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Men, Emotions and the Sickbed in a Sorcery Trial from Seventeenth-Century Germany

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Abstract

Some early modern Europeans believed that illness was caused by an act of harmful magic perpetrated against a sufferer by another person. This attribution of magical blame was not inevitable, however, although historians' understanding of the social and emotional dynamics of the process by which illness might be linked to bewitchment remains patchy. This article deepens our understanding of this 'witch-making' process and how it was gendered through in-depth analysis of a seventeenth-century German sorcery trial involving two urban craftsmen. It explains how two men who had previously had a socially intimate relationship reached a point at which one began to suspect the other of bewitching him into ill-health. It also establishes when and why the moments of greatest social and emotional tension were reached between the men and their families. This article argues that the sickbed constituted a particularly important temporal stage and spatial context in this process. As a site of bodily suffering, caring expectations and practices, and intense emotions, it required visitors and caregivers to manage their interactions carefully to maintain peace between neighbours. In the trial examined here, those efforts failed.

Keywords: early modern; witchcraft; gender; Germany; masculinity

On 21 December 1662, the blacksmith Georg Leupold received the last rites from his parish minister. A citizen of Rothenburg ob der Tauber, a small imperial city in south-western Germany, Georg died a week later. For years, he had suffered from kidney stones, which by November 1662 had rendered him bedridden. Far from accepting his fate and the natural explanation of his suffering, however, Georg had sent his wife Apollonia to the city councillors to report his suspicion that a citizen-wheelwright named Michael Wirth had caused his illness magically by means of a poisoned drink.¹ Wirth, who had been the Leupolds' neighbour for over twenty years, denied the charge

¹Stadtarchiv Rothenburg (hereafter StAR), A902: *Interrogation Book 1662–1663* (unpaginated), Apollonia Leupold's statement, 22 Dec. 1662, document 1 of the 52 trial documents (my numbering). For a trial summary, see Alison Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561–1652* (Manchester, 2003;

and brought a counter-allegation of slander against the now-widowed Apollonia in early January 1663. Wirth's attempt to suggest that he had been maliciously accused failed, as the city councillors – who constituted the highest court of criminal jurisdiction in Rothenburg and its rural hinterland – instead began an *ex officio* prosecution of Wirth for sorcery. They did not, however, take Wirth into custody while their investigations were ongoing. He was therefore able to flee the territory on learning that he was about to be arrested in late June and was banished *in absentia* from Rothenburg on 1 August 1663.²

The Wirth/Leupold case raises two questions that have long been central to research on early modern European witchcraft: Why might someone come to suspect that their ill-health was due to the magical aggression of a person they knew, and why that particular person rather than any other? These questions continue to puzzle historians because, as Edward Bever points out, 'disease was by far the most common harm ascribed to witchcraft' by early modern people.³ However, this link can have been made in only a few of the many instances of ill-health experienced during a period characterised by high rates of disease and mortality; otherwise, as Robin Briggs argues, the number of witch trials instigated on this basis 'would have proliferated dramatically, far above the levels of which we know'.⁴ Complex interpretative processes must have underpinned those cases of harmful magic that did end up in court. These involved competing ways of explaining and managing a patient's suffering and their interactions with the person suspected of having caused it, with formal accusations emerging only at 'moments of great emotional tension' between accuser and accused.⁵ A lack of detailed pre-trial sources pertaining to the tense relationships between the protagonists often means that historians know little about how and why such moments developed in specific cases, however. The gendering of such relationships has also proven difficult to reconstruct. Men's experiences – as both imagined practitioners and victims of harmful magic – remain hard to fit into the explanatory paradigms that have long dominated our understanding of early modern witchcraft.⁶

Indeed, as an instance of alleged male-on-male witchcraft, the Wirth/Leupold case at first sight fits the dominant explanatory models for witchcraft poorly. It cannot, for example, be mapped onto the still influential 'charity-refused' paradigm for explaining witchcraft accusations first posited in the 1970s by Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas. In this paradigm, the misfortune or illness suffered by one neighbour or a member of

2nd edn, 2026), 164–8. Rothenburg was a self-governing city of 5,000–7,000 inhabitants ruled by a council of sixteen men (from urban patrician families) which also ruled 10,000–11,000 subjects living in Rothenburg's hinterland, Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany*, 2–5, 9–10.

²Wirth's wife, Barbara, was also banished for having 'probably' ('vermutlich') helped Wirth work his sorcery, StAR, A902, trial verdict, 1 Aug. 1663 (document 50).

³Edward Bever, 'Disease', in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. The Western Tradition*, ed. Richard M. Golden, 1 (Santa Barbara, 2006), 283–5, quote at 283.

⁴Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (1996; 2nd edn, Oxford, 2002), 60–1.

⁵Robin Briggs, 'Emotion and Affect in Lorraine Witch Trials', in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*, ed. Laura Kounine and Michael Ostling (2016), 137–53, quote at 151.

⁶On men's experiences in witch-trials, see Alison Rowlands (ed.), *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2009).

their family was blamed on a poorer neighbour who had asked them for material assistance and been refused. The wealthier householder then projected the guilt they felt at their lack of charity onto the poorer neighbour – who was usually an older woman who expressed anger at the refusal – by linking any subsequent misfortune they or their family suffered to the spurned woman's magical malevolence.⁷ Lyndal Roper's argument that witchcraft accusations resulted from the 'deeply conflicted emotions about motherhood' that arose in the female-gendered context of childbirth leaves even less room for men.⁸ In her analysis of witch trials from the city of Augsburg, Roper suggested that accusations emerged from the six-week lying-in period following childbirth, when a newly delivered mother and her female neighbours blamed the illness or death of a newborn baby on the lying-in maid – the older, poorer woman hired by the mother's family to care for her and her infant while she lay in bed recuperating from the birth. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Roper argued that the magical malevolence of the lying-in maid was imagined to be motivated by her envy of the wealthier, still-fertile mother, who projected her anxiety about her maternal failings onto the post-menopausal lying-in maid when her baby failed to thrive.⁹

In this article I therefore use a different set of analytical lenses to explain why Georg Leupold came to believe he had been bewitched by Michael Wirth, which emotions were evoked in the process, and what this tells us about how early modern craftsmen experienced ill-health and were imagined as workers of harmful magic. I draw on the ideas of Johannes Dillinger and Sarah Masiak, who emphasise the importance of analysing how formal accusations arose from longer temporal processes of 'witch-making' in early modern Germany. Dillinger, for example, argues that historians 'need to seek the primary sources' of suspicion in the long-term situations of conflict between suspects and their neighbours, with 'specific events and activities' working only as 'secondary, corroborating factors' in the emergence of witchcraft suspicions.¹⁰ Masiak similarly argues that witch-making was a lengthy process of social and psychological interaction, involving accusers who began to define their neighbours' actions as witchlike, and suspected witches who either took action to resist this definition or internalised it to the point at which they self-identified as witches.¹¹ An approach that puts the witch-making process centre stage is especially useful in

⁷ Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (1970; 2nd edn, 1999), esp. 192–9; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971; paperback edn, 1973), 638–80.

⁸ Lyndal Roper, 'Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany', in *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (1994), 199–225, quote at 217.

⁹ Roper's use of psychoanalytic theory has been criticised as ahistorical, see Wolfgang Behringer, 'Ödipus und der Teufel', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 Oct. 1995, 39. For a critique of Roper's discussion of the importance of the lying-in maid's post-menopausal body to ways of imagining witches, see Alison Rowlands, 'Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany', *Past & Present*, 173 (2001), 50–89, esp. 57–61.

¹⁰ Johannes Dillinger, 'Evil People': *A Comparative Study of Witch Hunts in Swabian Austria and the Electorate of Trier*, trans. Laura Stokes (Charlottesville, 2009), 74–97, quote at 75.

¹¹ Sarah Masiak, *Teufelskinder: Hexenverfolgung und gesellschaftliche Stigmatisierung im Hochstift Paderborn (1601–1703)* (Konstanz, 2020), 67–89, esp. 73–4, 83–5. Despite their shared emphasis on the importance of witch-making, Masiak and Dillinger reach different conclusions about who was most vulnerable to the process; Dillinger argues that 'any person with socially objectionable behaviour' could be suspected of witchcraft (Dillinger, 'Evil People', 96), while Masiak's case study of the Westphalian village of Fürstenberg suggests that members of reputed witch-families were most vulnerable.

explaining how individual men came to be imagined as workers of harmful magic, given that, as E. J. Kent notes, 'early modern European male witches seem quite diverse' and the product of accusations that were 'essentially dynamic and responsive, not prescribed by some socio-demographic template'.¹² Peter Geschiere's emphasis on the relationship between intimacy, trust and fear of sorcery is also especially helpful for understanding the witch-making dynamics in Wirth's case.¹³ Geschiere suggests that, in witch-believing societies, intimacy, trust and harmful magic were three poles of a conceptual triangle that shifted constantly until a turning point in a relationship was reached when 'suspicions condense and people start to refer to witchcraft', a turning point characterised by an 'upsurge of emotions'.¹⁴ My analysis of the Wirth/Leupold case will show that there was not one but several such turning points in their relationship, and that Leupold's sickbed was a site of high emotional intensity within this unfolding relationship.

