

Witchcraft and Women: A Historiography of Witchcraft as Gender History

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Estimates that the early modern witch trials claimed the lives of nine million Europeans, 80-90% of whom were women, led early feminists such as Margaret Murray, Mary Daly, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Dierdre English, among others, to wonder: “Was the witch-hunt an intentional woman-hunt?” In addition to trying to prove that this was the case, these early feminists used very limited source material and what they knew about the witch persecutions to serve their agendas as part of the women’s movement. Margaret Murray’s *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, Mary Daly’s, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, as well as Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English’s, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, were among the foundational texts that forced the question of women and gender to the center of witchcraft discourse.¹ Christina Larner was one of the first seriously to engage with the subject of gender in witchcraft history. Her book *Enemies of God*, published in 1981, prompted serious and, often, interdisciplinary scholarship that questioned assumptions about witchcraft and gender, as well as fervent contention when she shifted the question away from whether or not the witch-hunt was actually a woman-hunt.

Although some scholars, like Anne Llewellyn Barstow, continued to assert the central significance of the original question of whether or not the witch-hunt was a deliberate woman-hunt, most historians began to rethink the question while still acknowledging the importance of including gender in the analysis of witch hunts. The new question that historians began to ask

¹ Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921); Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives & Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2010).

was why women were more susceptible than men to witchcraft accusations and what does that increased susceptibility suggest about the position or role of women in sixteenth and seventeenth-century European society. Lyndal Roper's *Oedipus and the Devil* and *Witch Craze* both made significant contributions to the investigation of this question, as did Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors*, Stuart Clark's "The 'Gendering' of Witchcraft in French Demonology: Misogyny or Polarity?," Elspeth Whitney "The Witch 'She'/The Historian 'He': Gender and the Historiography of the European Witch-Hunts," Diane Purkiss, *Women's stories of witchcraft in Early Modern England: The House, the Body, the Child*, Anne Llewellyn Barstow's "On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History: A Historiography of the European Witch Persecutions" and Joseph Klaits', *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts*. The history of witchcraft with gender as a central subject is only a few decades old, but there have been two major shifts since the 1970s. The first shift occurred when Christina Lerner published *Enemies of God* which seriously engaged with gender and shifted the central focus away from the woman's holocaust and towards reasons why women were more susceptible to accusations. The next shift occurred with the introduction of psychoanalysis to the study of witchcraft history and the emphasis on examining trial confessions and depositions by academics such as Lyndal Roper and Diane Purkiss.

Although academics have discredited her claims, few studies on gender and witchcraft do not mention Margaret Murray, even if simply to criticize her argument. Margaret Murray was an Egyptologist who studied witchcraft from an anthropological perspective and theorized that European witches were the remains of a pre-Christian fertility cult which congregated in covens of thirteen.² Her book, *Witch-cult in Western Europe*, published in 1921, suggests that witches were members of a pre-Christian agrarian cult which influenced the theory that the witch hunt

² Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch-Cult*, 12, 191.

was the Church's effort completely to eradicate the pagan religion and its worshippers. Murray was not the first to propose that witches were worshippers of an organized religion, but she was the first to call the religion pagan, rather than satanic. Historians rejected Murray's study, but it gained a lot of popularity among feminists when it was first reprinted in 1952. Murray also had a significant impact on Wicca which emerged in the early twentieth century and gained popularity in the 1950s.³ Norman Cohn, among historians of witchcraft persecutions, discredited Murray for manipulating her sources in order to support her thesis.⁴ Early feminists such as Mary Daly accepted Murray's argument for the ancient fertility cult, which they understood to be a goddess, female-centric religion. Although Daly found Murray's study convincing, her main criticism of Murray was that much of her evidence came from witch-trial confessions, which Daly believed to be lacking in credibility because they were given under torture.⁵

Mary Daly was a radical feminist and author of the book *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. As a feminist active in the women's movement, her purpose was to expose the misogynistic nature of patriarchy by exposing five "righteous rites which massacre women," which she calls "sado-rituals," while also reclaiming words like "hag" and "witch" for the movement.⁶ Her main argument was that "the intent [of European witch hunts] was to break down and destroy strong women, to dis-member and kill the Goddess, the divine spark of being in women" and to "purify society of the existence and of the potential existence of such women."⁷ Daly was the first to refer to the witch persecutions as a "woman's holocaust" or "gynocide." She called Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a "witchburning

³ Juliette Wood, "The Reality of Witch Cults Reasserted: Fertility and Satanism," in *Witchcraft Historiography*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 71.

