

# The Witch Figure









# The Witch Figure

Woodcuts and engravings  
from the 15th through 18th centuries

Coloured by Adam McLean

© 2017 Adam McLean

Alchemy Web Bookshop  
25 Main Street  
Kilbirnie  
KA25 7BX  
U.K.

[www.alchemywebsite.com](http://www.alchemywebsite.com)  
[adam@alchemywebsite.com](mailto:adam@alchemywebsite.com)  
[adam@weekendgallery.com](mailto:adam@weekendgallery.com)

These coloured images are copyright. They were part of the exhibition *The Witch Figure* at the Weekend Gallery in May-June 2017.

For permission to use these coloured images please contact

Adam McLean <[adam@alchemywebsite.com](mailto:adam@alchemywebsite.com)>

The original paintings for some of these images are available for sale.

Large format prints can be made available for some of these images.

The cover image is of Adam McLean's facsimile in oils of a mid -15th Century painting by an unidentified North Rhine master, now in the museum in Leipsig.



# Introduction

This book of images arose from an exhibition in the Weekend Gallery in Kilbirnie during May and June of 2017 entitled *The Witch Figure*.

The witch figure as found in European books was essentially a constructed one.

The exhibition explored the emergence and evolution of this figure over the centuries, from its first appearance towards the end of the fifteenth century through to the late eighteenth. The early imagery was totally rhetorical, intended to give pictorial form to the absurd, fantastical imagings expressed in such books as Kramer's 'Hammer of the Witches' (1487) which reveal more about the distorted imagination of churchmen driven by fear of sexuality and heresy, rather than any actual real 'witches'.

Kramer's book bears the Latin title *Malleus maleficarum*, and we note the use of the -arum suffix, the feminine plural. Kramer had a problem coming to terms with women. It is grim reading today and surely exposes a deeply troubled, paranoid and obsessed individual. Sadly, in the centuries following, some entirely innocent and mostly elderly women were persecuted, tortured and even executed, through the horrific witch trials.

The imagery helped give a false reality to the ravings of the witch hunters, as it reached out beyond the few who could digest the printed word and directly impacted the wider public, stirring up fear and prejudice. So exploring the way the depictions of witches evolved in the woodcuts and engravings can be an object lesson in how a constructed image, as real as unicorns, mermaids, dragons and angels, can have terrible consequences. Within this mass of moralising didactic woodcuts and engravings, some artists managed to find humour and satirised the excesses they saw there.

\* \* \* \*

I decided to colour these images by painting them in watercolours. Through my research I had seen many original manuscripts and books with hand coloured drawings and woodcuts and I decided to mimic this in my colouring scheme. Thus I kept to a subtle naturalistic approach, blending and merging the colours. I have found that people became interested in the imagery and once these were sensitively coloured, could then see much of the little details hidden away in the cross-hatched shading of engravings. Over the last fifteen years I have created nearly 1200 coloured images. I have used many of these in my study courses on alchemical symbolism, in my books, audio visual presentations and made them available to people in the form of prints.



Witch creating a love charm. Facsimile printing by Adam McLean from the original painting 'Der Liebezauber' of around 1470 by an unknown North Rhine Master, now in the Museum der bildenden Kunst, Leipsig.





Ulrich Molitor, *Von den unholden oder hexen*, Costentz, 1489.