The sources generated by Wirth's trial are exceptionally complete, offering remarkable insight into the interactions and feelings of the trial protagonists. They include all the *Protokollmitschriften* (records of the verbal testimony given by accusers, defendants and witnesses made by court scribes as close to verbatim as possible) as well as the correspondence relating to the trial, the legal advice requested by the councillors from Johann Höfel (a lawyer from the city of Schweinfurt) and the final verdict.¹⁵ The councillors' initial decision to leave Wirth free to ply his trade as long as he appeared at the town hall when required for questioning also encouraged him to respond to Leupold's allegations with a marked degree of incaution and emotion when testifying. The councillors' decision on this point went against Höfel's advice to arrest Wirth; it reflected the patriarchal privilege Wirth enjoyed as a master-wheelwright, whose honour and economic contribution to the city the councillors were trying to protect.¹⁶ Finally, in contrast to many other cases of alleged harmful magic where, as already noted, pre-trial sources are typically absent, the fact that Wirth and Leupold were citizen-craftsmen means that much prosopographical source material survives for them, making a detailed reconstruction of their pre-trial relationship possible.

Wirth's case must also be placed within the context of the city's generally cautious approach towards allegations of magical crime. Rothenburg and its hinterland saw 'only' three executions for witchcraft and no mass witch trials during the early modern

¹²E. J. Kent, *Cases of Male Witchcraft in Old and New England, 1592-1692* (Turnhout, 2013), 160, 163.

¹³Peter Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust: Africa in Comparison* (Chicago, 2013), 33.

¹⁴Peter Geschiere, 'Witchcraft and the Dangers of Intimacy: Africa and Europe', in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*, ed. Kounine and Ostling, 213-29, see 215. In *The European Witch-Hunt* (2016), Julian Goodare also emphasises the importance of distrust in the pre-trial reputation-building of alleged witches, which he suggests went through five stages (pp. 88-94).

¹⁵This is typical for Rothenburg; only trial verdicts survive for many other parts of Europe.

¹⁶Höfel recommended Wirth's arrest on 31 Jan. 1663, StAR, A902, document 8. Rothenburg's councillors had been advised to proceed cautiously in cases of magical crime involving craftsmen in the 1605 trial of citizen-joiner/cunning man Hans Georg Hofmann, who was banished for treasure-seeking with the help of demons, see Alison Rowlands, 'Ratskonsulent Friedrich Prenninger und seine Gutachten in drei Hexenprozessen im frühneuzeitlichen Rothenburg ob der Tauber', in *Städte, Regionen, Vergangenheiten*, ed. Karl Borchardt and Ekkehart Tittmann (Würzburg, 2003), 285-304, esp. 297-303.

period.¹⁷ This restrained pattern of witch-prosecution was due to the unwillingness of successive generations of city councillors to treat witchcraft as an exceptional crime and to torture suspects without restraint, or to believe in the reality of the witches' sabbath – the imagined conspiracy of devil-worshipping witches that fuelled large-scale witch-hunts elsewhere in Germany.¹⁸ On the contrary, while the Rothenburg councillors took the devil's potential to intervene in human affairs seriously, they tended to imagine that demonic power worked mainly on people's minds, to delude them.¹⁹ The councillors were therefore reluctant to imperil their own souls by proceeding hastily in the uncertain matter of magical crime and instead restrained popular enthusiasm for instigating trials by punishing anyone who spread rumours or made unfounded accusations of witchcraft for slander.²⁰ This created a socio-cultural context within which the territory's inhabitants – many of whom shared the council's preference for prioritising communal harmony over a more zealous policy of witch-hunting – learned to speak carefully about witchcraft, even when testifying in court.²¹

Like other Lutheran territorial rulers, the Rothenburg councillors found it easier to imagine women rather than men as witches; they were also more willing to bring the full weight of the law to bear against female rather than male suspects.²² In Rothenburg's trials, men were occasionally named as imagined attenders at witches' sabbaths – usually by self-confessed child-witches, a few of whom were boys.²³ On rarer occasions, a cunning man might be reimagined as a sorcerer, although the main way in which men became caught up in trials in Rothenburg or its hinterland was because they were related by blood or marriage to a woman already suspected of witchcraft.²⁴ Michael Wirth was the only man to be accused of harmful magic in his own right, although the fact that his wife, stepson and eldest son were believed to have acquired magical powers from him shows the importance of the witch-family stereotype in early

¹⁷Of the 65 people caught up in the 28 trials involving accused, denounced or self-confessed witches in Rothenburg between 1561 and 1709, 36 were arrested and interrogated in custody, 12 of them under torture. Of these 36, 3 were executed (all women), 11 banished, 1 handed over to authorities elsewhere, and 21 released unpunished; see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 212–28.

¹⁸For more detail, see *ibid.*, 14–80; Alison Rowlands, 'Eine Stadt ohne Hexenwahn: Hexenprozesse, Gerichtspraxis und Herrschaft im frühneuzeitlichen Rothenburg ob der Tauber', in *Hexenprozesse und Gerichtspraxis*, ed. Herbert Eiden and Rita Voltmer (Trier, 2002), 331–47.

¹⁹Alison Rowlands, 'Vorstellungen des Teufels in den Hexenprozessen der Reichsstadt Rothenburg ob der Tauber' *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 103 (2012), 210–36; Alison Rowlands, 'Demonological Texts, Judicial Procedure, and the Spread of Ideas about Witchcraft in Early Modern Rothenburg ob der Tauber', in *Demonology and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Julian Goodare et al. (2020), 208–32.

²⁰Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 14–47.

²¹*Ibid.*, 60–4.

²²See Rolf Schulte, 'Men as Accused Witches in the Holy Roman Empire', in *Witchcraft and Masculinities*, ed. Rowlands, 52–73, esp. 65–8. In Rothenburg, 11 of the 12 people interrogated under torture were women (the 12th was the son of one of the women); only women were executed (see above, n. 17). The worst punishment a man faced was banishment, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 212–28.

²³*Ibid.*, 160–1; Alison Rowlands, 'Hexenprozesse gegen Kinder in Rothenburg ob der Tauber, 1587–1709', in *Hexenkinder – Kinderbanden – Strassenkinder*, ed. Wolfgang Behringer and Claudia Opitz-Belakhal (Bielefeld, 2016), 257–66.

²⁴Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 161–2.

modern Germany.²⁵ Wirth's case was exceptional within its local geographical and confessional context. Precisely because it was exceptional, however, it leaves an unusually rich documentary trail, offering rare insight into the interactions, suspicions and emotions through which witches were made.

The experience of suffering

Georg Leupold's suffering – and the suspicion that Wirth had caused it – was first reported to the Rothenburg councillors by Apollonia Leupold on 22 December 1662. According to Apollonia, Georg had felt 'very strange' and started to vomit after drinking at Wirth's house with Wirth and a saddler from Kirchberg in October 1660.²⁶ Georg had struggled to travel to Kirchberg the next day to inspect some coach-fittings and been unable to urinate on returning home. He had taken home-made remedies to enable him to pass water and gone to consult the pastor of Wieseth (a cunning man in the neighbouring territory of Brandenburg-Ansbach) about his problems. Despite these consultations, Georg then became unable to defecate without medical help, passing unnatural things (like hair) in his stools. His condition had affected different parts of his body; first his back, making him walk 'completely hunched over'; then his genitals; and then his leg, making it swell.²⁷

After the Wieseth pastor died, Apollonia had consulted the Rothenburg physician, Johann Georg Sauber, a Dr Hirsch from Dürrenhof near Feuchtwangen, and the Rothenburg barber-surgeon, Andreas Falkenberger, about Georg's deteriorating health.²⁸ Hirsch had examined Georg's urine and told the Leupolds that his illness was due to a 'deadly drink' – by implication, the drink Wirth had given him in 1660.²⁹ Apollonia added that, on his return from Kirchberg in 1660, Georg had told Wirth that 'he thought he had quaffed pure poison' at Wirth's house, at which Wirth had only shaken his head (rather than defending himself more vigorously, as an honest man would have done).³⁰ Apollonia also explained that Wirth's social intimacy with the Leupolds had changed; whereas Wirth had previously been in their living-room (*Stube*) 'constantly ... so that they could barely eat their soup in his presence', he had not visited Georg's sickbed until just before Georg died.³¹

²⁵ Alison Rowlands, 'Gender, Ungodly Parents, and a Witch-Family in Seventeenth-Century Germany', *Past & Present*, 232 (August 2016), 45–86, esp. 56–60. Wirth's stepson and eldest son had been his apprentices, showing that men could be imagined as passing on magical skills in the same way as craft skills. On the witch-family stereotype, see Masiak, *Teufelskinder*.

²⁶ StAR, A902, Apollonia's testimony, 22 Dec. 1662 (document 1): 'ganz selzam'.

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 'ganz gebuckelt'.

²⁸ Dürrenhof (now called Thürnhofen) was subject to the Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach's criminal jurisdiction; it lies c. 35 km on modern roads south-east of Rothenburg. Wieseth lies c. 7 km east of Thürnhofen; see *Topographia Franconiae*, <https://vb2.uni-wuerzburg.de/smw/topographia/index.php/Topographia>.

²⁹ StAR, A902, Apollonia's testimony, 22 Dec. 1662 (document 1): 'ein tödtlicher trunck'.

³⁰ *Ibid.*: 'er glaube er habe lautter giffit in seinem Hauß gesoffen'.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 'der Würth seÿe hiebevorn stetigs beÿ ihnen gewes[e]n, also daß sie fast kein Supp[e]n vor ihm es[sen] könn[e]n'.

Born in the hinterland village of Wetrtingen in 1610, Georg Leupold fled to Rothenburg in the 1630s during the Thirty Years War.³² He married Apollonia (his second wife) in 1638; she bore him thirteen children, eight of whom were still alive by 1666.³³ The Leupolds lived on Gallows Street; Georg acquired citizenship as a master-blacksmith in 1639, a craft requiring him to shoe horses and to fit iron parts to carts, ploughs and coaches.³⁴ These tasks demanded great strength in the upper body and limbs to enable a blacksmith to balance at his anvil while working hot metal with heavy tools, as the image of the sturdy blacksmiths in the 1568 *Book of Trades* shows.³⁵ Apollonia's account of Georg's illness can thus be read as her observation of his decline from a muscular body to one that was hunched, swollen and unable to excrete waste products. That Georg was struggling to meet the physical demands of his work is suggested by the fact that he began to employ a Swiss-born journeyman called David Wälther in his smithy from March 1662, in addition to his son, Georg Adam Leupold, who had just finished an apprenticeship with his father.³⁶

Apollonia described Georg's illness as strange and resistant to all attempts at medical cure to imply that her husband had been bewitched. When Michael Wirth was first questioned by the councillors on 28 February 1663, he insisted that Georg's suffering was widely known to have had natural causes. Wirth explained that Georg had been unable to work strongly for years because he suffered from kidney stones, which he had treated by consulting Rothenburg physician Dr Josaphat Weinlin, taking baths, and drinking 'strawberry water' and wine containing 'stone-breaking' herbs, such as parsley and mullein.³⁷ It was in Wirth's interest to create this counter-narrative, but several of the symptoms Georg experienced – pain in the lower back, groin, and leg; nausea and vomiting; and problems with urination – are caused by kidney stones entering and blocking the ureter. Georg's agonising death was also consonant with the fate of an early modern kidney stone sufferer, whose only other option was to submit to the often-terminal procedure of stone-removing surgery. An autopsy might have found kidney stones in Georg's body and Apollonia was offered one after Georg died on 28 December 1662. However, this suggestion was only made by the councillors after Apollonia had asked that Georg's body undergo a *Bahrprobe* (byre-trial) – a ritual based on the belief that a corpse would bleed if touched by the hand of its murderer. The

³²Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern (LAELKB), Dekanat Rothenburg ob der Tauber-Wetrtingen, *Register of Baptisms and Marriages* 1579–1669, fo. 96. Georg's first wife died in Rothenburg in 1634, see LAELKB, Dekanat Rothenburg ob der Tauber-St. Jakob (RodT D-StJ), *Burial Register* 1617–42, fo. 214.

³³LAELKB, RodT D-StJ, *Marriage Register*, 1626–1726, fo. 73; *Baptism Register*, 1625–64, fos. 348, 392, 422, 459, 494, 519, 555, 580, 602, 624, 644, 660, 678. Seven unmarried Leupold children were listed in a contract dated 6 Jul. 1666 specifying their inheritance from their deceased father, StAR, B674, *Guardianship Book*, 1628–85, fo. 192^r; one had already married, LAELKB, RodT D-StJ, *Marriage Register*, 1626–1726, fo. 147.

³⁴StAR, B42, *Citizenship Book*, 1584–1745, fo. 94^v.

³⁵Theodore K. Rabb (ed.), *A Sixteenth-Century Book of Trades: Das Ständebuch* by Hans Sachs and Jost Amman (Palo Alto, 2009), 145.

³⁶StAR, A1305, *Blacksmiths' Papers* 1508–1708, fos. 212^r–215^r; StAR, B755, *Apprenticeship Book of the Blacksmiths, Locksmiths and Wheelwrights* 1577–1735 (unpaginated), entry for Georg Adam Leupold, 10 Mar. 1662; he was born on 27 Mar. 1645, LAELKB, RodT D-StJ, *Baptism Register* 1625–64, fo. 459.

³⁷StAR, A902, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19): 'Kreüterwei[n] Von bibine (?) & Petersilien, aaron, v[nd] and[er]e Steinbreche v[nd] erdbeer wasser getruncken'.

councillors rejected her request and suggested an autopsy as a less superstitious way of obtaining evidence about the cause of Georg's death. Apollonia refused to let Georg be opened, however, and had him buried on 30 December.³⁸ Barber-surgeon Andreas Falckenberger told the councillors that an autopsy would achieve little anyway, as Georg had been ill for so long that any evidence of poisoning would have disappeared from his body.³⁹

Early modern craftsmen dreaded becoming unfit for work, as this weakened their status as household patriarchs, making them dependent on, rather than providers for, their families.⁴⁰ This dread – and their hopes for his recovery – explain why the Leupolds invested so much time and money in Georg's treatment; home remedies, baths, and visits to and from medical experts all created additional expense for their household. Efforts to cure Georg intensified after he became bedridden in early November 1662, a turning point in his decline described by Wirth as 'Leupold lying down completely and becoming crooked'.⁴¹ Wirth claimed that the Leupolds had then consulted three cunning folk before sending for Dr Hirsch: a woman from the hinterland village of Gattenhofen; another woman called Saübabel, who had treated Georg for impotence; and a man from Sengelhof in Brandenburg-Ansbach.⁴² Apollonia Leupold only admitted to calling Hirsch and barber-surgeon Falckenberger to Georg's sickbed, although their services would have been expensive enough, with Hirsch coming from Dürrenhof to treat Georg and Falkenberger administering poultices, plasters and remedies.⁴³ Becoming bedridden would have placed further financial pressure on Georg's household; extra fuel would have been needed for heating his winter-sickroom and washing his bed linen, while a 79-year-old widow, Barbara Burckard, was employed as a live-in watcher at his bedside.⁴⁴ Greater demands would have been placed on Apollonia and her older daughters; caring for sick members of the household was a female-gendered sphere of work in early modern Europe, so they and Burckard would have undertaken Georg's day-to-day nursing.⁴⁵

Georg's sickbed also changed the spatial, interpersonal and emotional dynamics of the Leupolds' house. Early modern craftsmen usually slept in unheated bedchambers on the upper floor of their dwellings, with married couples sharing the bed brought to their marriage by the wife as part of her dowry. Becoming bedridden therefore involved Georg moving from the bedchamber he shared with Apollonia to a sickbed in their *Stube* – their main living-room on a lower floor. This physical separation of the Leupolds, and the impotence caused by Georg's illness, meant the end of their sexual

³⁸*Ibid.*, Apollonia's response to the councillors, 29 Dec. 1662 (document 2).

³⁹*Ibid.*, Falckenberger's testimony, 29 Dec. 1662 (document 3).

⁴⁰Cordula Nolte, 'Arbeits(un)fähigkeit und Teilhabe in Alltagswelten des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 1.2 (2019), 28–31.

⁴¹StAR, A902, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19): 'er Leupold sich gar gelegt v[un]d krumm worden'.

⁴²*Ibid.*, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19).

⁴³*Ibid.*, Apollonia's testimony, 22 Dec. 1662 (document 1).

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, Burckard's testimony, 13 Feb. 1663 (document 13).

⁴⁵Philippa Carter, 'Work, Gender, and Witchcraft in Early Modern England', *Gender & History*, 37.1 (2025), 91–108; Cordula Nolte, 'Domestic Care in the Sixteenth Century: Expectations, Experiences, and Practices from a Gendered Perspective', in *Gender, Health, and Healing, 1250–1550*, ed. Sara Ritchey and Sharon Strocchia (Amsterdam, 2020), 216–43, esp. 225–6.

relationship; it also marked a shift in the balance of power to manage their household affairs from Georg to Apollonia. As the only heated room in an urban house, the *Stube* was a 'multifunctional, public space' where 'all kinds of daily-life activities – meals, pastimes, reception of visitors, festivities – took place'.⁴⁶ It was therefore easier to care for an invalid in the lower-floor *Stube*, where they were also more accessible to visitors. However, to become bedridden in the *Stube* indicated that an invalid's suffering was more likely to end in death than recovery. A sickbed therefore gave the *Stube* a heightened emotional charge; the sufferer, and those interacting with them, would have experienced emotions with particular intensity.

Some sense of Georg Leupold's physical and emotional state after he became bedridden can be gleaned from the testimony of two master-craftsmen who visited him throughout November and December 1662. Potter Michael Albrecht Baumann and bark-tanner Achatius Friedlein were amongst the eight witnesses called upon to testify about the Leupolds' allegations between 17 and 26 January 1663, as the Rothenburg councillors considered how best to proceed against Wirth.⁴⁷ Baumann told the councillors that he had witnessed Georg's *Jammer*, a noun meaning misery and distress which in its verb form denotes lamentation, suggesting that Georg's suffering (like that of a childbearing woman) was audible as well as visible.⁴⁸ If Georg had had a kidney stone blocking his ureter, this would have caused excruciating waves of agony as he tried to expel the stone through involuntary contractions. Friedlein confirmed that Georg had experienced 'nothing but extreme misery and need [of relief/help]' on his sickbed.⁴⁹ Friedlein added that Georg had complained bitterly to him about Wirth, calling Wirth the 'arch-rogue and arch-thief who has thrown me onto my [sick]bed and is torturing me [here], the arch-villain'.⁵⁰ Rogue, thief and villain were the three most-commonly used insults against men in early modern Rothenburg; to use all three, amplified by the word arch, showed the depth of Georg's anger at Wirth as the person he blamed for his illness.⁵¹ Friedlein claimed that he had tried to persuade Georg away from this idea but that Georg had stuck to it, saying that he had been told by Dr Hirsch that his suffering had been caused by a near neighbour, who could also relieve it.⁵²

Georg's image of being thrown onto his bed and tortured by Wirth is also evocative. It suggests that Georg felt powerless to escape the pain of his sickbed; resentful of Wirth's physical strength compared to his own ailing body; and fearful of the magical hold he thought Wirth possessed over him. Georg's feelings of powerlessness

⁴⁶Nolte, 'Domestic Care in the Sixteenth Century', 222.

⁴⁷The others were gunsmith Georg Lauterer, gravedigger Michael Klein, wheelwright Johannes Georg, his journeyman Georg Kemm, bark-tanner Joseph Creutzmann, and maidservant Anna Maria Zipfel, StAR, A902 (documents 3–6).

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, Baumann's testimony, 21 Jan. 1663 (document 5).

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, Friedlein's testimony, 21 Jan. 1663 (document 5): 'Nach deme nun der Schmidt Kranck darnid[er] geleg[en]und nichts dann jam[m]er und noth bey demselben gewesen.'

⁵⁰*Ibid.*: 'Soll mich der Erzscheml und Erzdieb also her auffß beth werffen und also quälen, der Erzbößwicht.'

⁵¹On gendered insult in early modern Rothenburg, see Alison Rowlands, 'Women, Gender and Power in Rothenburg ob der Tauber and its Rural Environs, 1600–c.1618' (University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1995), 373–9.

⁵²StAR, A902, Friedlein's testimony, 21 Jan. 1663 (document 5): 'es habe ihms sein naher Nachbar gethun, und der es ihme gethun, könne ihm auch helffen'.

were like those of the childbearing women discussed by Roper in her analysis of the Augsburg witch trials, whose immobility and passivity in childbed were experienced as an 'oppressive sensation of smothering' that they blamed on witchcraft.⁵³ This suggests that being bedbound and suffering physical agony and existential terror generated a similar set of emotional reactions in both childbed and sickbed, regardless of the sufferer's gender.

The events of 1660

Why did Georg project his negative feelings onto Wirth, when he had a more witchlike suspect at his bedside – the aged widow, Barbara Burckard, fulfilling a role similar to that of the lying-in maids discussed by Roper?⁵⁴ The two men had been neighbours on Gallows Street from at least 1641, when Michael's wheelwright father Hans acquired Rothenburg citizenship; like the Leupolds, the Wirths fled to Rothenburg from a war-ravaged hinterland village (in their case, Gammesfeld).⁵⁵ Wirth was around ten years younger than Georg; he completed his wheelwright's apprenticeship with his father from 1640 to 1643, then acquired citizenship and married in 1646.⁵⁶ Wirth's father and first wife died in early 1647, so Wirth inherited the family's Gallows Street house and workshop and remarried in October 1647.⁵⁷ Born in 1613, his second wife, Barbara, was the daughter of Rothenburg butcher Jörg Schubart.⁵⁸ She brought an eight-year-old son, Georg Adam Knöspel, by her first husband, Adam Knöspel from Falkenau in Saxony, to the new marriage.⁵⁹ She bore Wirth five children between 1648 and 1657, all of whom were alive in 1663.⁶⁰

Wirth and Leupold interacted as neighbours in many ways. Leupold witnessed Wirth's 1647 marriage contract, thereby taking on the responsibility of seeing that its stipulations were followed.⁶¹ The two men were amongst the Gallows Street householders who participated between 1650 and 1658 in a lawsuit brought by Rothenburg's citizen-craftsmen against the councillors' perceived mismanagement of the city finances; they became members of the same six-man squadron in the citizens' militia that was formed in 1657.⁶² They also belonged to the same craft association of smiths

⁵³Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 210.

⁵⁴See above, nn. 8–9.

⁵⁵StAR, B42, fo. 97^r.

⁵⁶StAR, B755, entry for Hans and Michael Wirth dated 1643; LAELKB, RodT D-StJ, *Marriage Register* 1626–1726, fo. 97; StAR, B42, fo. 103^r. Baptismal records survive for Gammesfeld from 1634; Wirth's birth date was probably c. 1622.

⁵⁷LAELKB, RodT D-StJ, *Burial Register* 1642–1779, fos. 22–3; *Marriage Register* 1626–1726, fo. 101.

⁵⁸LAELKB, RodT D-StJ, *Baptism Register* 1600–24, fo. 329.

⁵⁹Georg Adam Knöspel was 24 in 1663, see StAR, A902, Barbara Wirth's interrogation, 27 Jul. 1663 (document 46). For the Wirths' marriage contract dated 10 Sep. 1647, see StAR, AA455, *Inheritance and Guardianship Papers* 1666–1701 (unpaginated), Wirth family bundle (document 1).

⁶⁰LAELKB, RodT D-StJ, *Baptism Register* 1625–64, fos. 532, 573, 595, 630, 653.

⁶¹See above, n. 59.

⁶²StAR, B705, *Chronicle of Matthias Vogtmann*, fos. 259^r, 381^r, 385^r, 522^r–526^r, 571^r; StAR, A1286a, *Documents Pertaining to Marksmen* 1502–1805 (unpaginated), document 33 (my numbering); StAR, A1286, *Documents Pertaining to Marksmen* 1502–1681 (unpaginated), Militia Ordinance dated 28 Mar. 1659; Karl Heller (ed.), *Rothenburg ob der Tauber im Jahrhundert des großen Krieges: Aus der Chronik des Sebastian Dehner* (Ansbach, 1913), 239–43.

and wheelwrights and were bound by the same regulatory ordinance in their work practices, as blacksmiths made and attached the metal fittings to the wooden wheels and vehicles crafted by wheelwrights.⁶³ By the early 1660s Wirth and Leupold were working together to build coaches for nobles living in the territories of Hohenlohe and Brandenburg-Ansbach. The literate Wirth was the driving force behind this venture, managing correspondence with clients.⁶⁴ They travelled together on business to locations within and beyond Rothenburg's hinterland, sharing a bed when staying overnight at inns on their journeys.⁶⁵ Testimony from the 1663 trial also referred to them drinking and talking in each other's houses, visiting each other on festive occasions and gathering hazelnuts together in their out-of-town gardens.⁶⁶ Over two decades Leupold and Wirth thus developed a relationship of social and physical intimacy and trust based on their connections as neighbours, work-mates, business partners and – presumably at some level – friends.

This began to change in 1660 when Wirth was arrested on 12 July, after a married maidservant from another Gallows Street household called Susanna Schmidt accused him of having tried to rape her in a garden outside the city wall in May. Wirth initially rejected Susanna's allegation, claiming she had led him on, but then admitted to the assault under the pressure of questioning by councillors Johann Balthasar Staudt, Jeremias Kärcher and Martin Sigmund Gammesfelder.⁶⁷ They released Wirth from custody on 13 July, fining him twenty *Gulden* (ten payable immediately, ten a fortnight later) plus costs, noting that they were sparing him harsher punishment because he had a family to support and because many people had interceded for him. The only intercessor named in the trial-verdict was Georg Leupold, who also stood as personal surety for the second instalment of Wirth's fine.⁶⁸ As the wealthier of the two men, Leupold may have lent Wirth some of the cash to pay it.⁶⁹ The close relationship between them was also evidenced by the fact that Leupold had helped Wirth before his arrest in an unsuccessful attempt to reach an out-of-court settlement with Schmidt's husband and father.⁷⁰

Wirth's conviction for the attempted rape of Schmidt did not have the devastating impact on his reputation one might have expected, given the importance of sexual probity to the honour of early modern craftsmen. He was not expelled from his craft association; he continued to socialise with his neighbours and was the only person to mention the assault during the 1663 sorcery trial.⁷¹ However, the events of 1660 identified Wirth as a man who struggled to control his desires, with the trial-verdict concluding that he had been 'driven by his lascivious and insolent disposition' to

⁶³ StAR, A1294a, *Craft Ordinances 1521–1776*, Blacksmiths' and Wheelwrights' Ordinance, fos. 189^r–192^r.

⁶⁴ StAR, A902, documents 14, 19, 21, 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, documents 19, 21, 22.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, documents 1, 4, 19, 22, 24.

⁶⁷ StAR, A901, *Interrogation Book 1659–1662*, fos. 89^r–98^v.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, fos. 99^r–101^v.

⁶⁹ A post-banishment inventory of Wirth's property listed a debt of three *Gulden* to Leupold's widow, Apollonia, StAR, AA455, document 2; a 1651 tax-assessment had valued Leupold's property at 711 *Gulden*, Wirth's at 441 *Gulden*, see StAR, A1609, *Taxes and Valuations 1491–1693*, fo. 118^r.

⁷⁰ StAR, A901, fo. 95^v.

⁷¹ See below, n. 76.

assault Schmidt.⁷² As E. J. Kent notes, ‘anxieties about the masculine capacity to succumb to the bestial passions’ shaped how early modern men came to be imagined as workers of harmful magic.⁷³ Wirth’s conviction for attempted rape would thus have raised concerns that he might commit further acts of aggression, while encouraging some people to imbue such acts with supernatural malevolence. The Rothenburg gravedigger Michael Klein, for example, testified on 17 January 1663 that Wirth had destroyed one of Klein’s pear-trees in 1660 just by touching it, leaving his handprint scorched into the bark. Klein’s testimony drew on stories about the German magician Faust, who was also believed to destroy trees magically.⁷⁴ Wirth’s former maidservant, Anna Maria Zipfel, also linked Wirth’s overheated passions, supernatural malevolence and uncaring actions in the testimony she gave on 21 January 1663. Zipfel claimed that Wirth had hit his wife Barbara so hard during an argument the couple had had on Christmas Eve in 1659 or 1660 that Barbara had attended Christmas Day communion with a black eye – a humiliating public sign of their marital disharmony. Zipfel claimed that a terrifying invisible being had knocked on the doors of the Wirths’ house during their argument, thereby implying that Wirth’s inability to control his violent passions had been influenced by the devil, who had led Wirth into the sin of harming instead of cherishing his wife.⁷⁵

The support Leupold gave Wirth in 1660 placed Wirth in his debt. However, a conversation between them recounted by Wirth during his sorcery trial in March 1663 suggests that Wirth had failed to demonstrate his gratitude adequately. Wirth testified that the two men had journeyed on business to Kirchberg an der Jagst in late July 1660, returning home after an overnight stay in Buch am Wald so that Wirth could pay the second half of his fine by the required deadline. On their return to Rothenburg, Leupold had told Wirth that he had been ‘very anxious’ (*recht bang*) and ‘fearful’ (*besorgt*) that Wirth would abscond on their journey (as Kirchberg and Buch were outside the council’s jurisdiction) and that he would then be accused by the council of having helped Wirth escape.⁷⁶ We only have Wirth’s account of this conversation, of course. However, maidservant Anna Maria Zipfel also suggested that Wirth was known for expressing the desire to abandon his responsibilities, testifying in January 1663 that she had heard Wirth threaten to leave Rothenburg and his family in 1660 or 1661 after coming home in a drunken fury and raving ‘as if the devil were in him’.⁷⁷ After July 1660 Leupold probably became less trusting of Wirth and more worried about Wirth’s volatility and its potential for harming other people, at the same time as he expected more gratitude from Wirth. These conflicting emotions help explain why Leupold came to believe that his illness had been caused by the drink Wirth had given him in October 1660.

⁷²StAR, A901, fo. 99v: ‘aus antrieb seines gailen vnd frechen Gemüts’.

⁷³E. J. Kent, ‘Tyrannical Beasts: Male Witchcraft in Early Modern English Culture’, in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*, ed. Kounine and Ostling, 91.

⁷⁴Alison Rowlands, ‘Michael Wirth’s *Kunstbüchlein*: Books of Arts and Weapons Magic in a Sorcery Trial from Seventeenth-Century Germany’, *English Historical Review*, 139.600 (2024), 1088–1116, at 1098.

⁷⁵StAR, A902, Zipfel’s testimony, 21 Jan. 1663 (document 5).

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, Wirth’s second interrogation, 14 Mar. 1663 (document 22).

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, Zipfel’s testimony, 21 Jan. 1663 (document 5): ‘alß wann ... der böse feind in ihm were’.

Intimacy and trust

Under interrogation in 1663, Michael Wirth did everything he could to stress that his relationship with Georg Leupold had been one of amity rather than enmity; as Wirth explained, 'they had both lived with one another as brothers'.⁷⁸ They had drunk together with the saddler of Kirchberg in October 1660 'honourably and honestly', parting as 'good friends'; Leupold had said nothing to Wirth the next day about having quaffed poison at his house.⁷⁹ Wirth also testified that he had often lifted Leupold out of the medicinal baths Leupold had taken to relieve his suffering – a point made to show Wirth's care for Leupold and Leupold's trust in the touch of Wirth's hands.⁸⁰ Wirth added that he and Leupold had shared a meal and a bed during an overnight stay on a journey to Bad Mergentheim in February 1662 as further evidence of the intimacy and trust that existed between them. Wirth also claimed that they had socialised happily (*fröhlich*) in Wirth's house in early June 1662, during the *Kirchweihfest*, the annual celebration of the consecration of their parish church of St James. Wirth assured the councillors that he would have undertaken the *Bahrpobe* requested by Apollonia Leupold 'fearlessly' – and that he was willing to lift Leupold's corpse out of its grave – to show that his touch meant no harm to Georg's body.⁸¹

Apollonia Leupold presented a different picture of her family's interactions with Wirth, suggesting that they had grown to dread any sort of intimacy with a man they had begun to imagine was a sorcerer. She disputed Wirth's claim that Georg had gone to feast with Wirth during the 1662 *Kirchweihfest* and said rather that a drunken Wirth and a gunsmith called Georg Lauterer had come into the Leupolds' *Stube* in June 1662 after participating in a shooting-contest held as part of the festivities. Wirth had then repeated a threat he had made at the shooting-contest against a rival marksman called Burckhard Roth, 'to shrivel (*ausdorren*) him [Roth] up like a turnip', thereby suggesting that Wirth was in the habit of aggressively wishing to shrivel other men's bodies.⁸² Apollonia added that Wirth had also boasted that he could blind a person if he had some of their urine. As a result, she had become afraid of emptying the family's chamber pots onto Gallows Street and her husband had begun to avoid Wirth when he could. The Leupolds' son, Georg Adam, confirmed that he had heard Wirth boast that he could use a person's urine to blind or shrivel them on two previous occasions in 1661, once when Wirth was chatting to Georg Leupold in the Leupolds' *Stube* and once when Georg Adam had been in Wirth's house, which he had thereafter not dared to enter.⁸³

Magical and counter-magical practices permeated all areas of everyday life in early modern Europe, including the male-gendered sphere of marksmanship, and I have shown elsewhere that Wirth was a competitive marksman who used weapons-magic to improve his shooting accuracy. This increased his risk of being imagined as magically

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19), response to question 1: 'V[nd] hetten sie beide alß brud[er] [mit]einand[er] gelebt'.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, response to question 2: 'Sie haben alß ehrliche v[nd] redliche leüth miteinand[er] getruncken v[nd] alß gute Freund Von einand[er] geschieden'.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, response to question 3.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 'ohne Scheu'; see also above, n. 38.

⁸²*Ibid.*, Apollonia's statement, 17 Jan. 1663 (document 4): 'wolte ers dem Schreiner Burck[en] gemacht haben, daß er wie eine Ruben aus gedorrt were'.

⁸³*Ibid.*, Georg Adam Leupold's statement, 21 Mar. 1663 (document 24).

aggressive towards other men in other contexts, as the rituals he employed involved the use of human urine and faeces to block and unblock guns, thus providing a conceptual framework through which the Leupolds chose to interpret Georg's unnaturally blocked body.⁸⁴ As evidence of Wirth's illicit supernatural power, the Leupolds claimed that Wirth possessed a book of magical arts that had been given to him in 1659 by a pedlar from the neighbouring territory of Brandenburg-Ansbach named Hans Stanninger. Stanninger and Wirth both denied this, although Wirth admitted to the councillors on 28 February 1663 that he did own a book of arts that he had acquired while travelling as a journeyman in the early 1640s.⁸⁵ Wirth surrendered this book to the councillors and it survives amongst his trial-documents; it contains seven handwritten blessings, six of them for use in healing rituals and one for a gun-blocking ritual.⁸⁶ This was almost certainly the book that Wirth's wife Barbara had spoken of on Gallows Street in October 1662. Barbara had boasted about her husband's shooting prowess to another Gallows Street wheelwright, Joannes Georg, telling Johannes that Wirth had only shot poorly at a shooting contest held at the Count of Hatzfeld's castle at Waldmannshofen because he had not taken his book with him.⁸⁷

Barbara's incautious public words about Wirth's book were badly timed, as Georg Leupold became bedridden soon after she uttered them, in early November 1662. This would have placed additional caring demands on his family and raised the emotional charge of the Leupolds' *Stube*, as the family experienced anxiety about the future, grief over Georg's suffering, anger towards Wirth and, in Apollonia's case, perhaps guilt at her failure to cure her husband. These feelings would, however, have been counterbalanced by the fact that the sickbed also encouraged the expression of positive emotions, turning the *Stube* into a space where Georg's neighbours were expected to show their love for him by performing the charitable act of visiting him there. Here I use Katie Barclay's definition of charity as an 'emotional ethic' experienced by early modern Christians as a 'bodily feeling – love for the other' and as 'embodied actions' that they were expected to demonstrate 'through a set of normative behaviours that were to underpin community relationships'.⁸⁸ Barclay includes 'charitable giving' but not sick-visiting in her list of the 'normative behaviours' that constituted charity in action, although she elsewhere notes that early modern Christians were expected to respond to the sight and sound of suffering bodies with compassion.⁸⁹ These are important insights for historians of witchcraft, as they remind us that charity between neighbours was performed in response to the suffering sick as well as the dependent poor, with refusals of charity, and their emotional and social causes and consequences,

⁸⁴Rowlands, 'Michael Wirth's *Kunstbüchlein*', 1103–7.

⁸⁵StAR, A902, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19), response to question 10; statement by Stanninger requested by the councillors from Stanninger's overlord, Johann Christoph von Eyb, on 30 Mar. 1663 (document 27); taken in Ansbach on 9 Apr. 1663 and posted to Rothenburg on 22 Jul. 1663 (document 44).

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, document 20; Rowlands, 'Michael Wirth's *Kunstbüchlein*', 1103–7.

⁸⁷StAR, A902, Johannes Georg's statement, 17 Jan. 1663 (document 4); Barbara Wirth's confession, 23 Jul. 1663 (document 43).

⁸⁸Katie Barclay, *Caritas: Neighbourly Love and the Early Modern Self* (Oxford, 2021), 3.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*; Katie Barclay, 'Compassion as an Agent of Historical Change', *The American Historical Review*, 127.4 (2022), 1752–85.

taking on meaning in the context of sick-visiting as well as that of alms-giving.⁹⁰ The frequency and manner of Wirth's visits to Georg's sickbed therefore took on great significance for the Leupolds as evidence of his identity as a sorcerer.

Georg Leupold's sickbed

Apollonia Leupold testified in 1663 that Wirth had not visited her bedridden husband until exhorted to do so by master-craftsmen Achatius Friedlein and Michael Albrecht Baumann.⁹¹ By contrast, Friedlein and Baumann were amongst a number of people who visited Georg throughout November and December 1662.⁹² These visitors included the medical experts who treated Georg, his father-confessor, Georg Simon Renger, and various neighbours: wheelwright Johannes Georg, baker Hans Georg Rueg, the latter's father, Hans Rueg, and the wives of a mason and another blacksmith called Jakob Wild.⁹³ The mason's wife brought a chicken, a gift from which Apollonia could make strengthening broths for her husband.⁹⁴ Other visitors probably discussed the family's future with Leupold as his health deteriorated, as Hans Georg Rueg and Jakob Wild became the guardians of Leupold's children when Apollonia remarried in 1666, responsible for ensuring that each child received their paternal inheritance.⁹⁵ This giving of gifts and advice to Leupold constituted charity in action, demonstrating bonds of trust between giver and recipient.

Baumann and Friedlein also acted as intermediaries between Leupold and Wirth, telling Wirth about their visits to Leupold and persuading Wirth to visit Leupold himself.⁹⁶ Friedlein was most influential in this role. A Gallows Street resident since 1642, Friedlein attended Michael and Barbara Wirths' wedding in 1647 and became the spokesman for the citizen-craftsmen in their dispute with the councillors in the 1650s.⁹⁷ In 1663, Friedlein testified that Leupold had blamed Wirth explicitly for his suffering when Friedlein had visited Leupold on his sickbed.⁹⁸ However, in the conversation that Friedlein subsequently had with Wirth in Friedlein's house, Friedlein had been deliberately unspecific, telling Wirth only that Leupold had expressed a suspicion about 'someone' who had caused and could also alleviate his suffering.⁹⁹ This was a masterly example of an indirect invitation to Wirth, as a suspected sorcerer, to visit and cure Leupold, by a man who had no wish to accuse Wirth of sorcery himself.

⁹⁰On the ways in which refusals of requests for material aid could underpin witchcraft accusations, see Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*.

⁹¹StAR, A902, Apollonia's statement, 21 Jan. 1663 (document 5).

⁹²See above, nn. 48–50.

⁹³These neighbours were seen by Wirth on his (infrequent) visits to Leupold (others would have visited at different times), see StAR, A902, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19), response to question 3; Wirth's interrogation, 14 Mar. 1663 (document 22).

⁹⁴Lisa Wynne Smith, 'Loneliness and Food in Early Modern England', in *The Routledge History of Loneliness*, ed. Katie Barclay et al. (2023), 184–5.

⁹⁵StAR, B674, fo. 192^r.

⁹⁶See above, nn. 48–50.

⁹⁷LAELKB, RodT D-StJ, *Marriage Register 1626–1726*, fo. 84; StAR, A1573, *Letters Confirming Honourable Birth and Apprenticeship 1562–1672*, fo. 450^v; StAR, A1609, fo. 118^v; StAR, B705.

⁹⁸StAR, A902, Friedlein's statement, 21 Jan. 1663 (document 5).

⁹⁹*Ibid.*: 'der Schmidt habe auf jemand einen verdacht, der es ihme gethun, könne ihm auch wider helffen'.

Friedlein's testimony thus gives a rare insight into what Briggs calls 'the complex code ... full of implicit understandings' that governed negotiations between neighbours in matters relating to bewitchment.¹⁰⁰

Wirth admitted that he only started visiting Georg after speaking to Friedlein. However, Wirth insisted that his initial unwillingness to visit was not due to enmity on his part but rather to the fact that Leupold had 'hurt him very much' by turning Wirth's stepson, Georg Adam Knöspel, against him.¹⁰¹ Wirth claimed that Leupold had told Knöspel that Wirth was preventing Knöspel from marrying and setting up his own workshop by withholding the inheritance Knöspel was due according to the Wirths' 1647 marriage contract.¹⁰² Wirth added that the presence of 'evil suspicious people' in Georg's sick-room (by which he meant the cunning folk attending Leupold) also put him off visiting.¹⁰³ After Friedlein's intervention, Wirth said he had visited Georg nine or ten times until his last visit on 23 December 1662. He had been supportive of Leupold when visiting, putting more coach-building work Leupold's way and bringing Leupold money owed for work already done. Wirth insisted that Leupold had never accused him directly of having caused his illness; had Leupold done so, Wirth said he would have defended himself against the allegation and resolved the matter with the councillors' help.¹⁰⁴ Apollonia Leupold painted a different picture of Wirth's actions, however. She testified that Wirth had only visited Georg three or four times about the coach-building business in the week before he died, suggesting that Wirth was more concerned about money than Georg's health. She also implied that Georg's reactions to Wirth's visits showed his fear of Wirth, as Georg either said nothing in response to Wirth or experienced a change in his symptoms after Wirth left.¹⁰⁵

The emotional charge of Georg's sickroom was affected by the medical and spiritual advisers who attended him, as well as by his visiting neighbours. Dr Hirsch from Dürrenhof was especially important in this regard, with Apollonia Leupold, Achatius Friedlein and Andreas Falckenberger testifying that Hirsch had confirmed Georg's suspicion that Wirth had bewitched him. Hirsch would have learnt what Georg thought about Wirth on visits to Georg's sickbed in late 1662; as Briggs notes, any diagnosis of bewitchment made by an early modern healer was 'bound to be influenced by the input from the patient and his or her relatives'.¹⁰⁶ Hirsch also lived outside the Rothenburg council's jurisdiction and was therefore freer to reach this diagnosis without fear of being prosecuted for slander.¹⁰⁷ Hirsch thus constituted a useful channel through which the Leupolds could make their suspicions about Wirth explicit without taking legal responsibility for such allegations themselves. Barber-surgeon

¹⁰⁰ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 62–3.

¹⁰¹ STAR, A902, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19), response to question 3: 'dieses nun habe ihme Würthen so wehe gethun'.

¹⁰² See above, n. 59.

¹⁰³ STAR, A902, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19), response to question 3: 'allerhand böse verdecktge Leüth[e]'.
¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* and confrontation between Wirth and Apollonia Leupold, response to point 4, 21 Mar. 1663 (document 24).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* and statements by Apollonia on 21 Jan. 1663 (document 5), 6 Mar. 1663 (document 21).

¹⁰⁶ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 59.

¹⁰⁷ See above, n. 28. Hirsch remains a shadowy figure; neither he nor any other cunning-folk named during the 1663 trial were pursued by the councillors.

Falckenberger spoke disparagingly of Hirsch, stating that 'the so-called little Dr Hirsch' had told Georg that he was ill because he had 'received a shot from evil people [i.e. witches]'.¹⁰⁸ However, Falckenberger did not dismiss the bewitchment diagnosis. On the contrary, Falckenberger told the councillors that he had given Georg *terram philosophicam*, a remedy Falckenberger knew had also been administered by the renowned Rothenburg physician Dr Josaphat Weinlin to patients who feared they had been bewitched.¹⁰⁹ This shows that medical practitioners took their patients' concerns about magical harm seriously, incorporating them into treatment regimes. Weinlin's ministrations might have kept the Leupolds' suspicions against Wirth in check, had Weinlin not died in February 1662 after being Rothenburg's chief physician since 1626.¹¹⁰

Hirsch was probably also the person who advised the Leupolds to make a last-ditch attempt to cure Georg just before Christmas 1662. This involved Apollonia borrowing a pair of plough-wheels that Wirth had made for Achatius Friedlein earlier that year so that Georg could try to urinate through one of the wheels and his wedding ring in order – although no-one said this explicitly – to break Wirth's hold over Georg's body. The attempt was significant because it expressed the Leupolds' suspicions against Wirth more publicly, by making the plough-wheels crafted by Wirth and brought to Georg's sickbed stand proxy for Wirth in the counter-magical ritual. It also made Barbara Wirth appear more complicit in her husband's sorcery. This was because she tried (probably at Wirth's behest) to retrieve the plough-wheels, going first to Friedlein's house, then sending her son Hans to the smithy to ask for them, and then running about on Gallows Street 'sweating in fear' after this request was refused.¹¹¹ The stakes were so high at this point because Georg had received holy communion from his father-confessor Georg Simon Renger, a deacon from the church of St James, on 21 December 1662, thus signalling that his death was imminent.¹¹²

Apollonia testified in 1663 that Georg had forgiven his enemies before taking communion, as befitted a pious Lutheran, who was expected to express 'passionate love for his neighbour' in his sickbed prayers.¹¹³ However, Barbara Burckard, the elderly watcher at Georg's bedside, testified rather that Georg had then repeated his suspicions against Wirth a hundred times on his deathbed.¹¹⁴ This was powerful evidence against Wirth, as Rainer Walz has shown that crying out against a suspected witch on one's deathbed was a crucial stage in the 'agonal' or ritual communication between

¹⁰⁸STAR, A902, Falckenberger's statement, 29 Dec. 1662, document 3: 'weil der sogenannte Dr Hirschle[i]n ... vorgegeben, ob solte besagter Leupold Von bösen leuthen einen schuß bekom[m]en hab[en]'.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 'weil man vorgebe es seÿe ein fascination v[nd] an gethanes Werck'.

¹¹⁰On Weinlin, see Ludwig Schnurrer, *Rothenburger Profile: Lebensbilder aus sechs Jahrhunderten* (Rothenburg ob der Tauber, 2002), 263–80.

¹¹¹STAR, A902, Apollonia Leupold's statement, 21 Jan. 1663 (document 5): 'die Wagnerin ... seÿe in der gaß[en] herum geloffen, daß ihr der angstschweiß ausgange'.

