26-27.

14. W. Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558-1718* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1911), pp. 164-205; Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 254-61; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 536-45.

15. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, p. 86.

16. Cited in Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 260.

17. Thomas Ady, *A Candle in the Dark: Shewing the Divine Cause of the Distractions of the Whole Nation of England, and of the Christian World* (London: Printed for Robert Ibb'tson dwelling in Smithfield near Hosier Lane End, 1655), p. 135.

18. P. Dale-Green, *Dog* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1966), p. 81-82.

19. Reproduced in part in K. M. Briggs, *Pale Hecate's Team* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 28-30.

20. *A Dialogue, or, Rather a Parley betweene Prince Rupert's Dogge whose name is Puddle, and Tobies Dog whose name is Pepper &c. . . .* (Printed at London for I. Smith, 1643), pp. 2-9.

21. *A Dog's Elegy or Rupert's Tears, For the late Defeat given him at Marstonmoore, neer York . . .* (Printed at London for G. B. July 27, 1644), p. 3.

22. Dale-Green, *Dog*, p. 81.

23. The account is given in G. Zilboorg, *The Medical Man and the Witch in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935), pp. 134-36.

24. Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials*, p. 294.

25. The tendency in witchcraft cases for children to give wildly imaginative testimonies under cross-examination has been well documented in R. L. Sjöberg's study of child testimonies during an outbreak of witch hysteria in Sweden during the seventeenth century (*Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 36 [1995]: 1039-51). Robin Briggs reports a similar phenomenon in his study of the Lorraine witch persecutions, see *Witches and Neighbors* (New York: Viking, 1996), pp. 233-37.

26. *A Detection of damnable driftes, practized by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsford in Essex . . . 1579.* Extracts in Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 150.

27. F. Hutchinson, *An historical essay concerning Witchcraft, with observations tending . . . to confute the vulgar errors about that point* (London: Printed for R. Knaplock at the Bishop's Head, and D. Midwinter, at the Three Crowns in St. Paul's Churchyard, 1718), p. 68.

28. Ady, *A Candle in the Dark*, p. 135.

29. Ibid.

30. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 282.

31. *The Examination, Confession, Triall, and Execution, of Joane Williford, Joan Cariden, and Jane Hott* (London: Printed for J. G., October, 1645), p. 2.

32. J. Stearne, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch-Craft . . .* (London: Printed by William Wilson, dwelling in Little Saint Bartholomewes neere Smithfield, 1648), pp. 41-42.

33. *A True and just Record of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches taken at St Oses . . . 1582*, pp. 161-2.

34. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 100-113; AVMA, *The Veterinary Service Market for Companion Animals* (Schaumburg, Ill.: American Veterinary Medical Association Information Center, 1992).

35. Moles could also be described as anomalous animals *sensu* Mary Douglas's theory of taboo in relation to animals that tend to cross categorical boundaries. In the case of the mole, these anomalous characteristics might include the fact that it is a mammal with fur that lives perpetually underground, and has no visible eyes or ears. See M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

36. See especially M. E. Robbins, "The Truculent Toad in the Middle Ages," in *Animals in the Middle Ages*, ed. N. C. Flores (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 25-47.

37. Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne* (1768: reprint ed., London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1949), p. 51.

38. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 110-11.

39. A. Allen, "Toads: The Biochemistry of the Witches' Cauldron," *History Today* 29 (1979): 265-68; R. Fletcher, "The Witches' Pharmacopoeia," *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital*, no. 765 (1896): 147-56; M. J. Harner, "The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft," in *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, ed. M. J. Harner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 125-50.

40. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 73.

41. H. C. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), p. 513.

42. The account is given in Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, p. 182.

43. W. Monter, "Toads and Eucharists: The Male Witches of Normandy, 1564-1660," *French Historical Studies* 20, no. 4 (1997): 563.