⁴ Christina Lerner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief*, ed. Alan Macfarlane (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1984), 48.

⁵ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 220.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

society, in which the massacre of women was deemed not only normal but also normative”; therefore, arguing that the witch hunts were, in fact, deliberate women hunts.⁸

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English were also feminists involved in the women’s movement—specifically the women’s health movement—and their understanding of the history of witchcraft was, to a great extent, influenced by Jules Michelet and Margaret Murray. Jules Michelet, a French historian, wrote *La Sorcière*, which put forth and made popular the idea that witches were actually the healers of the masses: “For a thousand years the people had one healer and one only, —the Sorceress. [...] If her cure failed, they abused her and called her a Witch.”⁹ He also asserted that sorceresses filled the role of midwives in every country, and were the only healers for women, because no woman in that period would have consulted or trusted a male physician.¹⁰ Furthermore, he suggested that the Church considered poisons, herbs, and material cures to be the instruments of the devil, and since these sorceresses had substantial knowledge of the properties of herbs and even how to use poisonous herbs as painkillers, the Church and some contemporaries viewed them suspiciously.¹¹

Ehrenreich and English self-published *Witches, Midwives & Nurses* as a project in the emerging women’s health movement.¹² Their purpose was to make the case that medicine is part of the history and heritage of women in order to encourage women to “[reclaim] healing roles in the late twentieth century.”¹³ With translations in six languages, the pamphlet was immensely popular and propagated the idea of the witch as a healer.¹⁴ In the second edition, which the Feminist Press published in 2010, Ehrenreich and English included a new introduction partly in

⁸ Ibid., 202.

⁹ Jules Michelet, *Satanism and Witchcraft*, trans. A.R. Allinson (New York: The Citadel Press, 1939), x.

¹⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹¹ Ibid., 83, 85.

¹² Ehrenreich and English, *Witches, Midwives & Nurses*, 9.

¹³ Ibid., 22.

¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

response to the criticism the book had received. In the introduction, they justified their mistakes by explaining that they had limited access to source material and made assumptions based on that limited material and the work of others, such as Margaret Murray, whose research “has since been discredited.”¹⁵ Ehrenreich and English’s central contention was, and remains (despite some admitted mistakes) that the witch-hunt was a thinly concealed effort of the church to eradicate female healing as part of the peasant subculture and eliminate women with “secret” knowledge.¹⁶ Robin Briggs also acknowledged Ehrenreich and English’s correlation between the rise of the European medical profession and the persecution of female healers: “for as the number of more or less qualified practitioners rose, so they became more anxious to exclude rivals.”¹⁷ He also commented, however, that the idea that midwives were commonly accused of witchcraft has proved untenable.¹⁸ Although, the works of Jules Michelet, Margaret Murray, Mary Daly, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English did not make any real academic contributions to the history of witchcraft, they greatly impacted popular understanding of women as witches and promoted the early feminist contention that witch hunts *were* women hunts. They also introduced the question of gender to the study of witch persecutions.

There were few scholarly studies that seriously engaged with gender and the question of why so many witches were women until the 1990s. In 1984, Christina Larner’s *Witchcraft and Religion* was published; in the study she critically addresses the question that feminists had been asking a decade before: Was witch-hunting woman-hunting? Larner brought the discussion of gender back into the realm of serious scholarship, prompting other witchcraft historians to engage with the subject, as well. While not dismissing the significance of gender relations in the

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷ Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 227.

¹⁸ Ibid., 279.

witchcraft trials, Larner suggested that patriarchy and misogyny were not the causes of the witch hunts, but rather, circumstances or conditions that fostered the hunts.¹⁹ Larner was also the first to call witchcraft a sex-related crime rather than a sex-specific crime; she followed that by investigating how the sex-relatedness influenced the outbreaks. The name of her first book is *Enemies of God*, and accordingly, she argues that witches were hunted primarily for ideological reasons—they supposedly worshipped the Devil and were, thus, enemies of God. In this point, she differs from the feminists who argued that men hunted witches primarily because they were women.²⁰ To the exasperation of scholars like Anne Llewellyn Barstow, despite Larner’s thorough understanding of patriarchy and awareness of the historic oppression of women, Larner validated and then dismissed the theory that the witch-hunting was woman-hunting.²¹ For Larner, what is at stake when elevating the theory of persecution by gender is a broader perspective from which to study witchcraft. But for Barstow, what is at stake, and has always been at stake, is women as a gender group and the importance of women’s history or rights today.

Larner does not dismiss the significance of the high number of accused women and acknowledges the deeply imbedded misogyny. She affirms arguments that women were feared as sources of disorder and as sexual beings in a patriarchal society. Barstow saw the sexual themes in demonological texts as proof that man’s fear of women as sexual beings was the underlying rationale for the witch persecutions, even calling the torture during witchcraft trial interrogations, “sexual torture.”²² Although, perhaps, not as extreme as Barstow, Joseph Klaitz also emphasized the sexual prejudices expressed in witch-hunting. He claims that the “the witch craze’s slaughter of women was the result of the spread of woman-hatred in the spiritually reformed elites” and,

¹⁹ Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion*, 84.

²⁰ Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-hunt in Scotland* (London: Chatoo & Windus, 1981), 102.

²¹ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts* (London: Pandora, 1994), 16-17.

²² Barstow, *Witchcraze*, 132-133.

like Barstow, attributes sadism and the appeal of sexuality and violence, to the treatment of accused witches during the witch persecutions.²³

From Larner's perspective, the witch-hunt was just that, a witch-hunt, not a woman-hunt. With the woman-hunt theory aside, she proposes different approaches to the question of why there was a severely disproportionate number of female victims. To explain this, she introduces the distinction between sex-related (an act which is predominantly associated with one sex) and sex-specific acts (an act which can only be performed by one sex). She argues that witchcraft is sex-related and suggests that women were more prone to suspicion because men considered the feminine nature to be malicious, sensual, evil, and irrational.²⁴ Writing about a decade later, Stuart Clark and Robin Briggs both supported her suggestion, elaborating upon it by explaining that the society was one dominated by polarized binary thought. As such, if men are associated with positive attributes, then women must be associated with their negative counterparts. If God is the embodiment of good and the Devil, His polar opposite, then, accordingly, men are innately closer to God and women to the Devil. This is even supported by Eve's original sin in "Genesis" of the *Bible*.²⁵

Both Anne Llewellyn Barstow and Marianne Hester have contended with Larner's treatment of the subject of gender in the study of witchcraft. Both Hester and Barstow argue that witch-hunts were sex-specific rather than sex-related. In *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination*, Hester distinguishes between scholars who argue that witch-hunts were sex-related (only discussing Christina Larner in this category) and scholars

²³ Joseph Klaitz, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 72-73.

²⁴ Larner, *Enemies of God*, 93

²⁵ Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors*, 284; Stuart Clark, "The 'Gendering' of Witchcraft in French Demonology: Misogyny or Polarity?" in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: Volume IV, Gendering and Witchcraft*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2001), 433.

who argue that the witch-hunts were sex-specific, discussing the works of Ehrenreich and English, Daly, and Carol Karlsen in this latter category. Placing her own work in the sex-specific category, she uses court records from the Assize Courts, pamphlets on individual Essex trials, and secondary sources to make her case that accusations of witchcraft were part of the strategic and organized efforts of men to push women back into the domestic sphere where they could be controlled.²⁶ Anne Llewellyn Barstow supports and expands Hester's arguments in *Witchcraze*. Barstow is even more extreme than Hester, finishing a chapter called "Keeping Women in Their Place" with, "I conclude that ruling-class European men looked at and treated their women basically as they did their African slaves and Indian serfs and as they had treated Jews and heretics before them, namely, with increasing violence."²⁷

A major criticism of the argument that the witch-hunt was a woman-hunt is that the witch persecution could not have been a deliberate form of repression against women because women also accused witches. Larner countered this assertion by explaining that the patriarchal social structure divides women and the nonconformity of women threatens women who do conform.²⁸ Clive Holmes proposes three ways in which women might participate in the proceedings against women: to testify as possessed victims, to report on the results of physical searches of the witch's body, or to testify to their experience as the victims of witchcraft attacks.²⁹ His main contribution is to the discussion of whether or not women as witnesses in witch trials discounts misogyny and gender as categories for the discussion of witchcraft history. His conclusion is that

²⁶ Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 132, 137, 157, 199.

²⁷ Barstow, *Witchcraze*, 164.

²⁸ Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion*, 86.

²⁹ Clive Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches" in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: Volume IV, Gendering and Witchcraft*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2001), 120.

both men and women believed in the reality of witchcraft and feared witches, so both men and women participated in the accusation of witches.³⁰

The argument that since women also accused witches, then the witch-hunt could not have been a cover for a deliberate and organized massacre of women would be valid, but since the society truly believed that witchcraft was real and witch trials were really intended to eliminate enemies of God and society, it makes sense that women would also participate. Nor does it eliminate the importance of including gender or misogyny in the discussion of witchcraft history, especially in regard to the question of why women were accused more often than men. J.A. Sharpe makes the argument that by participating in the trials, women were not just passive victims of patriarchy, but social actors with their own concerns and goals (within the patriarchy's limits). In this case, their concerns were the protection of their domestic space from the threats of witchcraft.³¹

In addition, Larner suggests that men viewed women's "life-bearing and menstruating capacities" as mysterious and dangerous, especially if uncontrolled (by men).³² In *Witches & Neighbors*, published over a decade later, Robin Briggs might be responding to Larner's connection between witchcraft and child-bearing and menstruation when he says, "There are signs that for women this transfer into the pool of suspects had a modest tendency to coincide with the menopause of the end of childbearing; while it would be rash to build too much on this flimsy basis, there may prove to be an important relationship here."³³ Although he acknowledges the potential for the connection, he contributes nothing else to investigating that relationship.

³⁰ Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches", 151-152.

³¹ J.A. Sharpe, "Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth-Century England: Some Northern" in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: Volume IV, Gendering and Witchcraft*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2001), 166-168.

³² Larner, *Enemies of God*, 93.

³³ Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors*, 264

Briggs also, in agreement with Lerner, acknowledges the need to shift from the question of whether or not the witch-hunt was a deliberate woman-hunt to the question of what made women particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations.³⁴ This is the question that Lerner begins to answer in *Enemies of God* and Briggs briefly touches upon in *Witches & Neighbors*. In *Oedipus and the Devil* and *Witch Craze*, Lyndal Roper uses psychoanalysis to push this question, building upon some of the ideas already proposed by scholars such as Lerner. She also addresses the connection between the increase in a woman's susceptibility to witchcraft accusations and the end of child-bearing.

Lyndal Roper's arguments support Lerner's conclusion that the witch-hunt was a witch-hunt, rather than a thinly concealed woman-hunt, because the people of the society (intellectual and peasant alike) honestly believed in supernatural forces and magic as a constant reality in everyday life.³⁵ Rather than the question of whether or not the witch-hunt was a deliberate persecution of women, however, Roper is more interested in the new questions of what made women particularly vulnerable to accusations and what does this say about the position of women in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She agrees with Briggs that witch accusations did not originate in a conspiracy to victimize women on the part of men or the elite, but rather in the fear and ignorance rooted in the psyche that dominated gender relations in small communities.³⁶ Like Briggs, Roper also investigates what drove people to accuse their friends and neighbors—people they knew intimately—of witchcraft with the understanding that

³⁴ Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors*, 263.

³⁵ Klaitz, *Servants of Satan*, 3; Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 10.

³⁶ Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors*, 285

torture and death were almost guaranteed to follow. Unlike Briggs, however, Roper uses psychoanalytical methods to explore the question.³⁷

Roper is especially interested in the prevalence of somewhat older women among the accused witches. She proposes that witch stories and accusations originated in fears surrounding procreation, motherhood, fecundity and age.³⁸ Roper supports her argument by explaining that wars of religion, disease, and bad harvests due to the “little ice age” already strongly impacted demographics and resources and inspired fear and greater protection of fertility. Furthermore, in such a society, motherhood was the pinnacle of the woman’s life and the ultimate show of success. Since social status correlated so closely with reproductive potential, old women who were past child-bearing years were hated and their barrenness and sexuality regarded with revulsion. In this, Roper might agree with Daly that targets of witchcraft were often women who survived marriage (widows) or rejected marriage (spinsters), but more so because they rejected maternity or were no longer fertile than because they asserted independence or deliberately deviated from the patriarchy.³⁹ Roper also discusses men’s fear of women as sexual beings, like Barstow, but she focuses on the young man’s fear of the combination of sexual desire and an old woman’s infertile body.⁴⁰ Roper uses rich archival sources to give expression to the fears that she proposes dominated communities during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These fears often involved themes of fertility and the witch’s attack on fertility (in the form of male impotency, barrenness, miscarriages, stillbirths, infanticide, livestock, crops, etc.⁴¹

³⁷ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 8-9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁹ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 184.

⁴⁰ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 164.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 159

In her conclusion, Roper asserts that the witch craze was about mothers.⁴² The witch killed babies, ground their corpses into powder, and used that powder to enhance her power. She was the anti-mother. Elspeth Whitney suggested that it “remains clear that the witch was seen as inverting not only the natural order in general but specifically the image of the ‘good woman.’”⁴³ She was not the first to make this suggestion. Larner, Briggs, Clark, and Roper, among others, all agree that the witch was often someone whom authorities and neighbors viewed as socially deviant in some respect. If the Virgin Mary is Christianity’s ideal woman, the witch is an anti-Madonna. Whereas Mary became a mother without having sex, the witch has sex, but either does not bear children, or kills the children that she bears.⁴⁴ Since, as Roper suggests, motherhood was the primary, if not sole, purpose of a woman’s life and succeeding in that purpose correlated with a woman’s status, then the witch, as an anti-mother would be the most contemptible of women. This explains why women were among the accusers and witnesses against witches in witchcraft trials better than Larner, Barstow, or Clark’s suggestions. Briggs makes a similar argument, affirming that a woman’s status depended on her ability to bear and successfully raise children, which was a fraught responsibility during the pre-modern era. In agreement with Roper, he also suggests that failure to conceive or carry a fetus to term, as well as masculine impotency, would have been blamed on witchcraft.⁴⁵ Since witches attacked women’s abilities to become mothers, then women would naturally have been among the accusers. These witches represented women’s deeply embedded fears and received the blame for inexplicable loss of life, illness, infertility, poor harvest, etc.⁴⁶

⁴² Roper, *Witch Craze*, 247.

⁴³ Elspeth Whitney, “The Witch ‘She’/The Historian ‘He’: Gender and the Historiography of the European Witch-Hunts” in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: Volume IV, Gendering and Witchcraft*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2001), 76.

⁴⁴ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 136-138

⁴⁵ Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors*, 270.

⁴⁶ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 158-159

Roper also addresses the question of the position of women at the time of the witch trials by examining witch confessions. Unlike some earlier historians, Roper understands that the people really believed in witchcraft and did not doubt that confessions were true. At that time, torture was an indispensable aspect of interrogation, as interrogators believed that pain “loosened the tongue” and the application of torture techniques was the way to ensure that confessions were truthful.⁴⁷ The interrogators, demonologists, and clerics wanted to understand more about witchcraft and witches so that they could identify them more readily; therefore they looked for personal details from the witches’ unique experiences to prove that the confessions were truthful. Roper uses these personal details to find the women’s voices and get a better understanding of how these women perceived their position or role in the society.