¹¹²*Ibid.* Renger (1627–1691) was a deacon from 1652 and St James' Preacher from 1673, see Wilhelm Dannheimer, *Verzeichnis der im Gebiete der freien Reichsstadt Rothenburg o. T. von 1544 bis 1803 wirkenden ev.-luth. Geistlichen* (Nuremberg, 1952), 13, 107.

¹¹³*Rothenburg Church Ordinance* (Rothenburg, 1668), 231: 'zu brünstiger Liebe gegen meinem Nechsten'; STAR, A902, Apollonia's statement, 22 Dec. 1662 (document 1).

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, Burckard's testimony, 13 Feb. 1663 (document 13), 23 Mar. 1663 (document 24).

neighbours that developed a suspected individual's reputation as a worker of harmful magic.¹¹⁵ It also suggests that the emotional intensity experienced around the deathbed constituted a key turning point at which suspicions against alleged sorcerers were either strengthened or diffused; in other cases, ministering clerics must have been more successful in persuading potential accusers to love their neighbours and leave such matters to God's judgement.

Georg's deathbed accusation was communicated to Wirth by Wirth's own father-confessor, St James deacon Georg Nagel, when he turned Wirth away from the confession service held at the church on Christmas Eve 1662.¹¹⁶ Nagel had probably been informed about the accusation by Georg's father-confessor Renger, but Nagel's action against Wirth made it public for the first time. Moreover, as someone in a relationship of unresolved enmity with his neighbour, Wirth would have suffered the additional humiliation of being excluded from the communal expression of Christian charity that Christmas Day communion constituted. As a result, Wirth turned to the councillors for help in countering what he saw as Leupold's slander against him, asking the Rothenburg mayor, Nicolaus Göttlingk, for mediation in the matter on 27 December.¹¹⁷ Leupold died the following day, however, leaving Wirth to pursue his slander allegation against Apollonia. The councillors duly called Wirth and Apollonia to the town hall on 7 January 1663 and gave them fourteen days to settle their differences with the help of intermediaries.¹¹⁸ Wirth and Apollonia immediately went to see Hans Rueg, an elderly master-baker who – like Achatius Friedlein – was of sufficiently high status to mediate between them.¹¹⁹

Rueg's attempted mediation failed, however, because Wirth rejected his advice to reach an out-of-court settlement with Apollonia. Wirth instead wanted to pursue a formal slander charge against her for the sake of his honour.¹²⁰ Wirth's desire to salvage a reputation damaged by his 1660 rape trial was understandable, but his decision backfired. It galvanised Apollonia into marshalling all the evidence she could to ensure that the councillors concentrated their legal scrutiny on Wirth. She did this by reporting additional suspicions against Wirth on 17 and 21 January and confirming them under oath; these related to Wirth's refusal to visit Georg Leupold on his sickbed, his threats against Burckhard Roth and professed ability to blind people with their urine, his blasting of Michael Klein's pear-tree and his possession of a book of arts.¹²¹ The councillors thus had no choice but to seek advice from jurist Höfel and then follow Höfel's recommendation to investigate the sorcery charges against Wirth.

¹¹⁵Rainer Walz, *Hexenglaube und magische Kommunikation im Dorf der Frühen Neuzeit: Die Verfolgungen in der Grafschaft Lippe* (Paderborn, 1993), 511–23, esp. 516.

¹¹⁶StAR, A902, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19), response to question 3. Nagel (1592–1663) was a deacon (from 1629), then preacher (from 1656) at St James, and Rothenburg Superintendent (from 1661), see Dannheimer, *Verzeichnis*, 97.

¹¹⁷StAR, A902, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19), response to question 3.

¹¹⁸This mediation was done verbally but was referred to in the 1663 trial records, see *ibid.*, documents 7, 9–11, 19.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, Hans Rueg Senior's testimony, 6 Feb. 1663 (document 11); StAR, B186a, *Councillor Lists* 1300–1720.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, testimony of Hans Rueg, 6 Feb. 1663 (document 11); Veit Rueg, 5 May 1663 (document 30).

¹²¹*Ibid.*, Apollonia's testimony, 17 and 21 Jan. 1663 (documents 4 and 5).

Michael Wirth's emotions

Wirth reacted angrily to the sorcery allegations and to Leupold's unwillingness to confront Wirth about them before he died. Wirth expressed his anger so forcefully that it strengthened rather than allayed the idea that he had wished Leupold harm. Testimony about Wirth's verbal aggression came from a particularly authoritative source – Veit Rueg, the Lutheran pastor of the hinterland village of Kirnberg and son of Hans Rueg, who had been visiting his father in Rothenburg on 7 January 1663 when Wirth had called on Hans to request his mediation. Veit had overheard their conversation about what Wirth regarded as Leupold's slander against him and testified that he had heard Wirth say that: 'If he [Wirth] had known that it would go thus with him, he would have made him [Leupold] suffer even more pain.'¹²² Veit had intervened to remonstrate with Wirth, telling him that anyone who failed to comfort the suffering sick was doing the devil's work as a 'terror-spirit' (*Schreckengeist*) and 'affliction-spirit' (*Betrübegeist*). Veit's remonstrations had failed, however, as Wirth had stuck to his words 'defiantly and obstinately'.¹²³

Wirth admitted that he had said words to this effect in Hans Rueg's house when he was first questioned by the councillors on 28 February 1663. He tried – unsuccessfully – to mitigate this damaging admission by explaining that he had meant that Georg would have died less peacefully had Wirth brought the slander charge against him before his death, as Georg would have had to deal with it during his illness.¹²⁴ Wirth's ambiguous testimony on this point was not helped by the fact that he also called Georg a 'godless' man, who had died in his sins, 'leaving a stench [i.e. the unresolved slander] behind him'. Had Georg been 'honest' and 'upright', he would have sent his father-confessor to fetch Wirth to reconcile them before Georg died – an indication of what more usually happened in such situations of enmity.¹²⁵ Wirth was theologically correct in calling Georg 'godless', not only because Georg had refused to be reconciled with him but also because Georg (and Apollonia) had consulted cunning folk in their attempts to cure Georg. This went against the expectation that a pious Lutheran should submit to suffering as a test of faith without seeking help from illicit magical healers.¹²⁶ Wirth's expressions of anger against Georg doubtless also stemmed from his sense of betrayal by Georg and his regret that he had not initiated legal action against Georg sooner. However, they sat uneasily alongside Wirth's testimony about the intimacy and trust the two men had previously shared, making the latter sound hollow to the councillors.

¹²²*Ibid.*, Veit Rueg's letter, 5 Feb. 1663, (document 9): 'Wann ers gewust hette, daß es ihm also gehen solte, Er wolte ihm noch mehr Schmetzen gemacht haben.'

¹²³*Ibid.*: 'trotzig Vnd halßstarrig'. Veit Rueg (1623–79) was pastor of Kirnberg from 1662, see Dannheimer, *Verzeichnis*, 116.

¹²⁴Star, A902, Wirth's first interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663 (document 19), response to question 5.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, Wirth's responses to questions one and two: 'd[er] Leupold solches nicht alls ein Redlich[er] aufrichtig[er], sond[er]n alß ein gottloser man gethan ... [der] seÿe d[es]wegen in seinen Sünden, als ein gottloser man gestorben ... so seÿe er ja in seinen Sünd[en] alß ein gottloser ... gestorben v[nd] lasse nach seinem Tod d[er]gleichen gestanck hind[er] sich'.

¹²⁶See Alison Rowlands, "'Superstition', Magic, and Clerical Polemic in Seventeenth-Century Germany', in *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present*, ed. S. A. Smith and Alan Knight (Oxford, 2008), 157–77; Ronald K. Rittgers, 'The Suffering Body in Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Devotional Literature', *Past & Present*, 234, issue suppl. 12 (2017), 33–50.

Wirth's answers to the twelve questions he was asked on 28 February were generally unguarded and disorganised, given that he had had two months since Georg's death to consider how to respond to the sorcery allegations. His responses to the first three questions about his relationship with Georg were especially impassioned, unstructured and lengthy, making up half of the total interrogation record. This testimony contrasted starkly with the carefully prepared defence he had had drawn up by a lawyer in Ansbach after he fled Rothenburg in June 1663, which began by acknowledging that Wirth had made damaging admissions under interrogation because he was 'a simple craftsman, inexperienced in the law'.¹²⁷ In addition to anger and resentment, Wirth's initial unguardedness may also have stemmed from an arrogant expectation that the councillors would side with him against Apollonia Leupold. He seems to have realised that this was not going to happen in the second half of the interrogation on 28 February, however. Some sense of his emotional turmoil at this point can be gleaned from the fact that he began to weep while denying that he had threatened to magically harm people (in response to question seven), and insisted in response to Michael Klein's allegation about the stricken pear-tree that he had been a 'lover' (*Liebhaber*) of trees since his youth (question eleven). Wirth's use of this emotive term reflected his strong feelings for these non-human beings on whose material properties his craft skills depended. The interrogators' observation at this point – that Wirth was 'feigning great distress' – reflected contemporary understanding of sorcerers as hard-hearted and incapable of genuine human feeling.¹²⁸

Wirth was next questioned in mid-March, after Apollonia Leupold reported a damning piece of new evidence to the councillors regarding an incident that had allegedly happened in 1661. According to Apollonia, Georg Leupold and Wirth had been travelling home one evening after going to Windelsbach when Wirth had suddenly cried out in terror that he could see the devil.¹²⁹ Georg had comforted Wirth, saying he could see nothing, but had told Apollonia on returning home that he never wanted to go debt-collecting with Wirth again.¹³⁰ Apollonia remembered this evidence so conveniently at this point in the 1663 trial that it could be dismissed as a fabrication. However, as she was testifying under oath it more probably reflected her genuine and growing fear of Wirth's magical malevolence. Wirth insisted that Apollonia's testimony was untrue and further proof of the Leupolds' enmity.¹³¹ He rejected all of Apollonia's evidence, suggested that she and her household had maliciously concocted their testimony together, and called Georg Leupold 'a complete and utter liar' when confronted with Apollonia and the other witnesses against him on 21 and 23 March 1663.¹³² Again, while Wirth's scathing stance was understandable, the 'extremely scoffing' attitude

¹²⁷STAR, A902, counter-suit for slander against Apollonia Leupold sent to Rothenburg from Ansbach, 1 Jul. 1663 (document 36): 'alß ein Idiot Vnnd deß rechtlichen proceßes vnerfahner Handwergksmann'.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, Wirth's interrogation, 28 Feb. 1663, responses to questions 7 and 11: 'Hatt sich sehr bekümmert gestellt'.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, statements by Apollonia Leupold and Barbara Burckhard, 6 and 7 Mar. 1663 (document 21).