44. G. Henningson, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition (1609-1614)* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980), pp. 78-79.
45. *Macbeth* IV.1.
46. *The Examination of John Walsh, before Maister Thomas Williams . . .* (Imprynted at London by John Awdely dwelling in Little Britain Street without Aldersgate, 1566), pp. 8-11.
47. This is certainly the least plausible aspect of this account since toads are generally unresponsive to anything but live and mobile insect prey. It would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to train one to "drink" milk from a saucer like a cat.
48. Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558-1718*, pp. 160-62.
49. W. Davis, *Shadows in the Sun* (New York: Island Press, 1998), pp. 203-38; P. T. Furst, "The Toad as Earth Mother: A Problem in Symbolism and Psychopharmacology," in *Hallucinogens and Culture*, ed. P. T. Furst (Novato, Calif.: Chandler & Sharp, 1976), pp. 158-82.
50. T. Lyttle, D. Goldstein, and J. Gartz, "Bufo Toads and Bufotenine: Fact and Fiction Surrounding an Alleged Psychedelic," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 28, no. 3 (1996): 267-90.
51. Davis, *Shadows in the Sun*, p. 219.
52. W. Davis and A. T. Weil, "Identity of a New World Psychoactive Toad," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 3, no. 1 (1992): 51-59; Lyttle et al., "Bufo Toads and Bufotenine," pp. 273-74.
53. T. L. Barry, B. S. Petzinger, and S. W. Zito, "GC/MS Comparison of the West Indian Aphrodisiac 'Love Stone' to the Chinese Medication 'Chan Su': Bufotenine and Related Bufadienolides," *Forensic Science* 41, no. 6 (1996): 1068-73; Lyttle et al., "Bufo Toads and Bufotenine," p. 279.
54. C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), pp. 205-7.
55. *The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensford . . . 1566.*
56. *The Discovery of Witches in answer to severall queries lately delivered to the Judges of Assize for the County of Norfolk and now published by Matthew Hopkins. . . . 1647*, p. 2.
57. Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials*, p. 22.
58. Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches* (1647), frontispiece.
59. Stearne, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch-Craft* (1648), pp. 14-16.
60. In fairness to Hopkins and Stearne, we should also allow for the possibility that these were standard names for pets in seventeenth-century England. Certainly, "Greedigut" is a singularly apt name for many dogs.
61. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 74.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-43.
63. *The Examination of John Walsh . . . 1566.*
64. *The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensford . . . 1566.*
65. *A Rehearsall both sraung and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile, Alias Rockingham, Mother Dutton, Mother Devell, Mother Margaret, Fower notorious Witches, apprehended at winsore in the Countie of Barks. and at Abbington arraigned, condemned, and executed on the 26 daye of Februarie laste Anno. 1579.*
66. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 75.
67. *The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three witches of Warboys, arraigned, convicted and executed at the last Assizes at Hintingdon, for the bewitching of the five daughters of Robert Throckmorton Esquire, and divers other persons . . .* (London: Printed by the Widdowe Orwin for Thomas Man and John Winnington . . . 1593). Reprinted in Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 239-97.
68. Stearne, *A Confirmation* (1648), pp. 43-49.
69. See especially: R. F. Benedict, "The Concept of the Guardian Spirit in North America," *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association* 29 (1923): 3-93; A. I. Hallowell, "Bear Coremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere," *American Anthropologist* 28, no. 1 (1926): 1-175; A. Hultkrantz, "On Belief in Non-Shamanic Guardian Spirits among the Saamis," in *Saami Religion*, ed. T. Ahlbäck (Abo, Finland: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 1987), pp. 110-23; M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. R. Brain (New York: Norton, 1975), pp. 33-39.
70. G. H. Gossen, "Animal Souls, Co-Essences, and Human Destiny in Mesoamerica," in *Monsters, Tricksters, and Sacred Cows: Animal Tales and American Identities*, ed. A. J. Arnold (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), pp. 80-107.
71. M. Ruel, "Were-Animals and the Introverted Witch," in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. M. Douglas (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), pp. 333-50.
72. Gossen, "Animal Souls," pp. 104-5.
73. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 100-210.
74. This theme has been elaborated recently by S. Clarke, *Thinking with Demons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 89; K. Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 58-61. Although men or boys occasionally confessed to suckling familiars, the vast majority of trials and accusations involved women.
75. See especially J. Canup, "'The Cry of Sodom Enquired Into': Bestiality and the Wilderness of Human Nature in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 98, no. 1 (1988): 113-34; Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 17-50.

76. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 101-5.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
78. Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 71; Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 30-32; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 530; Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 126-46.
79. Clarke, *Thinking with Demons*, passim.
80. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, pp. 32-38; Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 71; Rosen, *Witchcraft*, pp. 30-32; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 530; Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 126-46.
81. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 126-46; R. Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (London: Routledge, 1976).
82. Rosen, *Witchcraft*, p. 32.
83. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, passim.
84. Although see C. Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. R. Rosenthal (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990); R. A. Horsley, "Further Reflections on Witchcraft and European Folk Religion," *History of Religions* 19, no. 1 (1979): 84-86; Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, pp. 35-37.

### PART THREE

# THE ANIMAL-HUMAN DIVIDE IN THE MODERN WORLD: PHILOSOPHICAL AND SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES