Ana Inés Aldazabal

WHEN WOMAN MARRIED SATAN:

THE EMERGENCE OF DIABOLICAL WITCHCRAFT IN FRENCH MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University Private University

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by

Ana Inés Aldazabal

(Argentina)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Thesis Supervisor

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External Reader

Vienna
May 2022

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Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **Ana Inés Aldazabal**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

In the Middle Ages, official attitudes towards magical practices evolved from the skepticism admonished by tenth-century canon law to a widespread belief in the threat of demonic witches by the end of the fifteenth century. In literary works, representations of magic and magical practitioners do not always seem to adhere to official views. The analysis of the relationships between literary and non-literary written sources concerned with the issue of witchcraft can prove fruitful in understanding the change in attitude that took place in late medieval times.

This thesis focuses on the evolution of witch-like figures in French-language literary works. First, it traces the general trends in the evolution of the stereotype of the witch from the genesis of courtly romance in twelfth-century France to the first representations of diabolical witchcraft in fifteenth-century literature, at the time when some of the first mass witch trials were taking place in francophone lands. Then, it concentrates on an episode of the little-known *Roman de Perceforest*. The core of my research consists of a close-reading analysis of this fifteenth-century romance episode, which allows me to assess how some of the impressions obtained through the previous general examination of the stereotype's development come into being in a specific case. Through the work carried out in this thesis, I hope to offer a contribution to the study of the shaping of diabolical witchcraft in vernacular literary sources of the last centuries of the Middle Ages.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my academic supervisor Gábor Klaniczay, for all his patience, guidance, and constant support. I am also particularly grateful to Éloïse Adde, whose linguistic expertise allowed me to navigate an ocean of Old and Middle French sources. My acknowledgments also go to Baukje van den Berg and my colleagues at the MA Thesis Seminar, whose insights contributed a great deal to this work. From the University of Buenos Aires, I cannot fail to mention María Dumas and Susana G. Artal, for guiding me on my academic path and for suggesting and supporting me in this overseas adventure. Finally, I would like to thank my family, for their unconditional love and encouragement, and the whole Department of Medieval Studies at CEU, for making me feel that this was not only the ideal place to carry out my studies but also my home.

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Mais où sont les neiges d'antan ?

—François Villon, "Ballade
des dames du temps jadis"

Introduction

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings—with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently.
>
> —Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*

The definition of the fantastic offered by Tzvetan Todorov in his seminal study on this literary concept suits the notion of witchcraft well. When dealing with this issue, both the questions asked in times of old and those that we ask ourselves today seem to partake of that state of uncertainty, the "hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event," that constitutes, according to Todorov, the essence of the fantastic.[1] Late medieval and early modern authors may have asked themselves if witches can really fly, or if people who claim to attend their gatherings only dream that they are flying. Our contemporaries, for their part, may instead want to know how could the witch-hunts really happen, and how could they be produced by the same society in which the scientific revolution was conceived. In either case, however, the sense of wonder with which such

[1] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, tr. Richard Howard (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 25.

questions are posed seems to suggest that this world, the one we know, may indeed be controlled by laws unknown to us.

It is perhaps an aesthetic response to events that seem better suited for works of fiction than the real world that has kept the fascination with witchcraft alive. Over time, witches and witchcraft have come to occupy a central place in fiction, but what knowledge we can gather on the development of the early modern notion of diabolical witchcraft and the historical witch trials usually stems from legal and religious documents. It could perhaps be argued that information regarding historical events should not be sought primarily in what Platonists would call the "lies of poets." But does this mean that fictional sources should be disregarded? The construction of a more or less cohesive stereotype that took place between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries seems to be somewhat literary in nature. Demonological treatises often allude to the works of Greek and Roman poets as reliable sources;[2] studies of depositions from witch trials have been made with a focus on their narrative structure or their connections to folk legends.[3] However, strictly literary sources may also have something to contribute to the study of historical witchcraft. A comprehensive study of the impact of Greek and Roman literature on early modern ideas about witchcraft has recently been completed by Marina Montesano.[4] A study of the relationships between the development of these ideas and the courtly romances and allegorical poems that are concurrent or immediately previous to them remains to be done. It is the aim of this thesis to offer a contribution to the study of the shaping of diabolical witchcraft in vernacular literary sources of the last centuries of the Middle Ages.

[2] Marina Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 5; Eva Lara Alberola, "Las referencias a la literatura clásica en la tratadística de los siglos XV-XVII como evidencia del carácter «literario» de la brujería: primera aproximación," *Atalaya*, 15 (2015). https://doi.org/10.4000/atalaya.1624

[3] Diane Purkiss, "Women's Stories of Witchcraft in Early Modern England: The House, the Body, the Child," *Gender & History*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1995): 408-432; Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, tr. Raymond Rosenthal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7.

[4] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 2018.

Scope and Problem

The literary sources analyzed in this work were all written in Old or Middle French.[5] From the late eleventh century to at least the end of the thirteenth, France produced a profusion of remarkable creative works that made it a leading model for other European vernacular literatures and gave rise to the topos of *translatio studii*, in which the history of knowledge is regarded in terms of a linear progression from Greece to Rome to France.[6] Furthermore, the development of the stereotype of diabolical witchcraft is inextricably linked to events that took place in francophone territories, from the rise of thirteenth-century ritual magic in Southern France[7] to the fifteenth-century first mass trials for witchcraft in the Swiss region of Valais.[8] For these reasons, this thesis will focus on texts in Old or Middle French.

The texts that will be analyzed below are also literary. The meaning of *literature*, a term that is central to the object of this thesis, can be rather ambiguous even in its modern sense: while, broadly, it refers to a body of written works of any kind, in general usage it is applied, more narrowly, to a collection of works of creative imagination that are composed with words—usually written, but also oral—and distinguished by the perceived aesthetic quality of their execution.[9] Even if usage of the narrow meaning of the term is agreed upon, its employment

[5] A reflection on the relationship between territorial borders and dialectal varieties of what would become standard modern French can be found in Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 9.
[6] Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale*, 47. The topos is most notably articulated in ll. 30-36 of Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès* (c. 1170): "Our books have taught us this: that Greece had first the prestige in learning and chivalry. Chivalry then came to Rome, as well as the sum of learning, which now have come to France. God grant that there they may be kept."). Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ed. Alexandre Micha (Paris: Champion, 1982), my translation.
[7] Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons. An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (London: Book Club Associates, 1975), 176.
[8] Martine Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region (1430-1440): Text and Context," in *Demons, Spirits, Witches / 3. Witchcraft Mythologies and Persecutions*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 24.
[9] Kenneth Rexroth, "literature," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed April 25, 2022. https://www.britannica.com/art /literature

for the delimitation of a corpus of medieval literary works presents some further complexities. In medieval vernacular languages, there is no generic word for literary activity or works—the Latin noun *litteratura* refers "either to grammar or to the commented reading of authors and the knowledge that it provides, but not to all works taken as a whole."[10] In addition, while texts written in the vernacular prior to the thirteenth century can be clearly differentiated into compositions in verse characterized by their perceived aesthetic qualities and prose documents of a mostly legal order, later texts often display a hybrid nature that makes their classification harder.[11] However, an awareness of the existence of a literary activity and a literary corpus did exist in the Middle Ages.[12] Consequently, I will use the term *literature* in its narrow sense to refer to a corpus of medieval works in verse or prose that stand out for their perceived aesthetic excellence. For the purposes of this thesis, the term *literature* will only be applied to works that visibly fit the above description, and texts of a hybrid nature, like chronicles, especially when written without a clear aesthetic purpose, will not be classified as such.

Chapter 1 will provide an introduction to the historical origins of the notion of diabolical witchcraft. It will present the changing attitudes towards superstitions involving night-flying and harming through occult means from the early Middle Ages until the fifteenth century. It will also discuss some especially relevant fifteenth-century sources connected to the early waves of witch trials around the region of Valais (c. 1428-1436) and the city of Arras (1459-1461). These sources, which provide the first descriptions of the night gatherings of witches and outline the basic features of what will later be known as the "witches' sabbath," are expected to prove useful for comparison with literary texts.

[10] Michel Zink, "Littératures de la France médiévale," in *Le Moyen Âge et ses chansons ou Un passé en trompe-l'œil*, (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1996), translation by Liz Libbrecht in *Publications du Collège de France* (2017), § 6, accessed April 25, 2022. https://books.openedition.org/cdf/ 4847?lang=es
[11] Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale*, 10.
[12] Zink, "Littératures de la France médiévale," § 6.

Chapter 2 will address the evolution of the literary stereotype of the witch, which does not necessarily follow the same patterns as that of the historical stereotype. After a general introduction to the topic, five subchapters will be devoted to briefly exploring some significant works. The intention is to understand what are the particularities of the development of this figure in literary sources and how this evolution relates to that of the historical stereotype of the witch. The chapter will cover texts ranging from the birth of courtly romance in the twelfth century to the first literary representations of diabolical witchcraft in the fifteenth.

Chapter 3 will discuss an episode from the *Roman de Perceforest*, presumably written around the mid-fifteenth century, which features an account of a gathering of witches that can perhaps be regarded as the first prototype of a witches' sabbath in fiction.[13] The episode, which is still largely unexplored, is highly relevant in that it constitutes the culmination of the development of the stereotype in medieval courtly romance, and in that it allows for fruitful comparison with the first accounts of the nocturnal assemblies of witches in other sources. This will be the main analysis chapter of this thesis, in which the results of the research carried out in the first two are expected to converge. In it, I will make a case for the witches' gathering in *Perceforest*, arguing that despite the fact that it is rendered as a fictional episode set in a remote pagan past and not as a reflection of actual beliefs, it should be counted among the early sources from which the stereotype of the witches' sabbath begins to emerge.

Through the analysis of the aforementioned texts, I will try to demonstrate that the depiction of sorceresses and witches in French-language literary works adjusts to the evolution of official attitudes in that they progressively cease to be thought of as supernatural beings to become fully human characters who are unable to subdue supernatural forces to their will, but are instead dominated by them. At the same time, however, I will try to show how the ironic

[13] *Perceforest*. *Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 1999); Christine Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans *Perceforest*," *Le Moyen Âge. Revue d'histoire et philologie*, 99 (1993): 471.

attitude adopted by vernacular poets contradicts the gravity with which arguments in favor of the reality of witchcraft were being weighed by the Church and the secular courts in the late medieval and early modern times. This last observation comes across as especially valuable insofar as it allows us to verify the existence of dissenting voices among the learned, which reminds us that, in any society and at any time in history, the dominant culture and opinions are not monolithic, and that subaltern dimensions of culture also need to be examined if significant sociocultural phenomena, such as the emergence of early modern witchcraft beliefs, are to be understood in their full scope.

Chapter 1: The Origins of Diabolical Witchcraft

An old woman lives in a cabin in the woods. Her white hair floats wildly down her back and her wrinkled face is topped with a wart on the nose. In the wee hours of the night, she cooks a bubbling potion in her cauldron while her black cat sits on the window sill. It is said that she flies on a broomstick and that her concoctions are made from the fat of the children that she kidnaps.

The above description brings a specific stock character to mind. For hundreds of years, witches have been associated in popular culture with a figure like the one described. However, this was not always so. The stereotype of the witch that we have become familiar with through the world of fairy tales originated at a particular time in history: that of the witch-hunts that ravaged Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Witches were not always evil hags who ride on broomsticks, nor have evil hags always been called witches. Historical documents, both Latin and vernacular, employ a broad variety of words for a number of interrelated and frequently overlapping concepts that could be referred to as *witchcraft*.[14] In contemporary scholarship, various definitions for this term have been suggested by authors with different academic interests.[15] Studies about the early modern European witch-hunts, however, often refer to a "cumulative concept of witchcraft" that developed throughout the fifteenth century and whose core is formed by the combination of the

[14] Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300–1500* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 8.

[15] For example, the distinction between *sorcery* as magic exercised through external means and *witchcraft* as a person's internal power established by the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard suits his research on magic in the Azande communities of Central Africa, but is not necessarily useful for the analysis of early modern European sources. See Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 8. See also Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions* in *Bavaria*: *Popular Magic*, *Religious Zealotry and Reason of State in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 14.

notions of *maleficium*, or harmdoing through occult means, and worship of the Devil.[16] It was from this cumulative concept that the modern fairy-tale stereotype of the witch was born.

In medieval trials concerning accusations of *maleficia*, the demonological elements were absent. Their introduction into the universe of popular witchcraft beliefs only took place in the late Middle Ages, and through the intervention of ecclesiastical and juridical authorities. A long process of evolution that integrated elements from the accusations against medieval heretics and other scapegoats, notions of ritual magic, and legends on the pact with the Devil, eventually led to a transformation of traditional beliefs in learned contexts.[17] Trial records show that, even when the persecutions were at their height, ordinary people were generally less worried for the supposed diabolical aspects of witchcraft than for the practical harm they believed it could inflict.[18] Learned circles, however, were deeply concerned with the Devil's share. During the early years of the witch-hunts, a set of basic criteria were crystalized that enabled specialists to determine what constituted witchcraft—and these were strongly imbricated with accusations of diabolism.

This chapter will explore the origins of the notion of diabolical witchcraft. To make the distinction between medieval and early modern witches clearer, the words *witchcraft* and *witch* will generally be applied in contexts that refer to texts written from the fifteenth century onwards, in which diabolical associations are often implied. The first two subchapters will deal with the development of medieval witchcraft beliefs, the breeding ground from which the persecutions arose. The third one will focus on the events that took place in Valais (c. 1430-1440), where the first mass witch trials were conducted. It will also list the written works inspired by those trials and produced during or shortly after the events. The stereotype of the

[16] Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 9.
[17] Gábor Klaniczay, "A Cultural History of Witchcraft," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2010): 197.
[18] Michael D. Bailey, *Origins of the Witches' Sabbath* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), 21.

"witches' sabbath," or the nocturnal assembly of witches, that was first outlined in the Valais sources will be discussed in the subchapter that follows. The fifth will discuss the influence of the Council of Basel (1431-1449) on the codification and diffusion of the notion of diabolical witchcraft. Finally, the sixth and last subchapter will deal with the Vauderie of Arras (1459-1461), the most important of the fifteenth-century mass witch trials, and with the sources that it produced. The aim is to provide the necessary context against which to assess the evolution of the literary character of the witch. In Chapter 2 and, especially, in Chapter 3, the sources listed here will be compared with literary works.

Evil Magic, Good Ladies

The notion of *maleficium*, or harmdoing through occult means, was known to the Greco-Roman world; its practice sometimes punished by the law.[19] The term entered the Middle Ages through the Theodosian Code, a fifth-century compilation of the laws of the Roman Empire, and through Saint Jerome's translation of the Bible, which famously contains the phrase "Thou shalt not suffer a witch [*malefici*] to live" (Ex. 22: 18).[20] It was later included in Germanic legal codes, some of which punished magical practices while others penalized those who accused someone of being a practitioner or those who believed such actions to have real consequences.[21] The effects of *maleficia* recorded in early medieval texts include death, sickness, erotic feelings, impotence, and the conjuring up of storms to ruin the crops.[22]

[19] On Greek and Roman magic, see Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, tr. Franklin Philip (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). See pages 41-42 for the legal punishment of magic in the Latin world, and specifically the following passage: "It needs to be stressed that the law does not punish magic as such, but punishes the violation of the right to property in order to cause harm to others or to enrich oneself at their expense. It is not the (magic) act that is punished but the offense against property" (Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 42).
[20] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 76.
[21] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 84.
[22] Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 150-152.

The early Christian church considered that magic was pagan, and that since paganism was tantamount to demon worship, the practice of all magic, no matter how harmful or harmless, was to be opposed.[23] In his *City of God*, Saint Augustine refers to Greek and Roman figures such as Circe and the sorceress of Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* to explain how demons, who "do not really create substances, but only change the appearance of things," deceive people into believing in their shapeshifting powers.[24] Around the year 1000, the *Decretum*, a compilation of canon law written by bishop Burchard of Worms, included as one of its books a penitential, the *Corrector*, whose fifth chapter contains information about *maleficia*. While in the penitential some specific forms of *maleficium* are considered capable of producing real effects—for example, those whose aim is to cause impotence—, most others are treated with skepticism.[25] Burchard refuses to give credence to what he regards as superstitions. Along with the belief in occult powers, he censors a fantasy that seemed to be relatively widespread at the time:

> Have you believed what many women, turning back to Satan, believe and affirm to be true; as that you believe that in the silence of the quiet night, when you have settled down in bed, and your husband lies in your bosom, you are able, while still in your body, to go out through the closed doors and travel through the spaces of the world, together with others who are similarly deceived; and that without visible weapons, you kill people who have been baptized and redeemed by Christ's blood, and together cook and devour their flesh; and that where the heart was, you put straw or wood or something of the sort; and that after eating these people, you bring them alive again and grant them a brief spell of life? If you have believed this, you shall do penance on bread and water for fifty days, and likewise in each of the seven years following.[26]

In the Middle Ages, the Germanic folk figure of the cannibalistic night-flying woman became intertwined with that of the *strix*.[27] This monster from Roman lore, which seems to

[23] Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 155.
[24] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 79-80; Saint Augustine, *City of God*, tr. Marcus Dodds (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 689-690, quoted in Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 79.
[25] Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 151.
[26] Burchard of Worms, *Decretum*, quoted in Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 209; translation by Norman Cohn.
[27] Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 210.

have developed independently from her Germanic counterpart, was originally a sort of bloodsucking female human-bird. Throughout the history of Latin literature, she underwent a process of humanization, eventually acquiring a mostly human anatomy and the ability to shapeshift.[28] Thus, when the sixth-century Salic Law of the Franks, which also mentions *maleficia*, records the fines imposed on people who falsely accuse women of being cannibalistic monsters, the word used to refer to the monstruous women is *stria*, a new vernacular form of *strix*.[29]

Along with the murderous fantasies mentioned above, Burchard's *Corrector* lists penances for beliefs involving the "good ladies," thereby connecting the stories of cannibalistic female monsters to another folk tradition about women who fly at night. The "good ladies," who seem to have been known across much of Western Europe, were nocturnal spirits who, in the form of beautiful women, supposedly visited private homes together with their mistress, who was called Herodias, Diana, Abundia or by many other names.[30] If the members of the household left food and drink for them, they ate and drank without diminishing the quantity of what they consumed and rewarded the family with abundance; but if nothing had been left, they abandoned the place in contempt.[31]

Some people seemed to believe that they could take part in the good ladies' nocturnal activities. In 906, Regino of Prüm recorded a piece of canon law, later known as the *Canon Episcopi*, which is the source that is explicitly or implicitly alluded to in the passages of Burchard's *Corrector* about women who fly at night.[32] In this canon, Regino exhorts priests to warn their congregations against certain illusions caused by Satan:

[28] On the evolution of *striges*, see Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 55-66.
[29] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 86.
[30] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 91.
[31] Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 216.
[32] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 90.

> there are wicked women who, turning back to Satan and seduced by the illusions and phantoms of the demons, believe and openly avow that in the hours of the night they ride on certain animals, together with Diana, the goddess of the pagans, with a numberless multitude of women; and in the silence of the dead of night cross many great lands; and obey [Diana's] orders as though she were their mistress, and on particular nights are summoned to her service. Would that they alone perished in their perfidy, without dragging so many others with them into the ruin of infidelity! For a numberless multitude of people, deceived by this false view, believe these things to be true and, turning away from the true faith and returning to the errors of the pagans, think that there exists some divine power other than the one God.[33]

For a few hundred years, the *Canon Episcopi* provided the Church's official position on stories of night-flying women: they were superstitions, and it was the belief in them that was to be condemned. However, at some point this attitude began to change. In 1384 and 1390, two women were tried in Milan, not for imagining that they took part in the nocturnal "game" of a lady called "Madonna Oriente," but for actually doing so.[34] According to their confessions, the Lady of the Game would take her company, which included animals as well as dead and living persons, to visit the houses of the wealthy, where they would eat and drink. In addition, she instructed them about the use of herbs and answered questions about the future. In 1384, the two women were sentenced to various penances, but in 1390, having relapsed into heresy, they were sentenced to death.

Thus developed the beliefs in *maleficia* and in women who could fly at night from the early Middle Ages until the turn of the fifteenth century. By then, the official attitudes regarding magic had changed. As the Church moved away from the authority of the *Canon Episcopi* and stories previously regarded as superstitions were given credence, the threat of the mass witch trials began to loom large.

[33] Regino of Prüm, *Canon Episcopi*, quoted by Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 211; translation by Norman Cohn.
[34] On the trials of Pierina de Bugatis and Sibillia Zanni, see Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 217-218; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 90-93, and Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 190-191.

Heretics and Magicians

While some common folk dreamt of following ghostly ladies through the night, a different form of magical belief had caught the attention of the learned. From the twelfth or thirteenth century, a number of pseudo-Solomonic manuals on the art of conjuration began to circulate in Western Europe.[35] These manuals, aimed at well-educated male readers, explained how to compel demons to perform different tasks. While many of the benefits promised by the manuals were innocuous (for example, they would make the magician master the arts and sciences or enable him to see the future), some others were aimed at causing harm.

By the turn of the fourteenth century, the popes of Avignon were beginning to worry about stories of ritual magic carried out not far from papal lands. Around 1320, the Pope allowed inquisitors in Southern France to act against ritual magicians. The Inquisition had been created one century earlier with the exclusive mission of bringing heretical movements to an end, but when the 1326 or 1327 bull *Super illius Specula* designated magical offenses as heresy, the persecution of magicians was officially incorporated into its jurisdiction.[36] Already in 1318, some people were tried for ritual magic near the papal court in Avignon; then again in 1326 at Agen.[37] The accused were often clerics, that is, educated men who were professionally concerned with the workings of demons.[38] While their trials were not yet structured like later

[35] Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 164-167 and 179. On medieval books of magic, see Richard Kieckhefer, "Magic and its Hazards in the Late Medieval West," in Brian P. Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13-32.
[36] Alain Boureau, *Satan the Heretic. The Birth of Demonology in the Medieval West*, tr. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 11.
[37] Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 193-194. On fourteenth-century sorcery trials in France, particularly in connection to political issues, see Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 10-16.
[38] For example, the bishop of Cahors, Hugues Géraud, and the archbishop of Aix, Robert de Mauvoisin (Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*, 22). Indeed, it could be argued that the first person to have been tried for ritual magic was Pope Boniface VIII, in a posthumous trial that took place between 1310 and 1311 (Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 180).

trials for witchcraft, by taking their claims seriously the Church moved away from the tradition established by the *Canon Episcopi*.[39]

Meanwhile, stories had begun to circulate about Waldensians taking part in orgies and worshiping the Devil in the form of a cat.[40] The Waldensians were the adherents of an ascetic movement that began around 1173, when Peter Waldo, a rich merchant from Lyon, gave away his property and started preaching apostolic poverty. Not willing to recognize the restrictions on their preaching imposed by the Pope, the Waldensians were excommunicated and condemned as heretics in 1184. However, the movement continued to expand, spreading throughout Southern France, Northern Italy, and along the Rhine. Persecutions ensued and numerous Waldensians were tortured to death or burned at the stake. By the fourteenth century, many of them had retreated into the remote valleys of the Alps.

Until that point, no explicit connection between magic and Waldensians was established. Occult practices and dark rituals were sometimes attributed to heretics, as well as to other marginal groups like the lepers or the Jews, but in the fifteenth century, specifically the Waldensians began to be thought of as witches.[41] Waldensian theology bore no resemblance to witchcraft: on the contrary, it even denied the miracles of the saints, the powers of relics, and the efficiency of pilgrimage.[42] It may have been that some charismatic leaders of the lower orders claimed to have the ability to communicate with the other world and that their followers' habit of calling these leaders "good men" suggested a link between them and the "good ladies" of folk belief.[43] In any case, from the 1430s some of the early texts on the new sect of witches

[39] Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*, 11.
[40] See Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 32-34, and Wolfgang Behringer, "How Waldensians Became Witches: Heretics and Their Journey to the Other World," in *Demons, Spirits, Witches / 1. Communicating with the Spirits*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs (Budapest: CEU Press, 2005), 157.
[41] On the spreading of fantasies against Jews and lepers, see Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 33 ff.
[42] Behringer, "How Waldensians Became Witches," 170.
[43] This hypothesis is explored in Wolfgang Behringer's "How Waldensians Became Witches: Heretics and Their Journey to the Other World" (2005). See specifically pages 172 ff.

began to label them as *Waudenses* or *vaudoises*, and in this way, a clear link between the real and the imaginary cult was created.[44]

The Valais Witch Trials

The first mass witch trials arose against the backdrop of the persecution of the Waldensians in the area around the Western Alps.[45] In January 1428, the execution of the alleged spellcaster Martin Bertod in the Swiss canton of Valais sparked an affair without precedent.[46] Spellcasters had already been persecuted in that area for a while, and the idea that they acted in groups had been around since the 1380s. From the late fourteenth century, defendants were questioned in search of accomplices, and in the 1420s, a troubled political climate incremented the fear of conspiracy.[47] Trials followed one another and expanded across the valleys of the Western Alps. Until the wave of persecutions finally receded after six to eight years, about one hundred people were killed.[48]

The basic features of what is known as the "cumulative concept of witchcraft," including the notion of the *sabbath*, or the "nocturnal assembly of witches", developed already in this early stage.[49] A group of five sources produced during or shortly after the Valais trials render the first accounts from which the classic description of witches and their meetings would emerge. The first of these sources is a chronicle of the events that took place in Valais in 1428,

[44] Behringer, "How Waldensians Became Witches," 157.
[45] Behringer, "How Waldensians Became Witches," 163.
[46] Chantal Ammann-Doubliez, "La première chasse aux sorciers en Valais (1428-1436)," in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 69.
[47] Ammann-Doubliez, "La première chasse aux sorciers en Valais," 78-80.
[48] Ammann-Doubliez, "La première chasse aux sorciers en Valais," 86.
[49] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 51; Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region," 16.

written around 1430 by a lay clerk named Hans Fründ.[50] The author of the second text, Claude Tholosan, was a secular judge of the Dauphiné, a mountainous area of southeastern France that was likewise affected by the persecutions.[51] His report, written around 1436, describes the induction and the meetings of witches before turning to a legal analysis, in which he argues that witches should be handed over to the secular jurisdiction.[52] The anonymous *Errors of the Gazari* (c. 1437), probably written by an inquisitor, offers the most gruesome description of the murderous ceremonies of witches in this group of texts.[53] The *Formicarius* was composed by Johannes Nider between 1436 and 1438, when he was a professor of theology at the University of Vienna.[54] His work is written as a dialogue between a theologian and a student who asks questions about various moral and spiritual topics; its fifth book deals with the issue of witchcraft and provides a variety of examples that refer to the events in the Western Alps.[55] Nider includes in this text a strong element of misogyny that is absent from the other sources, arguing that, although witchcraft is practiced by people of both genders, women are more prone to it than men.[56] The fifth source is the *Champion des Dames*, an allegorical poem written

[50] Hans Fründ, "Rapport sur la chasse aux sorcières menée dès 1428 dans le diocèse de Sion," tr. Catherine Chène, in *L'imaginaire du sabbat : Édition critique des textes les plus anciens, 1430 c. – 1440 c*., ed. Martine Ostorero, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, Kathrin Utz Tremp, and Catherine Chène (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 1999), 23-62.

[51] Claude Tholosan, "Ut magorum et maleficiorum errores…", tr. Martine Ostorero, in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 355-438.

[52] Michael D. Bailey, "'So that the Errors of Magicians and Witches Might be Made Evident to Ignorant People': An Early European Witchcraft Treatise from the 1430s," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2021): 205-206.

[53] "Errores gazariorum seu illorum qui scopam vel baculum equitare probantur," tr. Kathrin Utz Tremp and Martine Ostorero, in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 267-338. The word *Gazari* derives from the Italian *gatto* ("cat"), and although it originally referred to the Cathars, by the time the treatise acquired its title (some time after its original date of composition) it was being assimilated with *Waldensians* as a way to refer to the generic heretical character of diabolical witches. Behringer, "How Waldensians Became Witches," 157-158; Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region," 19.

[54] Johannes Nider, "*Formicarius* (livre II, chapitre 4 et livre V, chapitres 3, 4 et 7)," tr. Catherine Chène, in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 99-266. See also Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region," 17.

[55] Michael D. Bailey, "Johannes Nider," in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 827. On the topic of witchcraft in Nider's *Formicarius*, see Gábor Klaniczay, "Entre visions angéliques et transes chamaniques : le sabbat des sorcières dans le *Formicarium* de Nider," *Médiévales*, 44 (2003): 47-72.

[56] Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell. Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 217.

between 1440 and 1442 by Martin Le Franc, secretary to Amadeus VIII, Duke of Savoy and antipope under the name of Felix V.[57] Le Franc's poem is also written as a dialogue, in this case between the eponymous Champion of Ladies, with whom the author seems to identify, and an Adversary who points to their depravities and follies. As opposed to the other texts, the *Champion des Dames* presents witchcraft as practiced fundamentally by women.

The authors do not fully agree in their descriptions of witches and their activities. For example, not all of them provide a full description of the gatherings that would later be known as "witches' sabbaths," only one presents the meetings of witches as exclusively female, and not all agree that witches can fly. However, all of their texts refer to similar phenomena and to the same geographical area, so that in the combination of the basic details featured in these accounts, the bases of the stereotype that was soon to spread out can clearly be perceived.[58]

The Emerging Concept of the Witches' Sabbath

Although the five fundamental Valais sources do not fully agree in their accounts of the activities of witches, the material they provide is sufficient to extract from them the basic set of criteria that would be later used to determine what constituted witchcraft. These criteria were, namely, the induction into a cult through the renunciation of God and/or a pact with the Devil, the possibility of aerial transportation, the attendance of the cult's nocturnal gatherings known as *sabbaths*, sexual relationships with demons or the Devil, and the practice of maleficent magic.[59] Not all of them needed to be met in each individual case, to the extent that the practice of harmful magic was not even taken into consideration in an important number of trials more

[57] Martin Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames* (ll. 17380-18200), ed. Robert Deschaux, in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 441-500. See also Elliot, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 267.
[58] Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region," 17.
[59] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 32-51.

concerned with cult meetings and demonic pacts.[60] At the same time, some features not necessarily listed as essential, such as shapeshifting or the devouring of infants, were also frequent.[61] On top of that, opinions on what practices met the criteria could vary greatly, even between nearby locations or short periods of time: for example, healing magic could be regarded as either harmless or dangerous, insofar as it resorted to the powers of demons to accomplish its purposes.[62]

At the core of the idea of diabolical witchcraft lies the stereotype of the sabbath, which in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts from francophone areas is usually named *vauderie* or *synagogue*.[63] Carlo Ginzburg's book on the topic opens with a vivid description of a possible sabbath scene:

> Male and female witches met at night, generally in solitary places, in fields or in mountains. Sometimes, having anointed their bodies, they flew, arriving astride poles or broom sticks; sometimes they arrived on the backs of animals, or transformed into animals themselves. Those who came for the first time had to renounce the Christian faith, desecrate the sacrament and offer homage to the devil, who was present in human or (more often) animal or semi-animal form. There would follow banquets, dancing, sexual orgies. Before returning home the female and male witches received evil ointments made from children's fat and other ingredients.[64]

As with the case of witchcraft, not all of the stereotype's major features need to be present for an assembly of witches to constitute a sabbath. For example, cannibalistic infanticide, not explicitly mentioned by Ginzburg, shows up in sources much more frequently

[60] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 41 and 50-51.
[61] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 8.
[62] Behringer*, Witchcraft Persecutions* in *Bavaria*, 15.
[63] The word *sabbath* was not widespread at the time and does not appear in early sources—in fact, it only seems to have become popular in the last hundred years. See Martine Ostorero, commentary to "Errores gazariorum seu illorum qui scopam vel baculum equitare probantur," in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 323-324; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 24-25, and Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region," 22.
[64] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 1.

than shapeshifting; participants could be exclusively of one gender, and individual testimonies often allude to activities that do not conform to any general description of these gatherings.[65]

A "Sabbath of Demonologists" at the Council of Basel

The Council of Basel, held between 1431 and 1449 in an area not far from where the notions of diabolical witchcraft and the witches' sabbath first emerged, seems to have had a substantial role in the codification and dissemination of these ideas.[66] The ecumenical council was convened by pope Eugenius IV to discuss reforms introduced following the end of the Western Schism, but after a promising start, infighting between supporters of conciliarism and defenders of absolute papal supremacy diverted it from its goals. In 1437, Eugenius IV attempted to dissolve the council, to which Basel responded in 1438 by declaring him deposed and electing Duke Amadeus VIII of Savoy as pope Felix V in his stead. Finally, the conciliarists lost the struggle and in 1449 Amadeus had to abdicate.[67]

While it never became an official topic of debate during the council, concern about the new diabolical sects seems to have left its mark on it. In 1437, pope Eugenius IV distributed a circular letter to all inquisitors about devil worshippers who committed *maleficia*, and three years later, he issued a bull accusing antipope Felix V of having used the services of what he called "stregule vel stregones seu Waudenses," specifying that this was the popular terminology of the Duchy of Savoy.[68] On top of that, the council was attended by a particular group of clerics

[65] Willem de Blécourt, "Sabbath Stories: Towards a New History of Witches' Assemblies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 86.
[66] Michael Bailey and Edward Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists: Basel 1431-1440," *The Historian* Vol. 65, No. 6 (2003): 1378, 1380. The title of "sabbat of demonologists" that Bailey and Peters, "somewhat mischievously" (p. 1378), gave to the meeting of some conciliarists with an interest in witchcraft seemed to me too witty not to adopt it for the present subchapter's heading.
[67] Bailey and Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists," 1375-1376.
[68] Behringer, "How Waldensians Became Witches," 156-7; Bailey and Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists," 1390.

who would develop a deep interest in defining witchcraft. This was an unstructured group whose members had no previous connections and included, among others, Johannes Nider, Martin Le Franc, and the Dominican inquisitor Nicholas Jacquier.[69] Although their discussions seem to have taken place informally, there is some evidence that, at the council or as a result of their presence in Basel, they not only exchanged information about witchcraft with each other, but also obtained it from people with direct experience in trials, like judges, inquisitors, or the accused themselves.[70] Thus Nider, for example, seems to have collected many stories while he was at the council, leading him from being an intellectual with no particular interest in witchcraft, to making this one of his main concerns.[71] In this way, the influence of the Council of Basel seems to have been decisive in the codification and diffusion of the notion of diabolical witchcraft.[72]

The Vauderie of Arras

Between 1459 and 1461, an unprecedented wave of witch persecutions took place around the Burgundian city of Arras, in present-day northeastern France.[73] In the fall of 1459, a hermit named Robinet de Vaux was tried for *vauderie* at a meeting of Dominicans in Langres. When compelled to name his accomplices, De Vaux implicated a prostitute and a traveling poet, both of whom lived in the region around Arras. Unfortunately for them, the inquisitor of Arras happened to be present at the proceedings and decided to take action. He was assisted by the Dominican inquisitor Nicholas Jacquier, who in 1458 had completed his *Flagellum hæreticorum fascinariorum*, a treatise in which he argued that the witches' sabbath was not an

[69] Bailey and Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists," 1378, 1381.
[70] Bailey and Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists," 1377, 1381.
[71] Bailey and Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists," 1382.
[72] Bailey and Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists," 1390.
[73] This summary of the events is based on Gow *et al.*, *The Arras Witch Treatises*, 3-7, and Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 270-271. Further details about the trials can be found in these two works.

illusion but a real threat. Later on, two other Dominicans took charge of the matter, one of whom was Jacques du Bois, dean of the cathedral chapter at Arras.

The prostitute and the poet were arrested and tortured until they began to accuse many others. A brutal use of torture combined with false promises of freedom proved effective in providing the inquisitors with an abundant list of suspects. The ever-increasing accusations produced a wave of paranoia in what had been a rich manufacturing city, whose economy suffered as its merchants lost their credit. Anonymous verses began to circulate denouncing the base intentions of the inquisitors. Eventually, the accusers went too far. When they tried to implicate some prominent citizens of Arras, these appealed to the Parliament of Paris. The duke Philip of Burgundy promptly put a stop to the arrests and the instigators were themselves summoned to court. Du Bois, who had inspired great resentment among the population, suffered a mental breakdown, which many interpreted as divine justice, and was dead within the year.