Diane Purkiss also incorporates psychoanalysis, as well as her literary background, into her study of witchcraft and gender. As part of an investigation of the same question of how women understood witchcraft and witches—as well as, or in connection with—their positions or roles in society, Purkiss examines female witnesses’ dispositions at witch trials. She acknowledges skepticism of these sources’ validity as expressions of women’s voices because clerks or judges often elicited the statements in the texts from women and, because women often were illiterate, men would inscribe the depositions that they submitted and may have intervened in the content. Despite these reservations, Purkiss still contends that the stories that women relayed in the depositions were powerful fantasies through which these village women negotiated their fears and anxieties of housekeeping and motherhood. In addition to being an anti-mother, Purkiss suggests that the witch was an anti-housewife, threatening the domain of women who were responsible first, for bearing and raising children, and second, for maintaining a well-kept

⁴⁷ Ibid., 46.

household.⁴⁸ In the crisis of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries' rural economy, starvation was a persistent fear, the pressure of which fell primarily on the housewife.⁴⁹ Briggs's and Roper's sources also reveal that animals kept for meat, milk, hides, and wool were frequent targets of witches.⁵⁰ Purkiss asserts that the good housewife carefully managed, conserved, and protected the household goods. A woman who infringed upon another woman's territory was more vulnerable to suspicion of witchcraft, especially if misfortune befell the family.⁵¹

The witch was dangerous because she disrupted motherhood and the household, and thus, disrupted the social order. This perspective that Roper and Purkiss's works propose is similar to that of the early feminists, such as Daly, in that the witch is a figure who rejects normative behavior. Roper and Purkiss differ from the early feminists, however, in their view of women as active agents in the witch trial and process, rather than as helpless victims slaughtered in a holocaust. These were women defending their territory—their homes—or in many cases, defiantly enduring inconceivable pain and torture. Roper and Purkiss also employ psychoanalysis to find the voices of the accused women and the accusing women to attempt to understand their fears and how they understood their position in society, rather than rely on the projections of male demonologists. Although they do not support the original assertion of the early feminists that the witch-hunt was actually a woman-hunt, they have not marginalized the question of women in the history of witchcraft and continue to explore witchcraft studies from the perspective of women's and gender history.

⁴⁸ Diane Purkiss, "Women's Stories of Witchcraft in Early Modern England: The House, the Body, the Child" in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: Volume IV, Gendering and Witchcraft*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2001), 280-281.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁵⁰ Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors*, 88; Roper, *Witch Craze*, 159

⁵¹ Purkiss, "Women's Stories", 285.

Guided primarily by the agenda of the women's movement, the early feminists wrote books on witchcraft and women that were ahistorical and lacking in evidence. Yet, despite the lack of credibility of their findings and conclusions, the questions they asked initiated a surge of witchcraft scholarship. Since the questions were initially posed by feminist activists and philosophers rather than historians, the study of witchcraft as part of gender history began as an interdisciplinary field. As such, the interdisciplinary contributions of Christina Lerner (sociology and history, Lyndal Roper (history and psychoanalysis), and Diane Purkiss (literature and history), among others, have yielded diverse and insightful perspectives into the history of witchcraft.

Despite the significant contributions these historians have made to the study of gender history, they fail to give any substantial attention to the investigation of the persecution of male witches. Recently, historians such as Lara Apps, Andrew Gow, and Rolf Schulte have been giving more attention to the male witches as a subject of witchcraft studies from the gender history perspective. Even during the early modern period, people stereotypically thought of the witch as a female figure. The investigation of the male witch is likely to continue, as much of witchcraft gender history does not yet offer convincing evidence to answer questions of whether or not the male witch was regarded as effeminate and fit into the popular fantasy of the witch figure, or whether the male witch, like the female witch, was viewed as a threat to domestic arrangements.

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