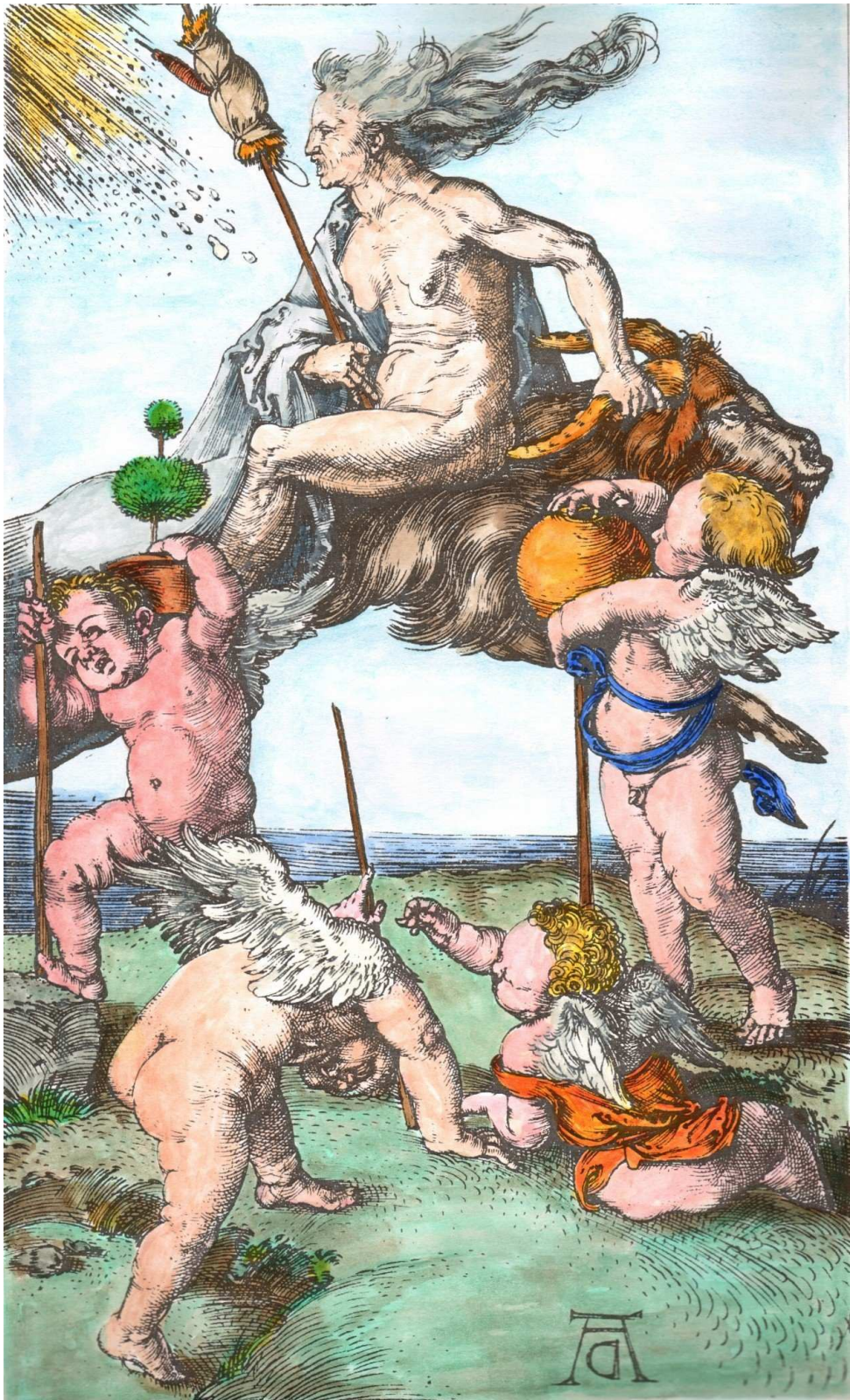
Ulrich Molitor, *Von den unholden oder hexen*, Costentz, 1489.



Hartmann Schedel, *Liber chronicarum*, Nuremberg, 1493



Geoffrey de la Tour Landry *Von der Exempeln der Gotsfurcht und Erbechert*, Basel, 1493



Albrecht Dürer, 'Witch Riding on a goat', 1500.



Hans Schüpflein, woodcut printed by Johann Otmar and Johann Rynmann, Augsburg, 1511.



Daniel Hopfer Three witches attacking a devil, 1510-20



Hans Baldung Grien, Woodcut, Strassburg, 1514.





Hans Burgkmair the Elder, Woodcut, 1514.



Two woodcuts by Hans Weiditz from Geiler von Kayersberg, *Emeis*, Strassburg, 1517.



Woodcut from Geiler von Kayersberg, *Emeis*, Strassburg, 1517.



Engraving Sebald Beham, 1528.



Two woodcuts from Petrarch *Das Gluchbuch*, Augsburg, 1539.



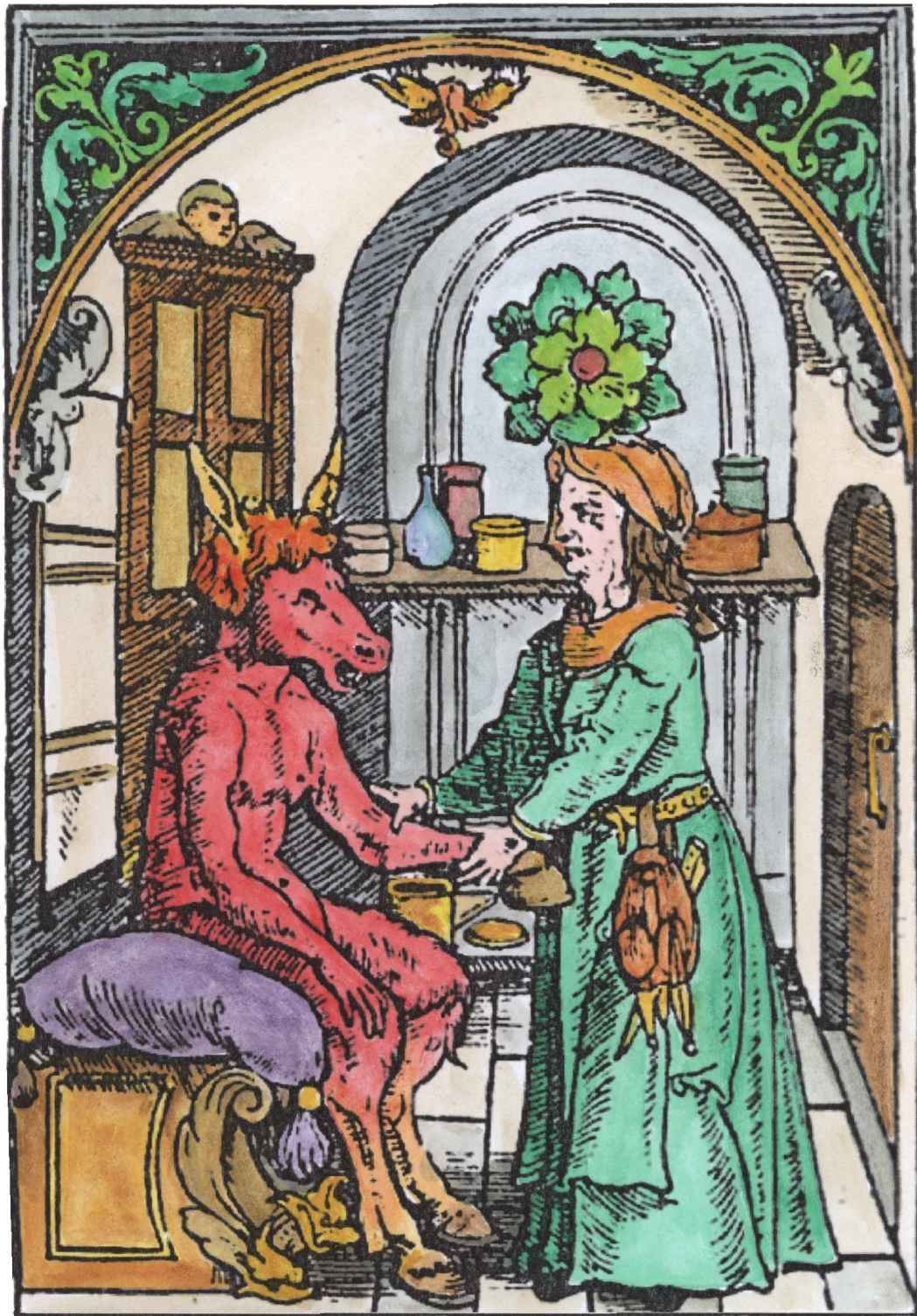
Three woodcuts from Ulrich Molitor, *Hexen Meysterey*, 1545.



Two woodcuts from Olaus Magnus *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*, Rome, 1555.



Two woodcuts from Olaus Magnus *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*, Rome, 1555.



Woodcut from an edition of Apuleius 'The Golden Ass', mid-16th century.





Thomas Erastus. *Dialogues touchant le pouvoir des sorcières*, 1570.



1571 Reinhard Lutz, *Warhafftige Zeitung von den gottlosen Hexen*, Schletstatt, 1571.



Two woodcuts from *A Rehearsall both Straung and True, of Hainous and Horrible Actes Committed by Elizabeth Stile*, 1579.



Abraham Saur, *Ein Kurtze Treue Warning*, Frankfurt, 1582.



Peter Binsfeld, *Zauberer und hexen*, 1592.



Trier Hexentanzplatz, 1594.



Engraving by Jan Ziarnko in Pierre de Lancre *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons*, Paris, 1612.



Two woodcuts from R. P. Guaccius *Compendium Maleficarum*, Milan, 1626.



Two woodcuts from R. P. Guaccius *Compendium Maleficarum*, Milan, 1626.



Two woodcuts from R. P. Guaccius *Compendium Maleficarum*, Milan, 1626.





Two woodcuts from R. P. Guaccius *Compendium Maleficarum*, Milan, 1626.



Two woodcuts from R. P. Guaccius *Compendium Maleficarum*, Milan, 1626.



Engraving by Matthieu Merian, 1626.



Jacques Callot engraving 'Temptation of St Anthony', 1635.



Engravings Johann Wilhelm Baur for *Ovid Metamorphoses*, 1639.



Frontispiece from *Magica de Spectris*, Frankfurt, 1656.

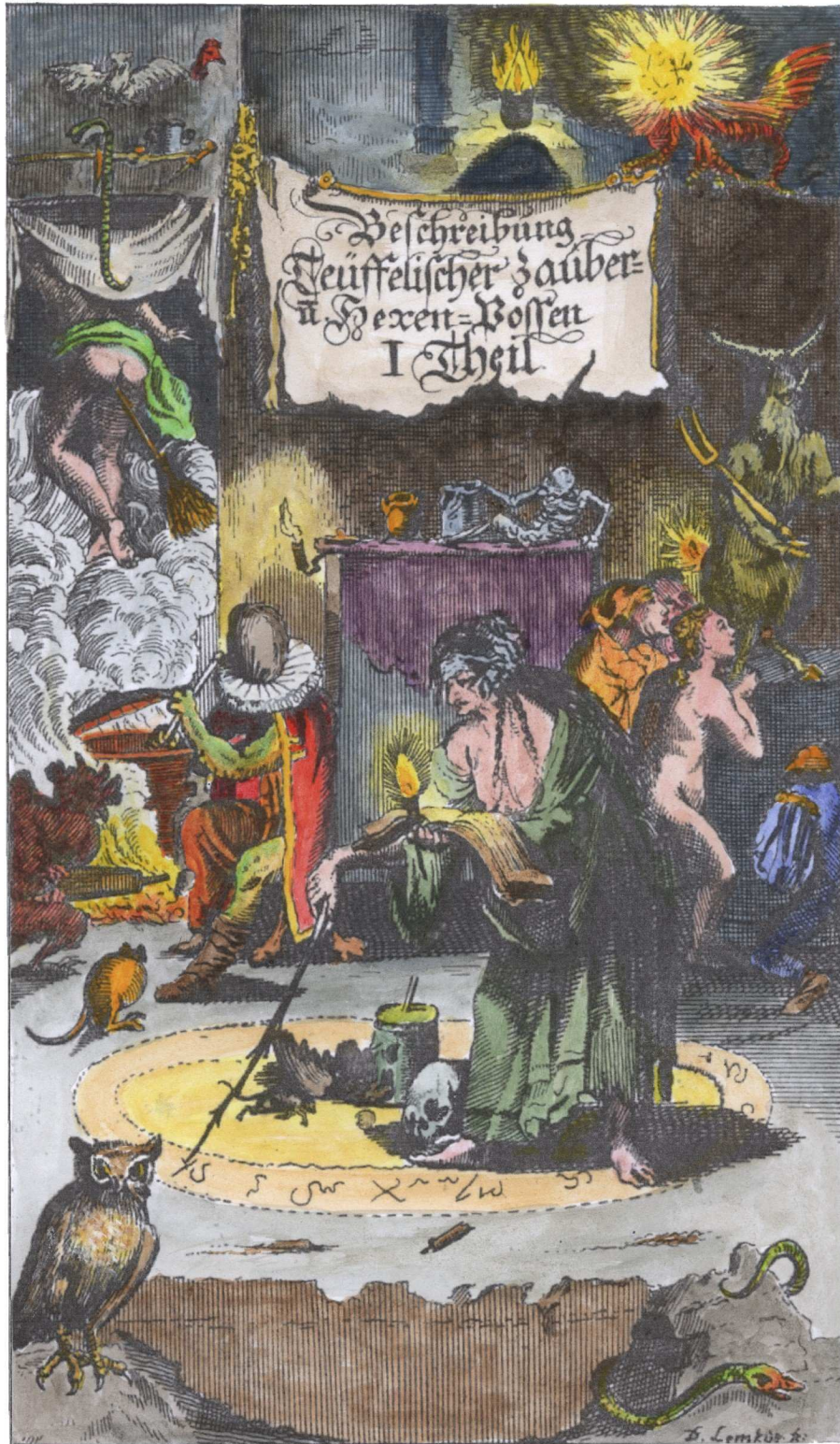


Frontispiece from Ludovicus Lavater *De Spectris lemuribus*, 1659.