The Vauderie of Arras took place in a sophisticated urban society that had plenty of writers to take note of the events.[74] In addition to the records of the trials, it inspired detailed chronicles and some theoretical writings.[75] In particular, two treatises that were produced in its midst made an important contribution to the emerging debate on diabolical witchcraft. One of them was the *Recollectio casus, status, et conditionis Valdensium ydolatrarum* (*A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics*), written in 1460 shortly after the first batch of trials.[76] While its author is not named, textual evidence has persuaded many scholars that it was none other than Jacques du Bois, one of the main figures behind the events.[77] The treatise presents a defense of the reality of night flights followed by a detailed and visceral

[74] Gow *et al.*, *The Arras Witch Treatises*, 6.
[75] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 270.
[76] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," in Andrew Colin Gow, Robert B. Desjardins, and François B. Pageau, *The Arras Witch Treatises* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 19-79.
[77] Gow *et al.*, *The Arras Witch Treatises*, 11.

account, supposedly inspired in the Arras confessions, of the induction of a female witch and her presentation at the sabbath.

The paranoid and obsessive rhetoric of the *Recollectio* stands in contrast to the subtler style of the second treatise, Johannes Tinctor's *Invectives Against the Sect of Waldensians* (1460).[78] Tinctor was a respected scholar whose work on witches aimed to answer a number of technical questions about their practices and to exhort the authorities to eradicate the sect. His nuanced and authoritative discourse proved more effective than the *Recollectio*'s, resulting in his work being widely distributed, translated into Middle French, and set down in lavishly illuminated manuscripts at the Burgundian, French, and maybe English courts.[79]

By the 1460s, the idea of an essential link between women and witchcraft was coming to the fore.[80] While there were still more men than women standing in the dock at Arras, and the *Recollectio* explicitly states that its description of an induction applies to both men and women, the treatise's choice of using a feminine lead figure suggests that the perception of women as witches was becoming widespread.[81] Writing in the 1430s, Nider had been the first major clerical authority to argue that women were more prone to witchcraft than men.[82] In the following decade, the *Champion des Dames* for the first time presented witches as principally female. By 1486, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which would become the most influential compendium of knowledge on diabolical witchcraft, completed the assimilation process. This deeply misogynistic text, which provides numerous arguments as to why women feel attracted to witchcraft, had the *Formicarius* as one of its main sources.[83] Whether its author was familiar

[78] Johannes Tinctor, "Invectives Against the Sect of Waldensians," in Gow *et al.*, *The Arras Witch Treatises*, 81-144.
[79] Gow *et al.*, *The Arras Witch Treatises*, 16-18.
[80] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 275.
[81] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 276.
[82] Bailey, "Johannes Nider," 827; also Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 275.
[83] Bailey, "Johannes Nider," 826; Klaniczay, "Entre visions angéliques et transes chamaniques," 47.

with any of the Arras texts is not known.[84] However, it was the same ideas that were already in circulation in the 1460s that inspired the *Malleus* a quarter of a century later. As the fifteenth century drew to a close, the full horror of the great witch hunt was unleashed.

[84] Gow *et al.*, *The Arras Witch Treatises*, 18.

Chapter 2: Witches and Witchcraft in French Medieval Literature

While official attitudes towards witchcraft evolve from the skepticism found in the *Canon Episcopi* to a widespread belief in the threat of demonic witches, the evolution of the character's literary counterpart seems at first to go the opposite way. The witch makes her way into fiction at a slow and stumbling pace, and seems to lose both her dignity and powers over time. Contrary to a somewhat extended belief, witch-like characters do not play a prominent role in vernacular literature prior to the sixteenth century, and the number of works that make reference to them, often only in passing, is limited.[85] Of course, the fact that at this time the stereotype of the witch is yet to be defined raises questions as to which characters should be included or excluded from this category. The most significant overlap occurs with the fairy, a fully supernatural figure that develops early and enjoys great popularity in twelfth-century chivalric romances, only to recede in the following centuries in the face of a growing demand for rationalization.[86] If fairies rationalized as mortals with magic powers are counted in the ranks of witches, then the number of the latter grows significantly. At the same time, the nouns employed to refer to witch-like characters are sometimes used in medieval texts—as in modern ones, for that matter—with the sole intention of disqualifying women who are considered evil or ugly.[87] When this is the case, references to "witches" or "sorceresses" will not be considered meaningful for the purposes of this thesis.

The texts discussed below have in common the fact that they feature women who practice magic, cast spells, and are generally well-versed in herbal lore. As will be seen, in time

[85] Francis Gingras, "Préhistoire de la sorcière d'après quelques récits français des XIIe et XIIIe siècles," *Florilegium*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2001): 32.
[86] Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge. Morgane et Melusine. La naissance des fées* (Paris: Champion, 1984), 381 ff.
[87] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 120-122.

these attributes start losing relevance, so that when the stereotype of the demonic witch is finally established, her powers become secondary to her participation in sabbaths and her submission to a demonic master, which come to be regarded as her defining features. It is worth noting that, while this is true for French-language works and literature written in other vernaculars under the influence of French literary traditions, it is not necessarily the case for works derived from other traditions and written in places where the witch hunts developed late or with less intensity.[88] It would be interesting to have the evolution of the character in some of these other traditions analyzed and then compared to the model of the French literary witch, but that is, of course, well beyond the limits of the present research.

This chapter will provide a broad-brush overview of the evolution of the character of the witch in medieval French-language literature. Five subchapters will be devoted to the discussion of relevant passages from some of the main works concerned. The first subchapter will focus on two characters from the mid-twelfth-century *Roman d'Enéas* and *Roman de Troie*, which at this early stage in the evolution of the genre take their subject matters from Classical Antiquity and import figures from Greek and Roman literature into the burgeoning vernacular romance.[89] The second subchapter will move on to the late twelfth century, when the new ideal of courtly love was at its height, to discuss the use of love magic in two verse romances, Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès* (c. 1176) and the anonymous *Amadas et Ydoine* (c. 1200).[90] The

[88] For example, in Spain, the best-known thirteenth-and fourteenth-century stories concerning the magical arts feature learned men who ask male magicians for favors, while the Spanish works from that period that feature female magicians are based on the French literary tradition and tend to follow the same patterns as French texts. In the fifteenth-century poem *Le Champion des Dames*, the so-called Champion of Ladies draws attention to the male associations of witchcraft in Spain in his attempt to defend women from the accusations of another character. See Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez, "Magias y brujerías literarias en la Castilla medieval," *Clío & Crimen*, 8 (2011): 143-164; David Navarro, "Presencia del Diablo y conspiración judía en el Medievo peninsular: una mirada particular a *El Milagro de Teófilo* de Gonzalo de Berceo," *Medievalia*, 44 (2012): 20-31, and Agnès Blanc, Virgine Dang, and Martine Ostorero, commentary to *Le Champion des Dames,* in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 493.

[89] *Le roman d'Énéas*, ed. Wilfrid Besnardeau and Francine Mora-Lebrun (Paris: Champion, 2018); Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, vol. 1, ed. Léopold Constans (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1904).

[90] *Amadas et Ydoine. Roman du XIIIè siècle*, ed. John R. Reinhard (Paris: Honoré. Champion, 1926); Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ed. Alexandre Micha (Paris: Champion, 1982).

third will briefly account for the problem of the distinction between sorceresses and witches in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Arthurian literature. The fourth subchapter will comment on a reference to the belief in night-flying women in the allegorical poem *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1275).[91] Finally, the merging of the literary sorceress with the new stereotype of the demonic witch will be addressed in the fifth subchapter, through an allusion to the relevant passages from the *Champion des Dames* (1440-1442) and the *Roman de Perceforest* (c. 1430-1460).[92]

Before proceeding, a brief terminological remark ought to be made. In French medieval literature, the two usual terms for sorceresses and witch-like characters are *estrie* and *sorcière*—the latter being the one still used for "witch" in modern French. Marina Montesano provides a very clear explanation of the distinction between *estrie* and *sorcière* in medieval literary texts:

> The literature composed in French contains two terms of particular interest, here: one is *estrie*, coming of course from *strix*; the other, destined to endure, is *sorcière*, which comes from Middle Latin *sortiaria*, in turn deriving from classical Latin *sors/sortis*: little wooden tablets used for divination. Originally, the word kept its connection to divination, only starting to take on the modern meaning of *malefica* between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the literary domain, we find both, but they are not used interchangeably.
>
> A main use for *estrie* is a derogative for ugly, old, wicked women, as, for example, in the French chivalric romance *Galeran de Bretagne*, attributed with uncertainty to Jean Renart, and composed between the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century. […] Similarly, in the *Miracles de la Sainte Vierge* of Gauthier de Coincy (1177-1233ca), both *estrie* and *fée* [fairy] are used in a polemic against women, in the case of the former with the hideousness that comes from old age and a mischievous life […]. Other authors, like the clerics and preachers whose works we have seen before, link *estries* to the women of the *Canon Episcopi* and to Lady Abundance. Such is the case in Jean de Meung's continuation of the *Romance of the Rose* […]
>
> In the centuries in question, the word *estrie* seems more fitted to the domain of female ugliness, wickedness or foolishness. When the French poets want to describe a powerful magician, they prefer to speak of *sorcières*.[93]

[91] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Dainiel Poirion (Paris: Flammarion, 1974).
[92] Martin Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames*, ll. 17380-18200; *Perceforest*. *Deuxième partie*, 77, 216-219.
[93] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 120-122. On the evolution of the French words for *witch*, see also Gingras, "Préhistoire de la sorcière d'après quelques récits français," 33.

In this thesis, the word used to refer to female practitioners of magic in French literary texts will be *sorceress*, which is etymologically derived from the Old French *sorcière* through the Anglo-Norman dialect of French that was spoken by the ruling classes in England.[94] The word *magic* and its related adjectives and nouns will be used in a broader sense, for all sorts of dealings with occult powers, and thus *magician* and *magical practitioner* will refer to any user of the magical arts.

Old Faces, New Stories

The first medieval literary sorceresses make their appearance in the vernacular reworkings of narratives from Classical Antiquity and are thus in themselves reworkings of mythical figures such as Medea or Circe, endowed with supernatural features and linked to a remote past. These figures are usually presented as unsettling but not necessarily evil, and they are granted immense powers that, although not always actualized, often amplify on the descriptions of Classical poets. Like in the majority of Greek and Roman literary texts, in twelfth-century French literature it is usually women who practice magic.[95] In the romances, these are also female figures of learning, which introduces a degree of contradiction between the realm of fiction and that of actual magical practices. Also like in the Classical world, in

[94] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 1996 edition, s.v. "sorcerer"; *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, 2020 edition (http://www.atilf.fr/dmf), s.v. "sorcière,"; *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (https://anglo-norman.net), s.v. "sorceresse."

[95] Across the history of Greek and Latin literature, sorceresses evolve from mysterious foreign women of supernatural origin to more consistently evil figures who have lost their divine attributes. The first medieval literary sorceresses, whose traits are based on those of both Greek and Roman figures, are closer to the Greek characters in their moral ambiguity, but their descendants later lean towards evil. See Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 11 ff. On the preeminence of women magicians in French medieval literature, see Laine E. Doggett, *Love Cures. Healing and Love Magic in Old French Romance* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2009), 3.

which the prominence of sorceresses in literature contrasts with that of male magicians in epigraphic texts and magical papyri, in twelfth-century France, the rise of ritual magic in clerical contexts seems to run parallel to the advent of female magicians in courtly fiction.[96]

The use of the word *sorcière* with the meaning of "sorceress" is first recorded in the *Roman d'Enéas*, a verse romance composed around 1160 and inspired by Virgil's *Aeneid*.[97] In this text, Dido claims to consult a powerful magician before making the decision to take her own life:

> There is a sorceress nearby. The most difficult thing is easy to her. She resurrects dead men, makes predictions and casts lots; she makes the sun set at high noon and turn back towards the east, and likewise with the moon, she makes it new or full three or four times a week, and she makes birds speak and waters flow upstream. She draws out of hell the infernal Furies, who announce their omens to her; she makes oaks descend from the hills and snakes to be tamed and captured. She makes the earth bellow under her feet, knows how to cast spells and is well-versed in omens; she makes people love or hate, and does as she pleases with all things.[98]

The anonymous poet translates by *sorcière* the title of a character who for Virgil is a *sacerdos* ("priestess").[99] He also expands on the powers attributed to her by the Roman poet by adding details that seem to reveal an influence from Ovid's characterization of Medea and from Lucan's Erichto.[100] However, while this sorceress's classical counterpart does indeed play a part in the *Aeneid*, in the *Roman d'Enéas* Dido's sister laments her absence, suspecting that the

[96] Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 185; Gingras, "Préhistoire de la sorcière d'après quelques récits français," 32.
[97] Gingras, "Préhistoire de la sorcière d'après quelques récits français," 33.
[98] *Ici pres a une sorciere,/Molt forz chose li est legiere,/El resuscitë homes morz/Et devinë et gete sorz,/Et le soleil fait resconser/En dreit midi et retorner/Tot ariere vers oriënt;/De la lune fait ensement,/Ele la fait novele o pleine/Treis feiz o quatre la semaine,/Et les oisels fait el parler/Et l'eue ariere retorner;/D'enfer trait les infernals Fuires,/Ki li anoncent les auguires;/Les chasnes fait des monz descendre/Et les serpenz donter et prendre;/La terre fait soz ses piez muire,/Enchanter set et bien d'auguire;/El fait amer o fait haïr,/De tote rien fait son plaisir*. *Le roman d'Énéas*, ed. Wilfrid Besnardeau and Francine Mora-Lebrun (Paris: Champion, 2018), ll. 1907-1926, my translation.
[99] Gingras, "Préhistoire de la sorcière d'après quelques récits français," 33.
[100] Gingras, "Préhistoire de la sorcière d'après quelques récits français," 35.

whole story of the magician and her powers may actually have been Dido's fabrication to save her worry:

> And where is now the sorceress who knows so well how to cast spells and who should have made you forget? […] This is a very poor spell, as we can plainly see: you have drunk a deadly potion to forget the brave young man. From now on you will no longer remember your love for the Trojan.[101]

In this way, the romance displays a contradiction between the supposed powers of the sorceress and those that are really put into play in the text.

The *Roman de Troie* (c. 1165) of Benoît de Saint-Maure also includes the figure of a female magician, but in this case, it is one who effectively exercises magical abilities throughout the text. Medea is introduced by a description of her powers that is similar to that of Dido's sorceress, although somewhat less detailed:

> She had a great knowledge. Through learning and natural disposition, she had come to know a great deal of conjuring and sorcery. She had put so much fervor into her understanding that she was very wise and learned. Since her childhood, she knew astronomy and necromancy by heart. She knew so much of the art and of conjuring that she could turn a bright day into dim night. If she would have wanted, she could have made whoever she pleased believe that they were flying about in the air, and she could make water flow upstream. So knowledgeable was she.[102]

To what extent Medea's nature is human or superhuman is open to doubt in the classical sources, but in the *Roman de Troie*, Benoît de Saint-Maure makes it clear that her knowledge,

[101] *Et ou est ore la sorciere,/Qui si forment set anchanter,/Qui vos devoit faire oblier?/[...] Ci a molt lait anchantemant,/Ce veons nos apertement:/Beu avez poison mortal/Por antroblier le vasal,/Ne vos membrera mes oan/ De l'amistie al Troian. Le roman d'Énéas*, ll. 2098-2110, my translation.

[102] *Trop ert cele de grant saveir/Mout sot d'engin, de maïstrie,/De conjure, de sorcerie;/Es arz ot tant s'entente mise/Que trop par iert saive et apprise;/Astronomie et nigromance/Sot tote par cuer dé s'enfance/D'arz saveit tant et de conjure/De cler jor feïst nuit oscure./S'ele vousist, ce fust viaire/ Que volisseiz par mi cel aire;/A ceux pour cui le vosist faire./Les eves faisieit corre ariere./Scïentose iert de grant manière*. Benoît de Sainte-Maure. *Le Roman de Troie*, ll. 1216-1228.

which is much insisted upon, is, at least to a certain extent, not innate but acquired.[103] This does not make her practice any less magical: throughout the romance, Medea performs various spells and is responsible for supplying Jason, among other remarkable items, with an ointment that repels fire and an invisibility ring. In addition to that, although the *Roman de Troie*'s account of Medea's story seems to have been inspired by the *Metamorphoses*, the French poet departs from Ovid on a highly relevant point.[104] The two Latin portrayals of Medea that were well known during medieval times, Ovid's and Seneca's, make her a purely evil character with no trace of the pity shown by Euripides for the injustices committed against her.[105] Benoît, however, chooses to completely erase her darkest features and all traces of her infanticide, truncating the story after Jason obtains the Fleece and limiting himself to blaming Jason for his subsequent infidelity and Medea for leaving her family before moving on to another topic.[106]

In the adaptations of Greco-Roman literary texts undertaken by the authors of the early French romances, the portrayal of magicians retains some of the features of their sources but not others. The romances present figures of female sorceresses and take care to list their powers; however, these powers are only actualized in the *Roman de Troie*. At the same time, these figures do not present any explicitly negative connotations, their main function being to help other characters. Moreover, in the *Roman de Troie*, the associations with infanticide that appear in previous versions of Medea's story are blatantly omitted.

[103] The classical Medea is the granddaughter of the sun god Helios and the niece of Circe, but she lacks her aunt's fairy features. Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 17-18 and ff.
[104] The romance is an adaptation of *Daretis Phrygii de excidio Trojae historia*, which does not mention Medea; the three hundred lines that the poet devotes to her and Jason's love story were necessarily taken from other source, most likely Ovid, whose depiction of Medea was best known in the Middle Ages. Robert Mayer Lumiansky, "Structural Unity in Benoît's *Roman de Troie*," *Romania*, 79 (1958): 412.
[105] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 20.
[106] Benoît de Sainte-Maure. *Le Roman de Troie*, ll. 2035-2042; Gingras, "Préhistoire de la sorcière d'après quelques récits français," 40; Doggett, *Love Cures*, 66.

The Things We Do for Love

Verse romances of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries introduce new female characters who are learned in the magical arts but do not identify with any figure of Classical Antiquity. The powers of these women are often closer to the control of illusions and the knowledge of medicine than to the strictly supernatural, and however unsettling they may be, they are always on the side of the female protagonist. The most important sorceresses in this period of French literature are found in Chrétien de Troyes's celebrated *Cligès* and in the lesser-known *Amadas et Ydoine*.

Both *Cligès* (c. 1176) and *Amadas et Ydoine* (c. 1190-1220) are often regarded as ironic rewritings of the story of Tristan and Iseult whose main aim is to parody the literary conventions of courtly love.[107] In both, an important part of the plot revolves around the heroines having to overcome the obstacle of their unwanted marriages in order to be reunited with their true loves. To achieve their goal, they resort to the aid of sorceresses.

In *Cligès*'s introduction to the character of the old nurse Thessala, a continuity with the literary tradition is established through an account of her powers that reminds the reader of the *Roman d'Enéas* and the *Roman de Troie*:

> Her nurse's name was Thessala, who had fed her as a child. She was skilled in necromancy, and this is why she had been called Thessala, for she had been born in Thessaly, where spells are cast, taught, and made. The women of that country work many charms and incantations. Thessala saw that her whom Love had in its power had turned sickly and pale, and secretly offered her advice: "[…] I know how to cure dropsy, and how to cure gout, quinsy, and asthma too; about pulse and urine I know so much that you need consult no other physician; for I know, I dare say, of true and well-proven charms and enchantments, more than Medea ever knew."[108]

[107] See, for example, Norris J. Lacy, "Cligès and courtliness," *Interpretations* Vol. 15, No. 2 (1984): 18-24, and Susan Crane, "Adapting Conventions of Courtliness," in *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 175-215.

[108] *Sa mestre avoit non Thessala,/Qui l'avoit norrie en anfance,/Si savoit mout de nigromance./Por ce fu Thessala clamee/Qu'ele fu de Tessalle nee,/Ou sont feites les deablies,/Anseigniees et establies./Les fames qui el païs sont/Et*

However, Thessala boasts above all about knowing how to cure different diseases, not about talking to birds or being able to change the course of the sun and moon. She calls herself a physician (*mire*), not a sorceress, and indeed, the only indications that denote in her a natural predisposition towards magic come from her birthplace and gender, since the text specifies that Thessaly is a land where magic is widely practiced, and specifically by women.[109] Otherwise, Thessala's work with herbs and spices is entirely chemical and suggests a possible inspiration in real-life folk healing practices.[110]

Thessala's two main achievements in the romance show her as an expert in generating illusions. Firstly, when her beloved Fenice reveals to her that the cause of her illness is the love she feels for Cligès, Thessala helps her by preparing a potion to drug Fenice's husband, who consequently becomes unable to consummate the marriage except in his dreams.[111] Later on, Thessala brews a different concoction that allows Fenice to pass herself off as dead so she can run away with Cligès.[112] While the effects of these two potions are undoubtedly remarkable, nothing indicates that they are supernatural.[113]

The magic of *Amadas et Ydoine* is quite different from that of *Cligès*. In this romance, the heroine Ydoine, daughter of the duke of Burgundy, seeks out the help of three sorceresses who trick her future husband, the count of Nevers, into thinking that a great misfortune will

charmes et charaies font./[…]Thessala voit tainte et palie/Celi qu'Amors a en baillie,/Si l'a a consoil aresniee. […]/Je sai bien garir d'itropique,/Si sai garir de l'arcetique,/De quinancie et de cuerpous ;/Tant sai d'orines et de pous/Que ja mar avroiz autre mire ;/Et sai, se je l'osoie dire,/D'anchantemanz et de charaies/Bien esprovees et veraies/Plus c'onques Medea n'an sot. Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ll. 2962-2991, my translation.

[109] In Classical Antiquity, Thessaly had a reputation as a center of magical practices and, especially, as the land of "witches who draw down the moon." Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 49.

[110] Doggett, *Love Cures*, 42, 53.

[111] Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ll. 3724-3786.

[112] Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ll. 5372 ff.

[113] Doggett, *Love Cures*, 54.

befall him if he marries her.[114] The Count is so frightened that on the wedding night he is unable to consummate the marriage.[115]

The sorceresses are introduced through an account of their powers, which for the most part are the standard ones—raising the dead, speaking with the birds, making the water flow upstream—, but with one interesting addition: "that they could fly at night across the entire world."[116] Once they agree on their task with Ydoine, the romance describes their entry into the room of the Count of Nevers:

> And behold, the three of them appeared by magic plainly visible before the Count—exactly how, he could not understand, for there was no door or window open. They had entered without resistance through a hole as small as an awl, and once inside they had put everyone to sleep except the Count, whom they found awake, and they enchanted him in such a way that, had the house been on fire, he would not have spoken a word to anyone high or low, or even moved a single step, for he did not know whether he was asleep or awake. And then the sorceresses wondrously took on the appearance of beautiful fairies and pretended to be the Fates. The first one posed as Clotho; the second one, as Lachesis, and the third one, as Atropos.[117]

These sorceresses who act collectively, fly at night, enter the houses through cracks and crevices, take on the appearance of beautiful fairies, and put a man in a state in which he cannot distinguish wakefulness from dream bring to mind some specific characters, not from literature, but from folk belief.[118] These are, indeed, the "good ladies" having some fun at the expense of the Count.[119] However, beyond their unusual method of breaking into the house, the "magic" they actually use on the Count is nothing more than illusion: they simply pretend to be the three

[114] *Amadas et Ydoine.* ll. 2170-2264.
[115] *Amadas et Ydoine.* ll. 2373-2378.
[116] *Amadas et Ydoine.* ll. 2023-2024.
[117] *Es vous les trois par artimage/Devant le conte apertement,/Laiens c'onques li cuens nel sot,/C'uis ne fenestre n'i desclot:/ Ou troc d'une alaisne petit/Entraissent bien sans contredit;/Et quant laiens venues sont,/Tous emsamble endormis les ont/Fors le conte que ont trouvé/Esvillié; lui ont encanté/Si que, se la maisons arsist,/Ne parlast n'un mot ne desist/A nul houme ne haut ne bas/Ne ne se remuast plain pas,/Car ne set s'il dort u s'il velle/Et puis se müent a mervelle/Em beles figures de fees:/Si se tignent a Destinees./Pour Cloto se tient la premiere,/Pour Lachesis l'autre sorciere,/ Et la tierce pour Atropos. Amadas et Ydoine.* ll. 2074-2094.
[118] *Amadas et Ydoine.* ll. 2089-2090.
[119] Doggett, *Love Cures*, 245. See also Chapter 1, 11.

Fates bringing him an ill omen, which the gullible man promptly believes.[120] In this context, the reference to the "good ladies" seems to be played for laughs, all the more so since the Count is a nobleman that should not engage in the fantasies of the common folk.[121]

Cligès and *Amadas et Ydoine* represent a new stage in the evolution of the figure of the sorceress in French literature. No longer reworked versions of ancient figures, by the end of the twelfth century medieval literary sorceresses have acquired a certain autonomy. Their portrayal combines an account of their powers rooted in literary tradition and various other features seemingly inspired in popular culture. Those of their practices that produce a concrete effect on the world are derived from illusion and folk medicine, nor from dealing with overtly supernatural powers. In addition, the power that they most successfully put into practice is that of causing impotence, which in some penitentials, like Burchard's *Corrector*, was listed among the forms of *maleficia* that are not treated with skepticism but as real threats.[122] Lastly, it is interesting to note that both *Cligès* and *Amadas et Ydoine* include among their themes that of the deceits of women, who are said to be "the wiliest creatures in all the world."[123] Even if in these two romances the accusations do not fall on the magical practitioners, who ultimately remain faithful to the adulterous heroines, in view of what was to come later, the link between sorceresses and works with misogynistic content should perhaps not be overlooked.

[120] Gingras, "Préhistoire de la sorcière d'après quelques récits français," 41. According to Harf-Lancner, the figure of the fairy would have arisen from a fusion between the nymphs and the Three Fates. Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 10-25.
[121] Doggett, *Love Cures*, 245. Practical jokes involving the "good ladies" seem to have been rather common: see, for example, Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 214-15, and Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 126-129.
[122] See Chapter 1, 10.
[123] *Amadas et Ydoine.* ll. 3570-3571. On women's deceits in *Amadas et Ydoine*, see Doggett, *Love Cures*, 254.

Fairy Into Witch

In her book on fairies in the Middle Ages, Laurence Harf-Lancner suggests that the development of prose fiction that took place around the thirteenth century came along with an accentuated tendency towards rationalization.[124] In this period, the fairy, an emblematic figure of twelfth-century Arthurian narratives, began to transform into something else. As prototypical representatives of the enthusiasm of courtly literature with that aspect of the medieval imagination known as the preter-Christian marvelous, fairies introduce a compellingly extravagant and unpredictable element into the narrative.[125] Although in the twelfth century they were not yet perceived as threatening, they would eventually be stripped of their problematic otherness and brought within the limits of what is acceptable in orthodox religion. Throughout the thirteenth century, two strategies were alternatively used to integrate fairies into a Christian worldview: Christianization, whereby they preserved their supernatural nature and the power to modify reality, but became servants of either God or Satan; and rationalization, whereby they became simple mortals endowed with magical knowledge to generate illusions.[126] Moreover, as they lost their supernatural nature, the originally benevolent fairies also became more sinister, taking on the role of antagonists of the knights in search of adventure.

With the exception of the *Roman de Perceforest*, an episode of which will be analyzed in depth in Chapter 3, the vast corpus of Arthurian literature, abundant in fairies that turn into evil sorceresses, will not be discussed in this thesis. Further information should be sought in Laurence Harf-Lancner's thorough study of fairies in French medieval literature, *Les fées au*

[124] Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 412, my translation.
[125] Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 379. Jacques Le Goff distinguishes between three forms of the supernatural in medieval imagination: the *miraculosus* or Christian supernatural, including but not limited to miracles; the *mirabilis*, translated to English as *marvelous*, which lies outside of Christianity and whose roots usually precede it; and the *magicus,* which is associated with evil, satanic forces. Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 29-30.
[126] Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 379.

Moyen Âge.[127] For now, it will suffice to mention that fourteenth-century Arthurian narratives kept up with the general trend, with stories from across the Channel taking a little longer to catch up with the new model, but eventually culminating in Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century masterpiece *La Morte D'Arthur* (c. 1470). In this celebrated compendium of Arthurian lore, that remains one of the best-known works on the Knights of the Round Table until this day, the powers of Morgan le Fay, the most renowned of the Arthurian fairy-sorceresses, are severely curtailed just as she is made consistently evil.[128]

The Poisoned Rose

For nearly three hundred years after its composition, the *Roman de la Rose* remained one of the most widely read literary works across Europe.[129] The text describes the allegorical vision of a Lover in pursue of a Rose that stands as a symbol of female sexuality. It is divided into two parts, the first one written by Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1230) and the second one by Jean de Meung (c. 1275), of which Jean de Meung' continuation stands out for its virulent misogynism. In the fifteenth century, the attacks on women of the *Roman de la Rose* sparked a literary dispute, known as the *Querelle de la Rose*, between some readers who sought to defend the poem and others who were disgusted by it and pointed to its misogyny and lack of decorum. The debate was initiated by Christine de Pizan, who is best known for her defense of women.[130]

[127] Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge. Morgane et Melusine. La naissance des fées* (1984).
[128] For an overview of the evolution of the character of Morgan le Fay in medieval literature from France and the British Islands, see Maureen Fries, "From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance," *Arthuriana*, 4, 1 (1994): 1-18.
[129] Charles Dahlberg, introduction to Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, tr. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1.
[130] For a collection of the documents, letters, and excerpts related to the *Querelle de la Rose*, together with an introduction to the debate, see Christine de Pizan, *Debate of the "Romance of the Rose,"* ed. and tr. David F. Hult (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

The continuation of the *Roman de la Rose* alludes in a passing reference to evil sorcery as a female activity: "Do we not see how mothers-in-law cook up poisons for their sons-in-law, how they work charms and sorceries and so many other diabolical things that, no matter how stout his powers of thought, no man could count them."[131] Later on, the poem also mentions the belief in night-flying women led by Lady Abundia:

> Many people, in their folly, think themselves sorcerers [*estries*] by night wandering with Lady Abundance. And they say that in the whole world every third child born is of such disposition that three times a week he goes just as destiny leads him; that such people push into all houses; that they fear neither keys nor bars, but enter by cracks, cat-hatches, and crevices; that their souls leave their bodies and go with good ladies into strange places and through houses; and they prove it with such reasoning: the different things seen have not come in their beds, but through their souls, which labor and go running about thus through the world; and they make people believe that, as long as they are on such a journey, their souls could never enter their bodies if anyone had overturned them. But this idea is a horrible folly and something not possible, for the human body is a dead thing as soon as it does not carry its soul; thus, it is certain that those who follow this sort of journey three times a week, die three times and revive three times in the same week. And if it is as we have said, then the disciples of such a convent come back to life very often.[132]

Although of no special relevance in the context of the poem, this second reference is worthy of notice in that it departs from the description of characters inspired by classical

[131] *Ne voit on comment les marrastres/ Cuisent venins a leurs fillastres/Et font charmes et sorceries / Et tant d'autres deablies/Que nus nes porroit recenser,/Tant i séust forment penser?* Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Dainiel Poirion (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), ll. 9153-9158 ; tr. by Charles Dahlberg, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, 165.

[132] *Dont maintes gens par lor folie/Cuident estre par nuit estries/Errans avecques dame Habonde,/Et dient que par tout le monde/Li tiers enfant de nacion/Sunt de ceste condicion./Qu'il vont trois fois en la semaine/Si cum destinée les maine;/Et par tous ces ostex se boutent,/Ne clés ne barres ne redoutent,/Ains s'en entrent par les fendaces,/Par chatieres et par crevaces,/Et se partent des cors les ames,/Et vont avec les bonnes Dames/Par leus forains et par maisons,/Et le pruevent par tiex raisons:/Que les diversités véuës/Ne sunt pas en lor liz venuës,/Ains sunt lor ames qui laborent,/Et par le monde ainsinc s'en corent;/Et tant cum il sunt en tel oirre,/Si cum il font as gens acroire,/Qui lor cors bestorné auroit,/Jamès l'ame entrer n'i sauroit./Mès trop a ci folie orrible,/Et chose qui n'est pas possible:/Car cors humains est chose morte/Sitost cum l'ame en soi ne porte;/Donques est-ce chose certaine/Que cil qui trois fois la semaine/Ceste maniere d'oirre sivent,/Trois fois muirent, trois fois revivent/En une semaine méismes:/Et s'il est si cum nous déismes.* Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ll. 19115-19362. Tr. Dahlberg, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, 305–306.

literature that is found in twelfth-century romances to bring up instead the beliefs of the contemporaries of the poem's author. His ironical dismissal of these beliefs as pure folly reflects both the position of the *Canon Episcopi*, which was not yet seriously questioned in the late thirteenth century, and that of later literary authors like Martin Le Franc, who would maintain a skeptical stance towards witchcraft even after the persecutions had begun. The passage does not mention believers in the ladies of the night being of any particular gender, and Jean de Meung's skepticism certainly does not presuppose an unexpected defense of women on his part. On the contrary, the combination of his allusions to female magic with the general misogyny of his poem may be seen as foreshadowing the slanders that would be brought upon women a few centuries later.[133]

The Devil's Bride

With the advent of the fifteenth century, the literary representations of sorcery began to lean towards diabolical witchcraft. Two works are particularly representative of this period: the *Roman de Perceforest*, composed or reworked around 1460, and the *Champion des Dames* (1440-42). Both texts were composed in the wake of the Valais trials and in the area where the persecutions were spreading. *Perceforest*, a prose romance whose origins can be traced to the court of Burgundy, includes an account of a witches' gathering that may have been inspired by the events of the Vauderie of Arras.[134] The *Champion des Dames* was probably written while its author, Martin Le Franc, was serving as secretary to the Duke of Savoy at the Council of

[133] On misogyny, witchcraft, female mysticism, and the literary tradition of the *Roman de la Rose*, see Gábor Klaniczay, "Rózsaregény, nőellenesség és boszorkányhit a 15. században" [The Roman de la Rose, misogyny, and witchcraft in the fifteenth century], in *A Rózsaregény. Kontextus, üzenet, recepció* [The Roman de la Rose. Context, message, reception], ed. Marianne Sághy, Eszter Nagy, and Veronika Novák (Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2019), 115-130.

[134] This possibility will be addressed in Chapter 3. See pages 71-76 of this thesis.

Basel.[135] Le Franc dedicated his poem to Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, and there is evidence that the Duke received two manuscripts of it, one of them shortly after Le Franc had finished his composition. This suggests that the author of *Perceforest*, who was working at the court of Philip the Good, may have had access to the text and used it as inspiration for his own work.[136]

Perceforest and the *Champion des Dames* present a vision of witchcraft that corresponds quite closely to its depiction in the non-literary sources linked to the early trials. The relevant passages of these two works are not about sorceresses practicing their art individually, but about wicked women who hold meetings in which they worship a demonic master. While both were in all probability influenced by written and oral accounts of the trials and by theoretical writings inspired by the events, the two literary works precede the demonological treatises in their portrayal of witchcraft as an essentially female crime. In this, they reveal their indebtedness to literary tradition and show how fiction may have primarily influenced discourses on witchcraft conceived as a real phenomenon.[137]

The witches' gathering episode in *Perceforest* will be the focus of Chapter 3, and therefore will not be dealt with further here. As for the *Champion des Dames*, its importance as one of the first sources attesting to the development of the stereotype of the witches' sabbath has already been alluded to in Chapter 1.[138] As previously mentioned, Le Franc's work is an allegorical poem written in the form of a dialogue between the eponymous Champion of Ladies, who acts as an advocate for women and with whom the author seems to sympathize the most, and a misogynistic Adversary prone to pointing out women's misdeeds. At a metatextual level,

[135] Blanc, Dang, and Ostorero, commentary to *Le Champion des Dames*, 485. On the Council of Basel and its role in the codification and dissemination of the notion of diabolical witchcraft, discussed in pages 19-20 of this thesis, see Bailey and Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists: Basel 1431-1440," (2003).
[136] Robert Deschaux, in collaboration with Martine Ostorero, introduction to *Le Champion des Dames,* in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 442; Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 79.
[137] Blanc, Dang, and Ostorero, commentary to *Le Champion des Dames*, 483.
[138] See Chapter 1, 16-17.

the poem itself also takes part in a dialogue, in this case with the other woks inscribed in the so-called *Querelle de la Rose,* the literary dispute about the condition of women instigated by Christine de Pizan and her reading of the *Roman de la Rose*.[139]

In a long section of the poem, the Champion and the Adversary discuss women's involvement in witchcraft. The Adversary claims to have learned of the case of an old woman who used to attend the sabbath (called "synagogue" in the text):

> I'm telling you that in prison I saw an old woman who, according to what was put in charter, confessed how on certain nights, since she was about sixteen years old, she rode to Valpute on a stick to see the whorish synagogue. There were usually a thousand crones in the troupe, who in the form of a cat or a goat would see the devil proper and promptly kiss his ass in obeisance.[140]

By mentioning the alpine region of Vallouise (formerly called "Valpute"), where several historical trials against witches and Waldensians had taken place, and the existence of a written document containing what seems to be the deposition of a defendant, the Adversary proves quite resourceful in lending credibility to his statements.[141]

As much as he worries about witchcraft, *maleficia* are not one of the Adversary's main concerns. During the witches' gatherings, he explains, some women are taught "evil sorceries and arts" by the Devil, but others prefer to entertain themselves by dancing, drinking, and eating.[142] Age, on the other hand, does matter to him. From the first stanzas of the poem that touch on the topic of witchcraft, the Adversary strives to emphasize that it is old women who

[139] Blanc, Dang, and Ostorero, commentary to *Le Champion des Dames*, 483-484; see also page 36 of this thesis.
[140] *Je te dy avoir veu en chartre/Vielle, laquelle confessoit,/Aprez qu'escrit estoit en chartre,/Comment, dés le temps qu'elle estoit/De seize ans ou poy s'en faloit,/Certaines nuis, de la Valpute/Sur ung bastonnet s'en aloit/Veoir la sinagogue pute/Dis mille vielles en ung fouch/ Y avoit-il communément/En fourme de chat ou de bouch/Veans le dyable proprement/Auquel baisoyent franchement/Le cul en signe d'obeissance*. Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames*, ll. 17457-17470, my translation.
[141] Blanc, Dang, and Ostorero, commentary to *Le Champion des Dames*, 487-488; on the Waldensian community in the Vallouise, Robert Deschaux, in Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames*, 456, footnote 33.
[142] Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames*, ll. 17474-17478, my translation.

take part in these practices.[143] Their age worsens the accusations of lasciviousness directed against them, since in this context sexual desire seems to be considered unnatural in older women.[144] Indeed, before their gatherings come to an end, the witches engage in an orgy in which each of them takes a man, except if these are lacking, in which case demons are provided to replace them.[145] Moreover, in other occasions they engage in sex not only with demons, but with the Devil himself. That, at least, is what the old woman with whom he had the opportunity to speak told the Adversary:

> The devil made himself into a man
> and took her with the ardor of lust.
> Oh God, what a horror!
> Dear God, the couple is worthy of note!
> Oh dear God Jesus Christ, what an error!
> The woman is married to the devil![146]

This appears to be the first instance of an accusation of sexual intercourse with the Devil in textual sources.[147] The charge had never been pressed against either witches or other heretics until then. Although the poem seems to have been written as a satire by an author who did not believe in the reality of witchcraft, it may well have contributed to spreading the stereotype of the witch and to providing it with the misogynistic undertones that would later become generalized. In the words of Dyan Elliott, "since sex with the devil was a charge that had not only a future but one that helped to consolidate women's alleged overrepresentation in witchcraft, we can only observe that the cost of Le Franc's joke was unreasonably high."[148]

[143] Blanc, Dang, and Ostorero, commentary to *Le Champion des Dames*, 495.
[144] Blanc, Dang, and Ostorero indicate that the figure of the lustful old sorceress is already present in Latin literature. Blanc, Dang, and Ostorero, commentary to *Le Champion des Dames*, 495.
[145] *Et sachiez qu'en la departie/Chascun sa chascune prenoit/Ets'aucune n'estoit lotie/D'omme, ung dyable lui survenoit*. Le Franc*, Le Champion des Dames*, ll. 17497-17500.
[146] *Que le diable homme se fasoit/Et avec lui prenoit l'ardeur/De luxure. O Dieu, quel horreur!/Vray Dieu, que la couple est notable!/O vray Dieu, Jhesus, quel erreur!/La femme est mariee au dyable!* Le Franc, Le Champion des Dames, ll. 17531-17536. Tr. by Dyan Elliott, in Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 268.
[147] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 269.
[148] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 269.

Chapter Conclusions

The fifteenth century marks the threshold between medieval and early modern attitudes towards witchcraft. In the following two hundred years, systematic persecutions of witches would extend throughout Europe. In literature, too, this is the time when the stereotype of the wicked witch takes shape. The witches that haunt the pages of so many works of early modern literature may be considered threatening on account of their powers but they are, at the same time, vulnerable due to their physical and social disadvantages: these women are consistently ugly, old, and poor. Under the pen of humanist poets, some of them are presented as truly fearsome.[149] Some other authors continue along the lines of skepticism and treat the magic of witches as limited, delusional, or at least ambiguous.[150] In the works of writers who take a skeptical stance, witches are often portrayed as humorous and mostly harmless.

The stereotype of the witch begins to develop in vernacular literature as the attitudes towards magic beliefs start to change. The evolution of the literary and the official discourses on magic run on parallel tracks, contrasting in certain ways but also influencing each other. The fifteenth-century rise of demonic witches in literature bears the marks of the weight exerted on fiction by the new official beliefs. At the same time, the early feminization of witches in *Perceforest* and the *Champion des Dames* spans from a literary tradition that probably influenced the official discourse. In the following centuries, the references to literary figures in demonological treatises attest to the influence exerted by fiction over actual beliefs.[151] At first glance, the differences and inconsistencies between the two types of discourse could make

[149] Madeleine Lazard, "Sorcières," in *Images littéraires de la femme à la Renaissance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), 224.
[150] Diane Purkiss, "Witchcraft in Early Modern Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 129.
[151] Alberola, "Las referencias a la literatura clásica en la tratadística de los siglos XV-XVII," § 6.

literary sources seem irrelevant for the inquiry into the phenomenon of early modern witchcraft beliefs. However, a more thorough analysis reveals that these sources allow access to other dimensions in the evolution of the concept of witchcraft, to some extent alien to the official postures developed in the last centuries of the Middle Ages but no less present in the culture of the times.

Chapter 3: The Witches' Gathering in *Perceforest*: An Early Literary Sabbath?

An extended prequel to the adventures of King Arthur, the little-known *Roman de Perceforest* can perhaps boast of featuring the first fictional account of a witches' sabbath. However marginal to the main plot of the romance, the episode in which the knight Estonné witnesses a gathering of women and demons in an abandoned house takes on a new dimension in light of its placement within the development of the stereotype of the witches' sabbath. The first modern scholar to acknowledge the relevance of the episode was Christine Ferlampin-Acher, who in 1993 published an article in which she pointed out the inconsistency between the full-fledged description of a nocturnal assembly of witches, a motif not found in written sources before the fifteenth century, and the until then uncontested dating of the romance around 1340.[152] While in this article Ferlampin-Acher provided arguments to accommodate the episode to an early dating, she would later move on to argue for setting the composition of *Perceforest* in the court of Burgundy around the year 1460.[153] The debate remains unsettled, with Gilles Roussineau, only modern editor of its full text, proposing that the romance as it is known today is an extensive reworking accomplished some one hundred years after the composition of the fourteenth-century original.[154] In either case, the fact remains that *Perceforest* contains one of the earliest descriptions of a witches' gathering, the first one we know of that was originally intended as fiction, and one that is still largely unexplored.

[152] Christine Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," *Le Moyen Âge. Revue d'histoire et philologie*, 99 (1993): 471-504.
[153] Christine Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir : propositions autour d'un récit arthurien bourguignon* (Geneva: Droz, 2010), 12.
[154] Gilles Roussineau, introduction to *Perceforest. Première partie*, vol. 1, ed. Gilles Roussineau, (Geneva: Droz, 2007), 30.

Perceforest and its Textual History

With its project of connecting the Arthurian and Alexandrian romance cycles in a single work, the *Roman de Perceforest* is as ambitious as it is original. Its overall subject concerns the conquest of Great Britain by the army of Alexander the Great, who appoints Perceforest as the general in charge of colonizing and civilizing the new territory. After defeating the forces of the evil sorcerer Darnant, Perceforest becomes the first king of England, prefiguring the rise of Arthur through the creation of a chivalric order of free equals that meet around a circular table. The knights of Perceforest and their progeny engage in various adventures across the land, suffer from an invasion by Julius Caesar and then take part in his assassination, and are eventually defeated by a new wave of invaders—but not before one of Perceforest's descendants can thrust his sword into a stone, to await a king capable of pulling it out and restoring the kingdom to its previous glory. In the meantime, the romance describes the transition between polytheistic and monotheistic religion, introducing the idea of a cult without priests that is practiced through individual meditation.[155] Additionally, the prologue strives to present the romance as part of a "historical" tradition of precursors of the legends of King Arthur that includes the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth.[156] It also frames the story of Perceforest and his knights within that of Count William I of Hainault's travels on the occasion of the marriage of king Edward II of England's marriage to Isabelle of France (1308): according to this frame story, the original version of the romance was contained in a Greek manuscript that the count theoretically discovered during his travels.[157]

[155] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 401. On the topic of religion in *Perceforest*, see also Jane H. M. Taylor, "Faith and Austerity: The Ecclesiology of the *Roman de Perceforest,*" in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in memory of Cedric E. Pickford*, ed. Alison Adams Armel H. Diverres, and Karen Stern (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1986), 47-65.
[156] On the use of pseudo-historical sources in *Perceforest*, and in particular of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, see Roussineau's introduction to *Perceforest. Première partie*, vol. 1, 46 ss.
[157] *Perceforest. Première partie*, vol. 1, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 2007), § 80-85.

The *Roman de Perceforest* seems to have been much better known closer to its date of composition than it is today. The three preserved manuscripts (BnF, fr. 345-348, A; Paris, BnF, fr. 106-109, B; Paris, Arsenal 3483-3494, C), all of which include the witches' gathering episode, date from the fifteenth century and were copied in the Duchy of Burgundy.[158] In spite of being the earliest of the three, manuscript C (1459-60) has traditionally been regarded as being further removed from the original than the other two. The reasons for this are its use of some rather modern expressions, its rendering into prose of some passages that are in verse in A and B, and the amplification of the total material most likely undertaken by the copyist David Aubert.[159] The romance went through several total or partial reprints in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and references to it and its characters can be found in the works of various authors of the time.[160] Probably for reasons not unrelated to its sheer length, *Perceforest* fell into oblivion thereafter, until interest in it was rekindled by a group of researchers in the mid-twentieth century. It was at that time that the fourteenth-century dating was proposed, following the frame story that links the first copying of the text, supposedly a translation of a Greek original, to the court of William I of Hainault.[161] A large section of the first of the six parts of the romance was edited in 1979 by Jane H. M. Taylor,[162] and an edition of the full text in eleven

[158] Three other partial copies, that were also composed in the Duchy of Burgundy and date from the end of the fifteenth century, are preserved in the British Library (Royal 15 E. V; Royal 19 E. II-III) and the Free Library of Philadelphia (Lewis E M 42:22). Further information can be found on the ARLIMA website: Archives de littérature du Moyen Âge (ARLIMA), "Perceforest" (accessed April 21, 2022) https://www.arlima.net/mp/perceforest.html

[159] One of the main agents responsible for the flourishing of the Burgundian court library in the fifteenth century, David Aubert was the official court scribe of Philip the Good, appointed some years after the death of his predecessor Jean Wauquelin in 1447. He lost his position after the duke's death in 1467, but regained it in 1475, when he was appointed official scribe in the service of Margaret of York, wife of Philip's son Charles the Bold. For further information, see Jacques Paviot, "David Aubert et la cour de Bourgogne," in *Les manuscrits de David Aubert, 'escripvain' bourguignon*, ed. Danielle Quéruel (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999), 9-18.

[160] Including Rabelais and Jacques Gohory, translator of the Spanish romance *Amadís de Gaula*. See, for example, Alexandra Hoernel, "Réécriture(s) et réception du *Perceforest* au XVIe siècle," in *Perceforest : un roman arthurien et sa réception*, ed. Christine Ferlampin-Acher (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 317-333.

[161] Gilles Roussineau, "Nouvelles remarques sur la genèse de l'œuvre," in *Perceforest. Première partie*, vol. 1, ed. Gilles Roussineau, (Geneva: Droz, 2007), 9.

[162] *Le roman de Perceforest. Première partie*, ed. Jane H. M. Taylor (Geneva: Droz, 1979).

volumes was published by Gilles Roussineau between 1987 and 2018.[163] In 2011, Nigel Bryant published an English translation of some select episodes from *Perceforest*, including that of the witches' gathering.[164]

The hypothesis that the romance was actually composed in the court of the Duke of Burgundy in the first half of the fifteenth century was first proposed by Tania Van Hemelryck in an article published in 2005.[165] In this article, Van Hemelryck points to the fact that, while there is no written evidence of the existence of *Perceforest* until around 1460, such evidence seems to spread indiscriminately after that date.[166] Furthermore, while the thematic parallels between an episode of *Perceforest* and one of a late fourteenth-century compilation of texts about the history of Hainault had led twentieth-century scholars to maintain that the romance could not have been written after 1399, Van Hemelryck argues that there is no reason to believe that *Perceforest* was a source of inspiration for the fourteenth-century compilation and not the other way round.[167] In his introduction to the first part of the romance, published in 2007, Gilles Roussineau provides ample proof to contest this hypothesis, while at the same time uncovering new evidence to support his own, already formulated in 1987, that the extant version of

[163] *Perceforest. Quatrième partie*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 1987); *Perceforest. Troisième partie, tome I*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 1988) ; *Perceforest. Troisième partie, tome II*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 1991); *Perceforest. Troisième partie, tome III*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 1993); *Perceforest. Deuxième partie, tome I*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 1999); *Perceforest. Deuxième partie, tome II*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 2001); *Perceforest. Première partie*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 2007); *Perceforest. Cinquième partie*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 2012); *Perceforest. Sixième partie*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 2014); *Florilèges de Perceforest*, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 2017); *Perceforest*, complément, variantes inédites publiées par Gilles Roussineau, ed. Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 2018)

[164] *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, tr. Nigel Bryant (New York: Boydell & Brewer, 2011).

[165] Tania Van Hemelryck, "Soumettre le Perceforest à la question. Une entreprise périlleuse ?" in *La littérature à la cour de Bourgogne. Actualités et perspectives de recherche*, ed. Claude Thiry, Virginie Minet, and Tania Van Hemelryck (Montreal: CERES, 2005), 367-379.

[166] Van Hemelryck, "Soumettre le Perceforest à la question," 367.

[167] Van Hemelryck, "Soumettre le Perceforest à la question," 368-369.

Perceforest is a fifteenth-century reworking of a text originally written in the mid-fourteenth-century.[168]

While most contemporary scholars stand with Roussineau in this debate, Ferlampin-Acher's *Perceforest et Zéphir : propositions autour d'un récit arthurien bourguignon* (2010) revives Van Hemelryck's hypothesis, claiming that the fourteenth-century *Perceforest* either did not exist or was no more than a draft.[169] For Roussineau and others, one of the main reasons for supporting the original dating in 1340 was that the connections established by the text between the territories of England and Hainault and between the lineages of Alexander and Arthur correspond to the ambitions of William I of Hainault, who cultivated "an image of himself as the living embodiment of Alexander" and had his daughter Philippa married to Edward III of England in 1328.[170] Ferlampin-Acher calls this idea into question by claiming that the continental territory covered by the text goes beyond the possessions of William of Hainault and actually covers the lands owned or coveted by Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy between 1419 and 1467.[171] She also perceives a parallel between the fluctuations in the career of David Aubert, who entered the service of Philip the Good as a scribe in the 1450s, and those of his contemporaries' interest in *Perceforest*. This leads her to suggest that Aubert could have been not only the copyist but also the author of the romance, making the version rendered by manuscript C the earliest instead of the latest.[172] Furthermore, she argues that, in its account of

[168] For example, he mentions the historical relevance of William I of Hainault, compared to that of his successor William II; the historical evidence of the former's attendance to the wedding of Edward II of England and Isabelle of France, and the confusion of the *Annales* regarding Philippa of Hainault's kinship relations to William II, to argue that William I is much likelier to be the original protagonist of the story of the discovery of the Greek manuscript than William II, to whom the discovery is attributed in the *Annales*. Further information on the debate can be found in Gilles Roussineau, "Nouvelles remarques sur la genèse de l'œuvre," in *Perceforest. Première partie*, vol. 1, ed. Gilles Roussineau, (Geneva: Droz, 2007), 9-46.
[169] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 12.
[170] Bryant, introduction to *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, 25.
[171] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 168 ss.
[172] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 41. The author explains the greater length of manuscript C by claiming that A and B may be abridged versions of it. Likewise, she explains the greater modernity of the language of C and its use of prose in passages that are in verse in A and B by claiming that the latter may have been attempting to give an antique halo to the text. Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 46-47.

the transition between polytheism and monotheism, the romance reflects a number of theological issues that were being discussed at the fifteenth-century court of Burgundy. The witches' gathering is mentioned among these issues: according to Ferlampin-Acher, the episode could have been inspired by the dramatic series of witch trials that took place in the Duchy of Burgundy between 1459 and 1461, the episode known as the "Vauderie of Arras."[173]

Whether *Perceforest* as it is known today was originally composed in the court of Philip the Good or is a reworked version of an earlier text, the evidence seems to point to the conclusion that the witches' gathering episode was written in the fifteenth century and in the court of Burgundy. In the first place, as noted in the 1993 article by Ferlampin-Acher, no reference to it can be found at any other point in the romance.[174] In addition, the episode shares at least some common features with the first accounts of the nocturnal assemblies of witches written in the first half of the fifteenth century and linked to the events of the Council of Basel, and with the witch treatises written during the Vauderie of Arras.[175] While it could be argued that the motif developed in fiction before it began to be taken as a real threat, the fact that no other such accounts are to be found in any kind of written sources before the 1430s would require an explanation. For all of these reasons, it will be argued that the witches' gathering in *Perceforest* dates from the mid-fifteenth century and that, albeit being presented as a fictional episode set in a remote pagan past and not as a reflection of contemporary beliefs, it should be counted among the early sources attesting to the development of the stereotype of the witches' sabbath.

[173] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 41.
[174] Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 472.
[175] Ostorero *et al.*, *L'imaginaire du sabbat* (1999); Gow *et al.*, *The Arras Witch Treatises* (2016).

The Witches' Gathering in *Perceforest*

The witches make two appearances in the *Roman de Perceforest*. The first one takes place when the knight Estonné is transported to the castle of Brane by the trickster spirit Zéphir, who has turned into a horse that rides "so fast indeed that Estonné didn't know whether he was riding on earth or air."[176] He hears a terrible noise and, looking up, sees a host of old bearded hags (*vieilles matrosnes barbues*) beating each other with everyday objects: stools (*selletes*), sticks or canes (*bourdons*), distaffs (*cyneules*), and bobbins (*hasplez*). Zéphir explains to him that these old hags who are "full of the dark arts" (*plaines de mauvais ars*) are being carried through the air by his fellow devils (*dyables*), who can cover the distance of an eight-day journey in one night, and who will then carry them back home, so that in the morning they will tell their neighbors amazing stories about what they have seen. Estonné regrets that the devils have not drowned them in the sea, but Zéphir tells him that they do not have the power to do more than they do.

Sometime later in the story, Zéphir tricks Estonné into spending the night in a ruined house not far from Brane that had been "uninhabited for twenty years because of the evil spirits that haunted it by night."[177] At one point, the hall begins to light up with a clarity coming from an unknown source, and Estonné sees a hideous creature sitting on a high seat, later called "the master" or "grand master" (*grant maistre*), and another ugly creature carrying a rod who will be called "the usher" (*appariteur*), who suddenly appear in the hall together with a terrible noise. The usher strikes three knocks of his rod on a floorboard and commands someone to come inside, after which the hall is filled with spirits, whose features Estonné cannot discern, but who are each carrying an old hag on their shoulders and jousting around the room. The

[176] The full passage can be found on *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, ed. Gilles Roussineau, (Geneva: Droz, 1999), § 131; English translation by Nigel Bryant, *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, 159.
[177] The full passage can be found in *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, §§ 383-392, and *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, tr. Bryant, 182-184.

usher strikes three knocks of his rod and commands them to take their places, and the noise ceases. Then the usher places another chair in front of the master's seat, now referred to as a dais (*eschaffault*), and starts calling the spirits to come forward. The master takes a look at the first spirit's woman and declares her to look like a bad glutton (*mauvaise gloute*), on account of which he will give her leave to become a surgeon-witch (*sorciere cirugienne*) against all sickness and bestow on any herb such virtue as she pleases. He then places a finger on her forehead and marks her with his sign in the shape of a fork (*grauet*). After having repeated this operation with the other spirits and women, the master looks around the hall and sees the frightened Estonné hiding behind the door. He makes the knight sit on the chair and asks him what he is doing there if he is not one of their party. Estonné answers that he was tricked into that situation by one who is, and the master tells him to call Zéphir to come forward as his defender (*advoé*). Zéphir does not show up and the master tells him that he will thus have to kiss each crone on the lips or receive an equal number of slaps on the cheek. Estonné chooses the second option and the first woman comes forward to slap him, but when she asks the master how exactly she should do it, Estonné answers that he will show her and proceeds to slap her himself. The spirits burst into laughter and the master is so pleased that he forgives the knight, after which the light and the whole party disappear, and Estonné is left alone in the house.

The sequence of Estonné's two encounters with the witches presents a number of interesting elements. Some of these seem to fit the early descriptions of the nocturnal assemblies of witches discussed in Chapter 1, others seem to be more idiosyncratic, and yet others seem to be absent from the early non-literary sources connected to the Arras and Valais trials but feature prominently in creative literature or in later texts or visual sources. The following subchapters will try to identify the most notable elements in *Perceforest*'s account of a gathering of witches and compare them with other sources to assess the place of this text in the context of the development of the stereotype of the witches' sabbath.

Witches of the Flatlands

Gilles Roussineau has identified the castle of Brane, in whose vicinity the witches' gathering takes place, with the present-day Braine-le-Comté, in Hainault.[178] If he is correct, then the setting of the episode would reinforce the hypothesis, suggested by Ferlampin-Acher, of a link between its inclusion in *Perceforest* and the Arras witch trials.[179] In fact, the homogenous alpine geography referred to by the sources that discuss the emerging stereotype of the witches' sabbath in the aftermath of the Valais trials does not seem to correspond very well to the flat terrain of Braine-le-Comté.[180] However, the persecutions that began to spread since then were not limited to mountainous areas, and between 1459 and 1461, the most infamous series of fifteenth-century witch trials were conducted in Arras, which is less than a hundred meters above sea level.[181] As noted by Ferlampin-Acher, Braine-le-Comté is located about a hundred kilometers from Arras.[182] Assuming that C (1459-1460) is the original manuscript of the romance, then the setting of the episode near Brane could serve as proof that its inclusion in *Perceforest* reflects an interest aroused by the ongoing events in the nearby city.

An Indoor Gathering

Beyond the general location of the episode in Hainault, it is also interesting to note that the witches of *Perceforest* meet in an abandoned house. Ferlampin-Acher finds a striking contrast between this detail and the accounts of early modern witches' sabbaths, which usually

[178] Roussineau, "Nouvelles remarques sur la genèse de l'œuvre", in *Perceforest. Première partie*, 13.
[179] Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 477.
[180] Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region," 17.
[181] Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 229-230.
[182] Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 477.

take place in open spaces.[183] However, towards the mid-fifteenth century the stereotype is not yet fully developed, and references to the kinds of places where witches meet are scarce. On the one hand, it is true that some early sources already emphasize the link between the activities of witches and outdoor locations such as forests and mountains. Thus, Hans Fründ reports on how an evil spirit carried witches at night from one mountain to another, which could be interpreted as a suggestion that they meet on mountain tops,[184] and the *Recollectio* of Arras claims that witches meet at night "in various forests and places," and that they do not even need to stop meeting in the winter because the Devil adds "some manner of heat quickly to the surrounding air so that the congregants do not suffer great cold."[185] On the other hand, though, various early sources do mention a type of gathering that is held indoors.

Among the early sources that indicate the meeting places of witches, both Fründ and the anonymous author of the *Errors of the Gazari* allude to feasts in the cellars of the houses of the rich.[186] Fründ does not provide a detailed description of the gatherings, but he mentions that witches hold "schools" in secret places and that they fly at night to the cellars of rich people, where they feast and drink their wine.[187] The *Errors of the Gazari* separately refers to meetings in the mountains, to the looting of the houses and cellars of the rich, and to the "synagogues," a term that in this text denotes an unspecified place rather than the ceremonies that take place in it:[188]

[183] Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 490.
[184] Fründ, "Rapport sur la chasse aux sorcières," 34-35; Bailey, *Origins of the Witches' Sabbath*, 8.
[185] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 30, 47. Some woods where meetings were supposed to take place are mentioned by name (Neufvireille, Tabary), but, according to the editors of the text, the location of these places could not be identified ("A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 47, notes 47 and 49).
[186] Nider's *Formicarius*, for its part, briefly mentions the confession of a penitent witch, according to whom the induction of new members into the sect was performed at the local church—that is, also in an indoor space—, on Sunday mornings before the consecration of the holy water. Nider, *Formicarius*, 156-157.
[187] Fründ, "Rapport sur la chasse aux sorcières," 34-37. Ostorero and Utz Tremp point out that the term "school" referred to the assemblies of heretics and that the meetings in cellars bring to mind "the accusations against Waldenses who were forced to live underground. Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region," 21.
[188] Ostorero, commentary to *Errores Gazariorum*, in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 305.

> …some of the sect, already burned, confessed that in bad weather they gathered in large numbers in the mountains, at the behest of the devil, to break ice—and indeed large heaps of ice have frequently been found in the mountains.
>
> […] Likewise, there are people who are used to living in delights [...] In their case, the devil advises some of the sect to take them along to the synagogue, first informing them of the ceremonies that relate to their desire. Then, the devil, at the appointed time, leads them to the houses of powerful dignitaries, nobles, bourgeois, and others [...]; around the third hour of the night, he opens the cellars of the powerful and introduces them into these; they remain there until about the middle of the night—and not beyond, for this is their hour and the reign of darkness.[189]

Therefore, the choice made in the romance to set the witches' gathering in an indoors location does not contradict the claim that the episode can count as one of the early sources attesting to the evolution of the notion of the witches' sabbath. On the contrary, it can be argued that this variation is only one of the many that can usually be found in the different representations of the stereotype—and even more so in the early stages of its development.

Haunted Houses

Interestingly, the house where the *Perceforest* episode takes place is not only abandoned, but also has a reputation for being haunted by evil spirits—presumably the same ones that lead the witches to their gathering.[190] Haunted houses do not show up in any of the sources related to the Valais or Arras trials. Indeed, tales of ghosts and haunted places are only rarely mentioned in medieval bureaucratic or theological records.[191] However, evidence that stories of returning souls had circulated for centuries and played a part in the impetus for the

[189] "Errores Gazariorum," translated by myself from the French version by Kathrin Utz Tremp and Martine Ostorero. Original and French text in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 294-297.
[190] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, § 383.
[191] Robert N. Swanson, "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages," *Studies in Church History*, Vol. 45 (2009): 149.

formalization of Purgatory is found in sources closer to popular culture, such as *exempla*.[192] Thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century tales of haunted houses tended to include a didactic aspect supportive of the theory of Purgatory.[193] Such is the case of the dialogue between the Dominican Jean Gobi and the ghost of a man named Guy of Corvo, who had returned to his former home to seek prayers for his soul and to warn his wife so that she might avoid his sufferings.[194] The affair, which allegedly took place in 1323 or 1324 in a town of southern France, was reported to pope John XXII and subsequently grew into a lengthy story that was diffused in various versions across Europe.[195]

By the second half of the fifteenth century, ghost stories seem to have acquired a different goal. Medieval ghosts had always been part of a broad category of apparitions that included not only the returning souls of dead humans but also other spectral manifestations such as the Wild Hunt.[196] However, at this time the emphasis on the demonic nature of many of these apparitions became stronger. Some learned fifteenth-century authors do mention ghosts in their work and relate them to witches. A section of the *Speculum peregrinarum questionum* of Bartholomeus Sybilla (d. 1492) makes a point of distinguishing between the manifestations of dead human beings and those of good and bad angels. The latter, he claims, can appear in assumed bodies—in the case of bad angels, sometimes at the instigation of witches.[197] A treatise concerned with the reality of witchcraft, the *Flagellum maleficorum* (c. 1460) of Pierre Marmoris, reports two then recent cases of houses haunted by spirits in locations of western France.[198] The cases are mentioned in a section on the ability of demons to act on humans and

[192] Swanson, "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages," 153.
[193] Martine Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat. Littérature démonologique et sorcellerie (1440-1460)* (Florence: Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2011), 529.
[194] Jean Gobi, *Dialogue avec un fantôme*, ed. Marie-Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994).
[195] Swanson, "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages," 159-160.
[196] Swanson, "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages," 144-145.
[197] Swanson, "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages," 151.
[198] The relevant section of the treatise is quoted in Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat*, 528-529.

objects, and their inclusion is aimed at justifying the idea that demons can assume physical bodies that allow them to move things around.[199]

The choice made in *Perceforest* to set the witches' gathering in a haunted house is unusual, but not extraordinary. Although it is impossible to know with what particular cases its author might have been acquainted, ghost stories circulated in popular culture and cannot have been unknown to him. By the time the episode was probably put into writing, supernatural phenomena taking place in people's houses were often associated with the activities of demons rather than souls of Purgatory. While haunted houses may not have become part of the learned construction of the sabbath stereotype, it is perhaps not so strange to think that a non-specialized author writing for a non-specialized audience may have conflated two different, but related, clusters of tales and beliefs into one. Examples such as this show that the analysis of literary works can bring to light some little explored aspects of how early modern ideas about witchcraft were shaped in people's minds.

Flesh and Spirit

The question about the corporeality of demons was one of the great problems faced by authors concerned with the reality of diabolical witchcraft. In 1215, the Fourth Council of the Lateran had defined as dogma the purely spiritual nature of angels and demons.[200] Supporting the authenticity of the accounts of meetings attended by demons who could see, touch, and in general act like physical entities, and by humans who could likewise interact with them, thus required an *ad hoc* explanation. In a nutshell, the theory held by many authors who believed that spirits were able to assume corporeal bodies claimed that these bodies were not a product

[199] Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat*, 529.
[200] Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat*, 266.

of an individual's imagination, since they could be exteriorly perceived by anyone, but that they were artificial and could only be apprehended by the human senses as to their accidents (such as color, shape, or temperature), but not as to the nature of their species.[201]

In the years after the Valais trials, the idea that demons could be granted divine permission to borrow material bodies gained strength. The authors of the treatises written around 1460 often allude to this problem: such is the case of Pierre Marmoris, whose tales of haunted houses aim to demonstrate that demons can move objects.[202] It is also the case of Johannes Tinctor, who does not seem entirely comfortable with the innovative ideas of his contemporaries and circumvents the problem by claiming that it does not matter whether witches really interact with demons, for it is their willingness to do so that makes them guilty.[203] Contrary to Tinctor's hesitations, both Nicholas Jacquier, whose *Flagellum hæreticorum fascinariorum* (1458) probably inspired the Arras *Recollectio*, and the *Recollectio* itself make a point of demonstrating the reality, and not the mere possibility, of diabolical meetings.[204]

In *Perceforest*, spirits assume some sort of physical body, but one that is only barely suggested. When Zéphir explains to Estonné that the host of bearded hags he sees are being carried through the air by his fellow devils, there is no indication that Estonné can see the devils as well.[205] Later, when he sees the hall of the ruined house fill with "some sort of spirits" (*une maniere d'esperitz*), in all likelihood the same ones that had been previously referred to as "devils" (*dyables*), the text explains that "he couldn't exactly see their features, but he could clearly see that each bore an old woman on its shoulders."[206] In fact, the only member of the company whose ability to assume concrete bodily forms is explicitly acknowledged is Zéphir

[201] Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat*, 266.
[202] Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat*, 528-529.
[203] See Gow *et al.*, *The Arras Witch Treatises*, 17.
[204] Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat*, 451, 662-663, 667.
[205] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, § 131.
[206] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, § 385; tr. Bryant, *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, 182.

himself. Throughout the romance, Zéphir frequently takes the form of the wind that gives him his name,[207] possesses dead bodies to take on a human form,[208] or either assumes other human or animal forms—including that of the horse that carries Estonné to the castle of Brane—through a process that is never specified.[209]

Although during the encounters with the witches Zéphir is called a "spirit" and a "devil," in the romance he is mostly referred to as a *luiton*—a sort of imp featured in tales and legends who, in other contexts, can shapeshift by means of a special fur.[210] By the fifteenth century, clerics often interpreted the folkloric *luiton* as an incubus.[211] In *Perceforest*, which never alludes to sexual intercourse between humans and supernatural beings, this possibility is bypassed. However, the demonic—although rather harmless—nature of Zéphir, and by extension the host of his companions, is explicitly referenced right before Estonné sees the witches for the first time, when he asks the "spirit inside the horse" (*esperit dedans le cheval*) what manner of thing it is:

> "Know that I am one of the angels cast out of Paradise with Lucifer because in his pride he wanted to reign and set himself in competition with God […]"
> "So how do you come to be here?" asked Estonné. […]
> "I'll tell you," the voice replied. "God is the fairest of judges, and punishes a soul only according to his misdeed. It's only right that the originator and source of wrong should be punished more than a follower. […]"
> The voice was that of a spirit who could no longer dwell near God but had no wish to be any near Lucifer. Estonné asked the source of his mysterious powers.

[207] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 365.
[208] The possession of corpses by demons was already registered in the thirteenth century, for example, in Thomas of Cantimpré's *Bonum universale de Apibus* (quoted by Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 367). Tinctor's "Invenctives Against the Sect of Waldensians" deals with this problem too: "And as the second and accidental perfection presupposes by necessity the first and essential perfection, it follows that the functions of a living body cannot take place in a body without the substance of life, and for that reason the angels cannot exercise these functions in a body that is dead. Thus, when they take a body and make it perform all the functions and actions of a body that seem to be natural functions, these are not real, but simply appear to be so." (Johannes Tinctor, "Invectives Against the Sect of Waldensians," 132).
[209] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 365.
[210] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 362.
[211] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 373.

> "They come from God," the voice replied, "who allows me to torment creatures for their misdeeds. I love mocking and playing tricks on people like you! But that's as far as my power goes."[212]

Ferlampin-Acher draws attention to the fact that the diabolical nature of the witches' gathering is not self-evident.[213] In *Perceforest*, she argues, the ceremony is not called a *synagogue* or *vauderie* and the word *dyable* is not used for the master, but only, and in a loose sense, for his host of spirits. Moreover, the term *sorciere* is employed by the master for women physicians and by Estonné to insult the woman he slaps, but not by the narrator, who calls the bearded hags either *matrosnes*—a word that technically denotes married women or midwives, but that was often used as an insult—[214] or, on most occasions, simply "old women" (*vielles*).[215] However, not all the early sources explicitly name the assembly of witches or refer to its presiding figure as the Devil. In the chronicle of Hans Fründ, for example, the meetings are not named, and their presiding entity is, just like in the romance, called a "master" (*Meister*) and an "evil spirit" (*böser Geist*).[216] More important than that is *Perceforest*'s acknowledgement of Zéphir's demonic nature, followed by the *luiton*'s explicit statement that the spirits are his companions. The inclusion of these two points in the beginning of the episode leaves no room for doubt about the romance's intent to endow the witches' gathering with diabolical undertones.

