The European Witch

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The Devil Abducts the Witch of Berkeley

By Michael Wolgemut & Wilhelm Pleydenwurff, 1493

i. This image depicts a nude woman accused of witchcraft being carried off by the Devil to her death

ii. Based on the story of a woman who was addicted to practicing magic, but did not want the Devil to get her when she died

iii. She had herself nailed inside a coffin in a church, but it is said that the Devil broke into her coffin and took off with her body atop a horse; this is what the image depicts

iv. The woman is shown nude with frizzy hair, making a connection between loose morals, witches, and the Devil

Three Female Witches on a Night Ride

- This image shows three scarcely-clothed women surrounding a cauldron, while a male figure oversees them

- Male figure may represent the Devil, who is above them in the image (has power over them) and gives them their power

- Another example of the female body and female sexuality tied to magic

Anonymous, 1517

Unknown, 1589

Three Witches Hanging

- Actual depiction from a pamphlet; three convicted witches in Chelmsford, England who were hanged, along with their familiars (demon "helpers" given to them by another witch or the Devil in the form of a small animal) at their feet

- This illustration shows how magic and witchcraft had become a felony, punishable by death

- The hanging of these women also overseen by a man in the bottom right corner, whom a familiar seems to run up to comfortably

Summary

- What do all these images have in common? Each image contains women, usually accompanied by a man or devil-like creature

- The women are typically nude, their sexuality also put on display (or they have already been killed for alleged magical practices)

- During the Tudor-era of England, women were told NOT to embrace their sexuality; it was also a common belief that magic, and the Devil, were intertwined

- Since sex was also believed to be what sealed a pact with the Devil, and women were seen as weaker and more vulnerbale to the manipulation of the Devil, it was easy for men, the elites, and religious figures to target them

- This resulted in perverse and twisted images given to the public of what a witch looked like, and what to stay away from

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