Frontispiece from Ludovicus Lavater *De Spectris lemuribus*, Gorinchemie, 1683





Nicolaus Remigius von Weiring *Daemonolatria*, Hamburg, 1693.



Richard Bovet *Pandaemonium*, London, 1684.



Gottlieb Spitzel *Die gebrochne Macht der Finsterniß*, Augspurg, 1687.



Witches raising a storm, 17th century engraving.



Two woodcuts from Nathaniel Crouch *Kingdom of Darkness*, London, 1688.



W.P. The History of Witches and Wizards: Giving a True Account of All Their Tryals in England, Scotland, Sweedland, France, and New England ca. 1700.



1702 Engraving by Romeyn de Hooghe on titlepage of *De Horlende Kollendans op Tilburn*, 1702.



Richard Boulton *A Compleat History of Magick, Sorcery and Witchcraft*, London, 1715.





Claude Gillot Engraving 'Les Sabbats', 1700-1720.



Etching by Bernard Picart, after Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola (Parmigianino) 1732.



Etching by Bernard Picart (censored version) 1732.



Engraving by H.S. Thomassin after Demaretz, 18th Century.

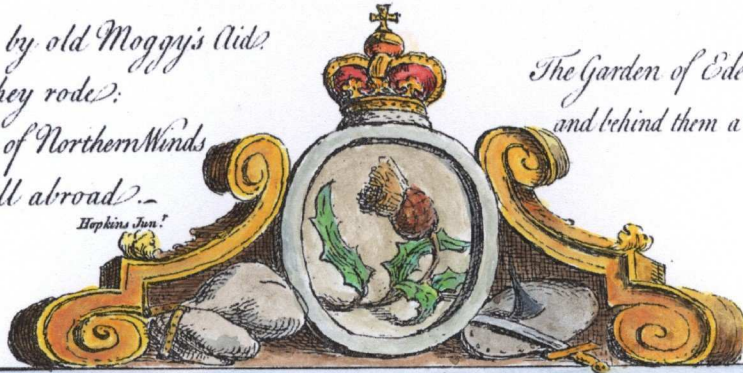


Johann Wilhelm *Hexen Meil*, 1735

*On Broomstick, by old Moggy's Aid,  
Full royally they rode;  
And on the Wings of Northern Winds  
Came flying all abroad.*

*Hopkins Junr.*

*The Garden of Eden is before them,  
and behind them a desolate Wilderness.*  
Joel Chap. 1. Ver. 3.



**The Flying MACHINE from EDINBURGH in one Day,  
perform'd by Moggy MACKENSIE, at the THISTLE and CROWN.**

*Price 6.*

*Published according to Act of Parliam<sup>t</sup>*

Paul Sandby, *The Flying machine* (play performed in Edinburgh), 1762.



D. Chodowiecki 'Illustrations to Shakespeare's Macbeth', 1784.









Adam McLean is a well known authority on and enthusiast for alchemical texts and symbolism, the editor and publisher of nearly 100 books on alchemical and Hermetic ideas. Based in the UK, he has been writing and researching alchemical and hermetic literature for many years. Between 1978 and 1992 he edited the Hermetic Journal and during those years he also began publishing the Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks, the important series of fifty five editions of key source texts of the hermetic tradition. From 1990 through 2002 he was supported by the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica to undertake research into hermetic texts. This enabled him to devote much of his time to research and projects making alchemical ideas available to people. In 1995, when the internet became more widely available, he began to construct the alchemy web site in order to make alchemical ideas more accessible to the wider community. It is now recognised as the most important internet resource on alchemy.

McLean is a great researcher and has often discovered, buried in libraries and specialist collections, important texts and images, both in printed books and manuscripts, which have been neglected. Some of these he has transcribed and published in the Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks and other related series which are sold through the alchemy web bookshop. An important part of his work is to attempt an analysis of and commentary on the ideas and symbolism of key hermetic works. In 1999 he began to produce a series of in-depth study courses on the interpretation of alchemical symbolism.

He is especially drawn to the rich vein of allegorical and symbolic material in the alchemical tradition. To make these more accessible to the modern eye he has produced coloured versions of key woodcuts and engraved emblems. He has also made some facsimile paintings (oil on canvas) of and other emblematic pictures. Here he turns his attention to the enigmatic witch figure.