As for the ambiguous corporeity of the spirits, it does not seem out of place in the context of the debate around the capacity of good and bad angels to assume material bodies. In the *Recollectio*, the demon who carries the attendants to the meetings "sometimes appears to

[212] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, §§ 126-129; tr. Bryant, *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, 158-159.
[213] Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 52.
[214] *DMF* 2020, s.v. "matrone."
[215] *dyables,* in *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, §§ 131, 389; *sorciere*, in §§ 386, 391; *matrosnes*, in § 131, and *vielle(s)*, in §§ 131, 385, 387-388, 390-392.
[216] Kathrin Utz Tremp, commentary to Hans Fründ, "Rapport sur la chasse aux sorcières menée dès 1428 dans le diocèse de Sion," in Ostorero *et al.*, *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 55.

them in visible form for the entire journey […]; but more often, he carries them without being visible."[217] Moreover, in a different section of the text, the argument that people who have been said to attend witches' gatherings could actually have been impersonated by demons is countered by the claim that the bad angels can be distinguished from humans by their imperfect composition:

> [Witches distinguish demons] by sight, for the demon forms the body that he takes on from condensed air or other things in such a way that one always sees signs in that body by which the demon is recognized, either from the black color always imposed upon the imperfect type of humanity or in a body not well finished in solid and firm shape, or often by its excessive size.[218]

Furthermore, the claim that demons form their material bodies from "condensed air," which brings to mind Zéphir's association with this element, is reiterated in other treatises. In Jean Vinet's *Tractatus contra demonum invocatores* (c. 1450), for example, it is mentioned that spiritual entities often make use of the elements to give form to their material bodies, and that, among the basic four, air works best due to its high variability and transmutability.[219]

In this way, it can be argued that the witches' gathering in *Perceforest* is demonic in nature and that their supernatural participants, who are referred to as "spirits" but take on some sort of material bodies, are actually demons.

Horse, Broom, and Chair

In the late Middle Ages, the question of whether spiritual entities can assume physical bodies and move objects was closely connected to that of the reality of night flights. The early

[217] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 37.
[218] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 65.
[219] Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat*, 267.

sources for the witches' sabbath show considerable variation regarding support for the reality of the flight, and the issue constituted a crucial point of discussion during the Arras trials.[220] The skepticism showed by some fifteenth-century authors reflects their respect for the authority of the *Canon Episcopi*, which condemned as superstition the beliefs of women who thought they rode at night on the backs of animals with the goddess Diana.[221] Among the earliest sources, the *Formicarius* shows the greatest skepticism. Nider describes the gatherings as local events that do not require any long-distance traveling, and, although he does not explicitly deny the possibility of flights, he adopts a distant and even ironic attitude regarding beliefs in flying women.[222] Tholosan, who shares Nider's skepticism, claims the Devil deludes witches into believing they fly on animals, brooms, or staffs.[223] Fründ, for his part, limits himself to report on the confessions of witches who claim they ride on chairs, without necessarily providing a personal opinion on the topic.[224] On the contrary, the *Errors of the Gazari* fervently supports the notion that witches fly on brooms or staffs, although the particular section of the text that expresses this support might be a later addition.[225] Lastly, the *Champion des Dames* presents the conflicting positions of the Adversary, who is certain that witches fly on staffs, and the Champion, who regards such beliefs as illusory.[226] As for the Arras treatises, the *Recollectio* does not question the assertion that witches fly on sticks, while Tinctor's attitude is more cautious.[227]

[220] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 349.
[221] Michael D. Bailey, *Origins of the Witches' Sabbath* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021); *Canon Episcopi*, quoted in Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons. An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (London: Book Club Associates, 1975), 211. In fact, the *Canon* never actually mentions flights, but only states that the women believe they can cover great distances when riding with Diana.
[222] Nider, *Formicarius*, 200; Catherine Chène, commentary to Johannes Nider, *Formicarius*, in Ostorero *et al.*, *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 204-220; Bailey, *Origins of the Witches' Sabbath*, 9.
[223] Tholosan, "Ut magorum et maleficiorum errores…," 368-369.
[224] Fründ, "Rapport sur la chasse aux sorcières," 34-35; Bailey, *Origins of the Witches' Sabbath*, 10.
[225] *Errores Gazariorum*, 288-291; Bailey, *Origins of the Witches' Sabbath*, 10-11.
[226] Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames*, 454-455 (st. 2180, 2183).
[227] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 65; Tinctor, "Invectives Against the Sect of Waldensians," 129.

Besides the issue of the reality of nocturnal flights, it is clear that the early sources also show considerable variation regarding the kinds of objects they list as means of aerial transport. Catherine Chène draws attention to the fact that, while some confessions recorded during the Valais trials mention the flights on animals largely present in stories of previous centuries, in the early sources concerned with the gatherings of witches these are often replaced by inanimate objects of the domestic sphere: the witches of Fründ, Tholosan, and the others do not ride on the back of animals, but on chairs, brooms, and staffs.[228]

In *Perceforest*, the bearded hags seen by Estonné are said to be "clutching stools and sticks, bobbins and distaffs, and were flying through the air, battering at each other like mad things."[229] The text does not specify if the objects used as weapons are also somehow involved in the mechanics of the flight, but they are still integral to the configuration of the scene. By contrast, Estonné rides a demonic horse himself—perhaps making his presence in the witches' gathering less inappropriate than he would like to believe. As can be seen, the assortment of items associated with flying witches in the romance includes all sorts of options: the old-style animal mount, interestingly used by the only man in the group; the sticks or staffs, ubiquitous in fifteenth-century sources;[230] the less common stools or chairs;[231] and the more remarkable distaffs and bobbins, which seem to replace brooms as objects linked to the sphere of feminine occupations.[232]

[228] Chène, commentary to Johannes Nider, *Formicarius*, 215.
[229] *tenoient en leurs mains selletes et bourdons, hasplez ou cyneules et en aloient escremissant en l'air les unes aux autres ainsi que toutes esragees*, *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, § 131; tr. Bryant, *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, 159.
[230] Beyond the sources related to the Valais trials, they are also present in those related to the Arras trials and others. See, for example, "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 61.
[231] Chène suggests that flight on chairs or stools might be a variation of the motif specific to the region of Valais (Fründ, "Rapport sur la chasse aux sorcières," 35, note 6); however, Ginzburg remarks that the witches in Pico della Mirandola's *Strix sive de ludificatione daemonum* (1523) also ride astride stools and benches (Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 178, note 50).
[232] A manuscript of Tinctor's "Invectives Against the Sect of Waldensians" illuminated by a Flemish artist around 1470 (MS Rawl, D. 410, f. 1r) depicts a woman riding on a distaff. Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft. Print and visual culture in sixteenth-century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2007), 65.

The assemblies of witches were initially thought to be attended by both women and men, and most of the tools for flying listed by the early sources, such as staffs or chairs, are not gender-marked.[233] However, with the later feminization of the stereotype, the instruments of witchcraft became feminized too. The broom, which would eventually become the object most commonly associated with flying witches, acquired in this context a phallic connotation:

> like the staff of which it seems to be a variant, it has, in the hands of these women, a phallic significance, all the more so since the maleficent power of witches is often supposed to damage the virile strength of men. The broom is also the attribute of the housewife in her home: it is therefore diverted here from its usual function to serve as a mount, as if the witch were claiming the eminently masculine, if not chivalrous, status of the knight. Assimilated to the staff […], the broom is an emblem of male power that these women appear to have seized.[234]

In the non-literary sources related to the Valais trials, in which the gatherings are not exclusively associated with women, these connotations are not necessarily present. The *Champion des Dames*, which, like *Perceforest*, introduces the notion of an exclusively female witches' assembly, mentions brooms in one single occasion.[235] However, two early manuscripts of the poem, both produced in the Duchy of Burgundy around 1450-1460, include illuminations of female witches riding on brooms [Figs. 1, 2]—the marginal illumination of Paris, BNF, fr. 12476, f. 105v being the first known graphic depiction of a witch riding a broom in the context of a sabbath.[236] Thus, the associations between the women's attempted appropriation of male power and a perverted use of traditionally feminine domestic utensils do not seem to have been lost on the readers of the poem. In the same way, in *Perceforest*, in which the people invited to the gathering are all women too, the feminization of witchcraft tools is already present. The

[233] Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region," 21.
[234] Ostorero and Schmitt, "Note sur une illustration marginale du manuscrit Paris, BNF, fr. 12476, f. 105v," 504-505, my translation.
[235] Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames*, 454 (l. 17435).
[236] Martine Ostorero and Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Note sur une illustration marginale du manuscrit Paris, BNF, fr. 12476, f. 105v," in Ostorero *et al*., *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, 502.

distaffs and bobbins wielded as weapons and used for jousting (*behourdant*) represent an inverted order, a variant of the trope of the world turned upside down where village women armed with household tools take on the roles of knightly men.[237]

Figure 2. Anon. Witches mounting on broom and staff. Martin Le Franc, Le Champion des Dames, c. 1451. BNF, fr. 12476, f. 105v.

Figure 1. Maître du Champion des Dames. Witches, one of them riding on a broom. Martin Le Franc, Le Champion des Dames, c. 1460. Bibliothèque municipale de Grenoble, ms. 352 rés., f. 344r.

[237] On carnivalesque imagery and the world turned upside-down, see Bakhtin's classic study *Rabelais and his world* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

The Battle of the Breeches

The fights with sticks and household tools stand out in *Perceforest*'s description of the witches' gathering. After having seen the witches rabidly battering at each other through the air, once inside the house Estonné sees the spirits "charging round the hall, hags astride them, jousting with such vile aggression that [he] was sure they'd all kill each other."[238] In spite of their prominent role in the romance, fights and beating are not common in the early accounts of the emerging sabbath. Among the sources related to the Valais trials, only the *Champion des Dames* mentions, through the mouth of the Adversary, that the Devil beats the witches who want to repent.[239] Among the Arras treatises, the *Recollectio* indicates that witches sometimes "report heavy beatings by the demons with the sinews of cows or being stabbed with awls or by sticks that the Devil keeps close at hand."[240] However, in both cases it is the Devil or the demons who beat the witches, but there is no mention of either witches or demons fighting each other.

Later textual and visual sources prove more helpful in this respect. In his well-known book *I benandanti* (1966), Carlo Ginzburg explored the collective fantasy of a group of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century peasants of the Italian region of Friuli.[241] Some of these people (predominately women) declared that, while in a state of lethargy or catalepsy, they periodically participated in the processions of the dead, while others (predominately men) declared that "armed with bunches of fennel stalks, they periodically fought for the fertility of the fields, against male and female witches armed with canes of sorghum."[242] Ginzburg remarks

[238] *les esperitz aloient par la salle behourdant, les vielles a leurs colz, d'une si laide contenance qu'il estoit advis a Estonné qu'ilz se deussent tous entrefroissier*. *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, § 385; tr. Bryant, *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, 182.
[239] Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames*, 456 (ll. 17481-17484).
[240] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 45.
[241] Translated to English as Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles. Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, tr. Anne and John Tedeschi (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011).
[242] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 155.

the presence of certain recurrent elements both in the accounts of the *benandanti*'s nocturnal visions and in other similar records, sometimes from very distant places. One of the most prominent stories he uncovered was that of the Livonian werewolf Thiess, who in 1692 declared that, along with other good male and female werewolves armed with iron rods for scraping ovens, he fought against witches armed with broomsticks.[243] Subsequent research by Ginzburg and others would continue to unravel a tangle of Eurasian stories of nightwalkers often armed with everyday objects.[244]

In his 1966 book, Ginzburg suggested that the allegorical combats and carnivalesque imagery of European seasonal festivals might provide the substratum for the *benandanti*'s dream visions.[245] Like carnival and other similar festivities, their night ramblings combined a serious narrative with an element of license and unrestraint—an element that in carnivalesque celebrations often has a connotation of sexual deviancy and that, although presented as less important than the core narrative, is in fact quite central to the general experience.[246] The *benandanti* explained to the questioning authorities that they "fought, played, leaped about, and rode various animals, and [..] the women beat the men who were with them with sorghum stalks, while the men had only bunches of fennel," that they "congregate in certain places to perform marriages, to dance and eat and drink," and that they "drank in the wine cellars, entering through the cracks, and getting on the casks."[247] The fight for the fertility of the fields seems to have been the central activity of the nightwalkers' gatherings, but it was the revelry that ensued that the authorities considered analogous to the sabbath.[248]

[243] Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 29; *Ecstasies*, 153.
[244] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 14; Louise S. Milne, "Pieter Bruegel and Carlo Ginzburg: The Debatable Land of Renaissance Dreams," *Cosmos* 29 (2013), 68-69.
[245] Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 24-25.
[246] Milne, "Pieter Bruegel and Carlo Ginzburg," 70.
[247] Ginzburg, *Night Battles*, 1, 3, 13.
[248] Milne, "Pieter Bruegel and Carlo Ginzburg," 75.

The stories that the *Canon Episcopi* dismissed as womanly superstitions featured both feasting and the nocturnal rides of a troupe resembling a women's military company commanded by Diana.[249] Looking at sources from the processes against the *benandanti*, Ginzburg draws attention to the contempt felt by the authorities for the "crazy populace," in which elements of classism and misogyny were combined in a rejection of popular knowledge understood as nonsense and "old wives' tales."[250] The dismissal of the female discourse as irrational did not mean it was considered less dangerous—on the contrary, fear of sexual deviancy and the transgression of gender hierarchies were often one of its ingredients. Even in one of the accounts of the *benandanti*, Louise Milne notes the odd detail that some women seem to fight with the weapons of the witches and against their own companions:

> Now these attacking women could conceivably be the witches on the opposite side of the combat: the enemies of the (male) benandanti. Elsewhere, the sorghum stalks are described as the weapons of these witches. But then why does Gasparutto specify that the victims are the men who were with them; that is, the women's own companions? In either case, this is a telling indicator that, on some level, the imagery of the battle of the sexes could elide itself into the benandanti dream-accounts.[251]

The statement about the dangers of female sexuality already perceivable in the marginalia of the 1451 manuscript of the *Champion des Dames* became integral to the visual iconography of witchcraft in the following century.[252] Especially in the Low Countries, the farcical medieval trope of the "wife who wears the breeches" and beats her husband with household tools [Fig. 3] merged with stories about supernatural night battles fought with everyday objects, giving way to increasingly sinister representations of male nightmares about

[249] *Canon Episcopi*, quoted in Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 211.
[250] Ginzburg, *Night Battles*, 90, quoted by Milne, "Pieter Bruegel and Carlo Ginzburg," 94. Milne ("Pieter Bruegel and Carlo Ginzburg," 96) also draws attention to the fact that *benandanti* women were more likely to be considered insane and incurred harsher punishments than men.
[251] Milne, "Pieter Bruegel and Carlo Ginzburg," 100-101.
[252] Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*, 13. For the marginal image in BNF, fr. 12476, f. 105v, see pages 63-64 of this thesis.

women overpowering men through an alliance with demons.[253] Depictions of witches by Northern Renaissance artists combine the phallic symbolism of domestic tools, like brooms or distaffs, with distorted female versions of typically male activities, such as riding or fighting, to convey the idea of a corrupt gender order. Bruegel's *St. James and the Magician Hermogenes* (1565) depicts a naked woman mounted on a goat, wielding a broomstick like a weapon to joust a rival company of witches riding on monsters [Figs. 4, 5]. Half a century earlier, Dürer imagined a threatening *Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat* [Fig. 6]. On Dürer's engraving, Charles Zika comments:

> For sixteenth-century viewers, a backward ride would have immediately established the allusion to sexual inversion. Riding backwards on an animal, often on an ass, was a frequent form of humiliation in the late Middle Ages, used to punish those who had not maintained the honour considered appropriate to their gender […] The appropriated sexual power of the witch is further underlined by the distaff that rises from the crotch of the riding woman as an appropriated phallus […] Spinning was traditionally regarded as women's work, and so distaff and spindle were frequently used as visual codes of the female, whenever gender relations were the subject at issue. Here then was a wild and powerful woman, not only associated with the lasciviousness of the goat and the vice of lust, but one who had inverted the gender order by appropriating male power and sexuality for herself.[254]

Being quite reticent on any explicit gendering of witchcraft, the early non-literary sources for the sabbath do not place any special emphasis on motifs involving the inversion of gender hierarchies.[255] Conversely, *Perceforest*'s all-female witches' gathering sets a precedent by combining popular elements of carnivalesque celebration, night-flying, and violent housewives. Sexual anxiety builds throughout the episode, reaching a climax when Estonné has to choose between being kissed or slapped by the witches. The tension is relieved when he slaps

[253] Milne, "Pieter Bruegel and Carlo Ginzburg," 102.
[254] See Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*, 28-29.
[255] Bailey, *Origins of the Witches' Sabbath*, 19.

the first witch himself. Through this act, transgression is punished, and the patriarchal order is restored.

Figure 4. Anon. Wife beating her husband with a distaff, vellum. Luttrell Psalter, England, 14th cent. British Library.

Figure 3. Pieter van der Heyden, after Pieter Bruegel. Saint James and the Magician Hermogenes, 1565, engraving. © Trustees of the British Museum, BM 1851, 1213.90. From Milne, "Pieter Bruegel and Carlo Ginzburg," fig. 6b.

Figure 5. Pieter van der Heyden, after Pieter Bruegel. Saint James and the Magician Hermogenes, 1565. Detail. © Trustees of the British Museum, BM 1851, 1213.90.

Figure 6. Albrecht Dürer, Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat, c. 1500, engraving. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1956. From Zika, The Appearance of Witchcraft, fig. 1.12.

At the Courtroom

The early accounts of the emerging witches' sabbath oscillate between an ecclesiastical and a feudal imagery. The more generalized ecclesiastical undertones can be noticed, for example, in the spreading usage of the word *synagogue* to designate the meeting, in Nider's setting of the ceremony in a church, or in Tholosan's inclusion of the details that the Devil seats on a *cathedra* and that the congregants drink from an urn containing his urine (which brings the Eucharist to mind).[256] Still, Dyan Elliott observes that Tholosan also imbues his report with feudal imagery by including in the ceremony acts like "a solemn pledge made into the hands of the devil, the mutual exchange of promises, a formal oath of fealty (symbolized by the inverted hand), the kiss on the mouth."[257] The *Errors of the Gazari* take diabolical feudalism one step forward by having the Devil receive an oath of fealty followed by a kiss on the anus or under the tail (depending on whether it appears as a man or an animal).[258] The induction described in the *Recollectio* is usually read by scholars in terms of a feudal bond, suggested by its reference to a "homage" given by kissing the foot or hand of the presiding demon, but numerous other features recall a religious ceremony instead.[259]

When compared to the aforementioned sources, the ceremony described in *Perceforest* reveals some striking common features with that of the *Recollectio*. The first remarkable coincidence is that in both texts the prospective member of the cult is presented as a woman and introduced to the presiding entity by a familiar demon:

> When a woman is introduced for the first time to the gathering (and the same is true for a man), by a demonic caretaker or familiar according to his custom, as well as by a man or a woman who introduces friends whom she knows to the congregation, she is presented to the presiding demon—who always appears in

[256] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 266-267.
[257] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 267.
[258] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 267, 272.
[259] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 272-273.

> the masculine form—although the names and forms or faces [of the others] appear as men and brute beasts conjured up in various forms.[260]

> Estonné, crouched beside the door […], saw the lowest of the spirits rise, his hag on his shoulders, and sit in the appointed chair. And the master seated on high began to look the old woman up and down with a hideous and terrible gaze and said:
>
> "Well, madam, you look a proper reprobate, with your gnarled and bearded face! So I give you leave to practice witch-medicine against all sickness and bestow on any herb such power as you please." […]
>
> And the spirit rose and came before the master, hag astride him, and the master raised his hand and placed a finger on her forehead and made a mark in the shape of a hooked claw. […]
>
> And the spirit withdrew to the side and left the other spirits and evil hags in the middle of the hall; and one after another each spirit took the crone he carried to sit upon the chair.[261]

Elliott raises the question "of whether these demonic familiars might not also service their mistresses sexually as incubi," which brings to mind the associations between the incubus and the folk figure of the *luiton*.[262] Another coincidence between *Perceforest* and the *Recollectio* is that in both texts the presiding demon seats on an elevated seat, recalling the cathedra from Tholosan's earlier report.[263] In the *Recollectio*, this presiding demon holds a staff with a touch of which he can make cloths and a lavish banquet appear on the ground—not unlike the rod carried by the usher in *Perceforest*.[264] Furthermore, in the Arras treatise the Devil gives new members of the cult, "by way of recompense, some grace or special faculty, or the promise of money […] [or] the ability to use women or men for pleasure, or to heal quickly by

[260] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 37.
[261] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, §§ 386-388; tr. Bryant, *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, 183. The expression translated by Bryant as "a proper reprobate" is *une mauvaise gloute*, whose literal meaning is "a bad glutton."
[262] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 269; Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 368; see also page 58 of this thesis. Ferlampin-Acher points out that late medieval clerics often interpreted the *luiton* as an incubus, and that Zéphir's role in *Perceforest* allows to read him as a prefiguration of Merlin, who in Arthurian legend is the son of a mortal woman and a demon, but that the suggestion that Zéphir might be an incubus himself is deflected by the fact that, throughout the romance, the possibility of humans engaging in sexual activity with supernatural beings is always denied.
[263] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, §§ 384-386, 388; "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 42; Tholosan, "Ut magorum et maleficiorum errores…," 369.
[264] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 43; *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, §§ 385-386.

superstitious means." [265] Likewise, in *Perceforest*, the master rewards the old hags with "leave to practice witch-medicine against all sickness."[266] The reward is not freely given: in exchange, the Devil of Arras "received a *wadium*—such as her finger, hairs, or fingernails, and very frequently some amount of her blood," after which he gave the new member of the sect "some tangible token—such as a ring of gold, or copper, or of silver, or a thread, or a roll of paper […]—by the touch or use of which some effect that provides the special power that has been granted [to her] is caused." [267] For his part, the master in the romance placed a finger on the women's foreheads and marked them with a sign in the shape of a fork or a hooked claw.[268]

In spite of the parallels that can be drawn between *Perceforest* and the *Recollectio*, the feudal imagery of the latter gives place to a setting of judicial undertones in the former. Ferlampin-Acher observes that the vocabulary used in *Perceforest* sets up the scene as a trial, perhaps a parody of an ecclesiastical court.[269] Although the term *grant maistre* may also have religious connotations, recalling the orders of the Hospitallers or the Knights Templars, in *Perceforest* the master clearly plays the role of a judge.[270] The word *appariteur*, used for the figure who organizes the women and spirits around the room, is a term borrowed from Latin that designates a court officer in charge of introducing a magistrate.[271] The master reproaches

[265] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 39.
[266] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, § 386; tr. Bryant, *Perceforest: The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain*, 183.
[267] "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics," 38-39, 41. Niermeyer's *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: Brill, 1976, vol. 2, quoted in Gow *et al*., *The Arras Witch Treatises*, 38, note 31) defines a *wadium* as "a pledge; an object which in a symbolic way binds a person or his property (the debtor) who, in consequence of an unlawful act or contract, has assumed obligations towards the opposite party (the creditor)."
[268] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, §§ 387. The word that Bryant translates as "hooked claw," *grauet*, can also refer to a "small fork" or, specifically, to a "kind of fork with three prongs used to remove pieces of meat from the pot" (my translation). See *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, 2020 edition, ATILF - CNRS & Université de Lorraine (http://www.atilf.fr/dmf), s.v. "grauet."
[269] Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 481.
[270] Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 479.
[271] Roussineau, introduction to *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, 25; *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* 2020 (http://www.atilf.fr/dmf), s.v. "appariteur"; Ferlampin-Acher ("Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 481) specifically mentions an ecclesiastical magistrate.

Estonné for not having brought a lawyer (*advoé*) and, although he is not the defendant but the judge who will punish Estonné for his intrusion, he sits on an *eschaffault*, a term that refers to a dais or podium and, more specifically, to the one used for executing convicted people or for exposing heretics.[272]

It could be argued that *Perceforest*'s legal imagery actually provides further evidence of its connection to the *Recollectio*. Ferlampin-Acher maintains that the judicial dimension of the episode stands as a reference to the Vauderie of Arras, in which the supposed witches, however, were judged by men and not by the Devil.[273] Furthermore, the inclusion of a variant on the theme of the imposition of the devil's mark provides an invaluable clue that the episode could not have been written before the 1400s, and that it aligns best with the images that began to populate the collective imagination towards the middle of the century.[274]

Partially derived from the old representation of the individual pact, the devil's mark was conceived as a heretical response to the symbolic mark of the Cross received at baptism by the soldiers of the army of Christ.[275] It began to be mentioned, only on rare occasions, in treatises and confessions of the fifteenth century, particularly in connection with secular trials, but it did not become common until the sixteenth.[276] Some of the earliest references to the mark can be found in the documents of the Arras trials and in Nicholas Jacquier's *Flagellum hæreticorum* (1458).[277] Jacquier mentions it on a single instance: he reports the confession of a sixty-year-old man whose mother had introduced him and his siblings to a demon named Tonyon when he

[272] *DMF* 2020, s.v. "échafaud"; Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 481.
[273] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 349.
[274] Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 481; Roussineau, "Nouvelles remarques sur la genèse de l'œuvre," 33.
[275] François Delpech, "La marque des sorcières : logique(s) de la stigmatisation diabolique," in *Le sabbat des sorciers*, ed. Nicole Jacques-Chaquin and Maxime Préaud (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1993), 350, 352.
[276] Delpech, "La marque des sorcières," 350-351.
[277] Delpech, "La marque des sorcières," 350-351; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 342; Russell briefly mentions that a reference to the devil's mark was made in Fribourg in 1438, but does not provide any details.

was a young child. The demon, who appeared in the shape of a goat, had taught the children that he was their master and would make them happy. Then, he had touched their hips with his forepaw to mark them with an indelible sign in the shape of a bean, which in 1458 the man still wore.[278]

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century records show great variety in the size and shape of the devil's mark. It is usually found in the left part of the body, generally in places that are kept hidden—inside the mouth, under the eyelids, under the body hair—, but it can also be a withered finger or a (sexually connotated) mark on the nose.[279] In *Perceforest*, the sign that the master traces on the witches' foreheads is shaped like a fork. Associated with the Devil since at least the tenth century, the fork's role in iconography was perhaps derived from ancient depictions of trident-wielding deities such as Poseidon.[280] With the development of the stereotype of the sabbath, its demonic associations were extended to witches. One woodcut from a series that appeared in numerous printed editions of Ulrich Molitor's *On Female Witches and Seers* between 1490 and 1510 shows a group of three witches with animal heads riding a forked stick through the sky [Fig. 7]. This was presumably the first instance in which this tool appeared in a scene of witchcraft.[281] Molitor's images had an impressive impact on contemporary representations of witchcraft and were a great influence on the painter Hans Baldung Grien.[282] In 1510, the young artist engraved a woodcut showing a trio of naked female witches grouped around a cauldron, symbolically united by a triangle of cooking forks; the sexual and domestic associations providing "the scene with a sense of magic and mystery […] clearly linked to the women's gender" [Fig. 8].[283] Baldung's woodcut would become the first of a series that proved

[278] Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, 242; Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat*, 473.
[279] Delpech, "La marque des sorcières," 349, 357, 359; Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, 255.
[280] Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (London: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 254.
[281] Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*, 23-24.
[282] Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*, 17-18.
[283] Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*, 11-12. It is worth noticing that the word *grauet* used in *Perceforest* also refers, not to pitchforks, but to cooking forks.

an invaluable contribution to the new visual subject of witchcraft,[284] thereby consolidating the associations between the figure of the witch and the fork as one of her tools.

The description of the witches' induction in *Perceforest* seems to bear a greater resemblance to representations of the witch and the sabbath that date from the mid- to late fifteenth century than to earlier ones. Some of the connections here explored have drawn Ferlampin-Acher to suggest that the episode could have been inspired by the events of the Vauderie of Arras. Still, imagining a direct inspiration of the Vauderie on *Perceforest* is risky. As indicated by Ferlampin-Acher, who nevertheless supports this hypothesis, this would imply that manuscript C, copied between 1459 and 1460 and therefore contemporary with the trials at Arras, is really the original. The more modern language of C with respect to A and B, together with the implication that David Aubert, hitherto considered a copyist, is in fact the author of a monumental work which he could complete in only two years, are weighty arguments against this claim.[285] Even if a late dating of this single episode (as opposed to the whole work) were to be proposed, it would remain to explain why A and B, which seem to be based in a copy earlier than C, nevertheless include the witches' gathering with almost no textual differences between the three manuscripts. However, the coincidences are enough for the hypothesis not to be ruled out. Could it be that ideas that were circulating in the region in the first half of the fifteenth century crystallized both in the romance and in the arguments put forward in the trials and captured in the *Recollectio*? The matter is still far from being settled.

[284] Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*, 11, 17.
[285] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 414-420.

Figure 7. Anon, Transformed Witches Ride a Forked Stick Through the Sky, woodcut, in Ulrich Molitor, Von den Unholden oder Hexen, Strasbourg: Johan Prüss, c. 1493, fol. B3r. From Zika, The Appearance of Witchcraft, fig. 1.9.

Figure 8. Hans Baldung Grien, The Witches, 1510, chiaroscuro woodcut. The Metropolitan Museum of Arts, New York, 41.1.201.

Forbidden Pleasures

Two of the most characteristic features of the witches' sabbath, demonic orgies and cannibalistic infanticide, seem to be missing in *Perceforest*. Given the lighthearted tone of the episode, the absence of the stereotype's most gruesome features should perhaps not be surprising. Besides, as noted by Ferlampin-Acher, witches' voracious eating and sexual habits, albeit in a milder variant, are actually implied in the text.[286] Although no specifics are given about her culinary preferences, the first of the women to undergo the master's evaluation is praised for being a "bad glutton" (*mauvais gloute*).[287] When Estonné is given the news that he will have to kiss the old crones, the prospect of receiving a young knight's favors is greeted by them with an enthusiasm that suggests an "unnatural" sexual desire on the part of women who, breaking the established gender norms, lust for a much younger man.[288] Still, the object of the witches' lust is human. By rejecting to direct their desire towards their demonic partners, the episode is being coherent with the rest of a romance that consistently denies the possibility of intercourse between mortals and the immortal or undead. The supernatural origins that tradition associates with both Arthur and Alexander are ignored in *Perceforest*. The followers of the evil sorcerer Darnant, who continue to haunt the forests after death, in their revenant form cannot sexually harass the ladies like they did when they were alive.[289] Likewise, in what constitutes one of the earliest versions of the story of Sleeping Beauty, the lady's father naïf idea that her daughter has been impregnated by a god is disproved by the narrator's explanation that her pregnancy is actually the product of rape during her sleep.[290] While throughout the romance the

[286] Ferlampin-Acher, "Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest," 482.
[287] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, § 386.
[288] *Perceforest. Deuxième partie*, vol. 1, § 391.
[289] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 374.
[290] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 375; *Perceforest. Troisième partie*, vol. 3, ch. 50-60.

author shows a proven interest in popular tales and beliefs, the widely circulated stories of incubi and the offspring of fairy lovers have no place in his narrative.[291]

In a work in which the marvelous occupies a central place, the principal strategy adopted by the text to deal with the supernatural is rationalization.[292] The witches of *Perceforest* have no real power: in the same way that the tension created by the discovery of Estonné's hiding place is quickly dispelled through a slapstick joke of misogynistic undertones, the substitution of cannibalism and demonic sex for gluttony and revolting kisses with old crones reassures the readers in the face of growing anxieties over the reality of witches in the outside world. Zéphir explains to Estonné that, in the morning, the flying women will tell their neighbors amazing stories about what they have seen: it would seem that, after all, all those anecdotes of night flights and demonic revelry are no more than old wives' tales.

Chapter Conclusions

The gathering of the old hags in *Perceforest* is undoubtedly related to the first accounts of the emerging stereotype of the witches' sabbath. Enough commonalities have been found between the romance and other early sources to rule out the idea that these are mere coincidences. In particular, its striking similarities to the *Recollectio* of the Vauderie of Arras (1460) contribute to the exploration of the hypothesis that the Arras trials might have had a direct influence on *Perceforest* and warn that, whether there was a direct influence or not, the relationships between the romance and that historical episode cannot be ignored. As to the points on which *Perceforest* and the early treatises diverge the most, the romance shows its belonging to the literary tradition and establishes a link with folk culture. The inclusion of

[291] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 375, 406.
[292] Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir*, 377.

elements like haunted houses or violent women armed with household tools denotes a familiarity with popular lore, while the early feminization of the stereotype and the rationalization of magic can be traced to the conventions of late medieval courtly romance. In this way, the analysis of the witches' gathering episode in *Perceforest* proves useful for exploring the ways in which the early modern notion of witchcraft began to develop, not only in the minds of specialized judicial and religious authorities, but also in other segments of society.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have tried to explore the relationships and mutual influences between medieval literary and non-literary written sources regarding their depictions of witches. I have focused on French-language literary works, tracing the evolution of witch-like figures from the birth of courtly romance in the twelfth century to the first literary representations of diabolical witchcraft in the fifteenth. Additionally, I have chosen one particularly significant fifteenth-century source to carry out an in-depth close-reading analysis that would allow me to assess how some of the impressions obtained through a general analysis of the stereotype's evolution materialize in a specific case.

Contrary to my first impression, I found that the literary development of the stereotype of the witch does not necessarily run counter to official attitudes towards witchcraft beliefs. Despite the fact that the early vernacular romances introduce the sorceress as an exotic figure of power and include lengthy accounts of the character's alleged supernatural abilities, from early on the romances also rationalize the skills that sorceresses actually possess as consisting mostly of the ability to generate illusions. In this way, they do not contradict the official position held by the Church at the time and based on the authority of the *Canon Episcopi*, which treated most magical practices and beliefs as superstitions and illusions caused by the deceptions of demons. Furthermore, the *maleficia* that prove most often effective in early romances are those that are used to cause impotence in men, which is consistent with the view of some penitentials that this particular type of *maleficium* had real effects.

However, in the course of my research I also found some relevant differences between literary and non-literary sources. Of particular note is the early association established in medieval romances between magical practices and women, which has its roots in the classical literary tradition and is connected to the use of misogynistic literary tropes. When in the late

Middle Ages the official attitudes on witchcraft evolve to heed the belief in a supernatural threat, literary sources begin to distance themselves from these attitudes by maintaining a mostly skeptical position. At the same time, however, they adapt to the new set of beliefs by introducing characters who are no longer capable of bending reality to their wishes and whose defining feature is instead their submission to a demonic master. Furthermore, and in spite of their skepticism, literary works provide the primary association with women to the configuration of the stereotype of the demonic witch, and they probably contribute to its diffusion more than they manage to call it into question.

My analysis of the witches' gathering episode in the *Roman de Perceforest* served to highlight the ways in which works of late medieval fiction may draw on both literary and non-literary learned sources to shape a particular configuration of the figure of the witch, and those in which elements from popular culture usually left out from the learned construction of the stereotype may be incorporated into these narratives. In addition, the analysis of *Perceforest* revealed a close relationship between this text and a mid-fifteenth century treatise on witchcraft composed in the Burgundian city of Arras. This finding not only contributes to the study of the relationships between literary and non-literary texts that address the issue of witches, but also to the debate on the dating of the romance, whose origins in the court of Philip the Good of Burgundy have been discussed but not definitively proven.

I believe that the results that this thesis has produced can be expanded in a number of ways. Some of the literary texts mentioned throughout my work, such as *Cligès*, have been extensively analyzed by researchers, but others, like *Amadas et Ydoine*, deserve a deeper examination. In addition, an analysis of the evolution of Arthurian sorceresses, which was deliberately omitted in this work, should be included in a larger comparative investigation. Furthermore, fruitful results could be obtained by grouping and approaching works with specific questions in mind. For example, it would be interesting to analyze what are the opinions

about witches in the context of the debate around the defense of women. It could also be interesting to focus on the court of Burgundy to analyze the configuration of the fifteenth-century literary stereotype that took place in that particular context, taking into account that the corpus of texts related to sorcery and witchcraft that were produced and circulated in that area included not only *Perceforest* and *Le Champion des Dames*, but various other titles such as *Le Paradis de la Reine Sybille*, by Antoine de la Sale, or an anonymous prose reworking of Chrétien's *Cligès*. Finally, at a much more advanced stage of the investigation it would be interesting to compare the evolution of the French literary stereotype to that of the witches and sorceresses of other literary traditions—for example the English, which dedicates a more prominent place to the village witches known as *wise women* or *cunning folk*, or the Spanish, in which the late medieval feminization of the stereotype is much less evident. In summary, I consider that the historical study of the shaping of diabolical witchcraft can still benefit greatly from the study of medieval literary sources and that, in the same way, the analysis of their witchcraft-related themes can offer a valuable contribution to literary research on these same sources.

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