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, Apollonia's statement (6 Mar. 1663), confirmed by Barbara Burckhard (7 Mar. 1663), document 21.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, Wirth's interrogation, 14 Mar. 1663 (document 22).

¹³²*Ibid.*, Wirth's confrontations with his accusers, 21 and 23 Mar. 1663 (document 24): 'ein recht offenhäblicher Calumniant'. Wirth's wife, Barbara, was confronted with wheelwright Johannes Georg and his journeyman Georg Kemm.

he showed towards Apollonia was noted by his interrogators as further evidence of his hard-heartedness.¹³³

Face-to-face confrontations between neighbours carried an exceptionally high emotional charge in *ex officio* investigations, as they made the number and identity of the people willing to testify on oath against the accused – and therefore the likely outcome of the case – clear to the accused for the first time. Wirth's anguished realisation that his socio-economic status and patriarchal privilege as a citizen-wheelwright was at risk is also suggested by the anger with which he reacted to wheelwright Johannes Georg's willingness to testify about what Barbara Wirth had said of Wirth's book of arts.¹³⁴ Wirth admitted to the councillors that he had threatened to throw a glass of drink into Johannes' face at a recent craft association meeting, but explained that he had only done this because he had been very 'hurt' (*sehr weh getan*) by Johannes saying that he (Johannes) as an 'honest' (*redlich*) master would not accept any more drinks from Wirth.¹³⁵ This refusal implied that Johannes feared that Wirth was a dishonest master and a sorcerer who might give him a bewitched drink. It also signalled the exclusion of Wirth from the socio-economic bonds that craftsmen created through fraternal drinking, thereby jeopardising his ability to work and provide for his family.

Wirth also expressed his anger in a letter written to the councillors in late March 1663 from the neighbouring territory of Brandenburg-Ansbach. Wirth had gone there to see if he could obtain a statement from Hans Stanninger, the pedlar who had supposedly given Wirth a book of magical arts in 1659, confirming that this had never happened. Wirth wrote to reassure the councillors that he would return to Rothenburg, as he had left the city without their permission. In the letter, Wirth stated that Apollonia Leupold was motivated by an evil and vengeful spirit (*auß bösen rachgierigen gemüth*) to deprive him maliciously (*boßhaffterweiß*) of his good name and life, and that she and the other witnesses against him were partisan (*partheyisch*) and hate-filled (*hässig*). Wirth insisted that only God, as the ultimate arbiter of his innocence, could see into his heart and kidneys, although he knew himself to be pure of conscience. Wirth added that he was praying to God to bring down his enemies, to deliver him from his distress (*Trübsal*), and to 'help me out of this labyrinth which is almost killing me and eating away at the very marrow of my bones'.¹³⁶

Wirth's letter was more strategically crafted than his verbal statements to suggest that the Leupolds were ungodly for slandering him with a false accusation so serious it was causing him physical agony, in much the same way that his alleged sorcery had supposedly caused Georg's suffering. Wirth's insistence on his purity of heart also mattered. A godly heart was regarded in contemporary medical and theological thinking as the source of the genuine tears that signified a good Christian's social and emotional openness to charity and reconciliation, although Wirth's insistence again sat uneasily alongside his expressed desire for God's punishment of his

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Wirth's confrontation with Apollonia, 21 Mar. 1663 (document 24): 'recht hönisch'.

¹³⁴ See above, n. 87.

¹³⁵ StAR, A902, Wirth's confrontations with his accusers, 23 Mar. 1663 (document 24).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, letter from Wirth to the councillors, read by them on 30 Mar. 1663 (document 25): 'Vnd mir auß diesen mich fast sterbenten vnd das marck in beinen Verzehrendten labyrinth ... zu verheiffen'.

enemies.¹³⁷ Wirth's attempt to help his own legal cause failed, however. A statement by Stanninger denying all knowledge of magical books was sent to the Rothenburg councillors by Stanninger's overlord in July 1663, but this was too late for Wirth. He had fled Rothenburg for Ansbach for good on 22 June, on the pretext of a coach-building job, after being tipped off that he was about to be arrested.¹³⁸ The tip-off may have come from Martin Sigmund Gammesfelder, a councillor involved in Wirth's trials in 1660 and 1663.¹³⁹ The fact that Gammesfelder was also the commander of the citizen-militia company to which Wirth belonged hints at the privileged access to men's communication networks that Rothenburg's citizen-craftsmen enjoyed.¹⁴⁰

From Ansbach, Wirth employed a lawyer to draw up a counter-suit for slander against Apollonia which he sent to the councillors, offering to return to Rothenburg if they gave him a guarantee of safe conduct. The councillors refused this and Wirth's request for copies of the witness-statements pertaining to his case, asking instead that he return to Rothenburg by 13 July to allow his trial to continue.¹⁴¹ Wirth's refusal to obey this ultimatum was probably rooted in a fear of being gaoled that sprang from his experience of spending a night in the city dungeons during his attempted-rape trial in July 1660, but his failure to return to Rothenburg must have seemed like further proof of Wirth's 'defiance' to the councillors.¹⁴² It also constituted a dereliction of Wirth's husbandly duty, as he thereby abandoned his wife Barbara to suffer arrest and interrogation alone.¹⁴³

Conclusions

As Georg Leupold's experience shows, the early modern sickbed shared many similarities with childbed; both were characterised by bodily suffering, caring expectations and practices, and intense emotions. Witchcraft accusations emerging from childbed are thus most usefully seen as an important subset of those that emerged from instances of suffering more generally, as it was experienced by people of all ages and both genders.¹⁴⁴ Early modern sickbeds did not inevitably produce accusations of harmful magic, however. Attempts at reconciling the suffering sick and their alleged bewitchers were encouraged by the emotional ethic of charity and doubtless succeeded on many occasions. Their failure in the Wirth/Leupold case was due to Wirth's mismanagement of reconciliation opportunities and the implacability of the Leupolds, whose dread of Wirth became so marked precisely because he and Georg had previously trusted one another. In this context, Wirth's testimony about sharing beds with

¹³⁷Ulinka Rublack and Pamela Selwyn, 'Fluxes: The Early Modern Body and the Emotions', *History Workshop Journal*, 53 (Spring 2002), 7–8.

¹³⁸StAR, B27, Chronicle by Johann Georg Albrecht (1629–1703), entry for 1663. Höfel advised the councillors to arrest Michael and Barbara Wirth on 10 Jun. 1663, StAR, A902, document 39.

¹³⁹StAR, A902, documents 5, 11, 14; see above, n. 67.

¹⁴⁰StAR, A1286a.

¹⁴¹StAR, A902, Wirth's counter-suit, 1 Jul. 1663 (document 36). Höfel advised that Wirth be banished if he failed to return to Rothenburg by 13 July, *ibid.*, document 39.

¹⁴²See above, n. 123.

¹⁴³StAR, A902, Barbara Wirth's interrogations, 21, 23 and 27 Jul. 1663 (documents 42, 43, 46).

¹⁴⁴The suffering experienced by the allegedly possessed in early modern Europe could also be incorporated as another such subset.

Georg and lifting Georg out of the bath worked to Wirth's disadvantage, as it suggested an unusual level of physical intimacy between them that was reinterpreted as giving Wirth's touch malevolent power over Georg's body.

Analysis of Wirth's trial also deepens our understanding of how the witch-making process worked in a region characterised by relatively restrained witch trials. It had three stages: pre-trial suspicion building, events leading to formal accusation, and finally the trial itself. The likelihood of initial suspicions leading to formal accusation was strongly influenced by interactions between protagonists in temporal and spatial contexts that carried a particularly high emotional charge, often because expectations about caring and charity were perceived as being subverted rather than fulfilled. This gave a timeline to witch-making processes that was temporally uneven, with suspicions gathering (and losing) momentum at certain key turning points. The witch-making process would have been accelerated dramatically in other regions where belief in the demonic conspiracy of the witches' sabbath was taken seriously, and where trials were more formulaic and brutal than they were in Rothenburg. It was in areas such as these that 'any person with socially objectionable behaviour could be plausibly accused – and rapidly convicted – of witchcraft'.¹⁴⁵

Finally, witch-making was profoundly gendered. As a man who practiced weapons-magic, threatened other marksmen and craftsmen in drink and anger, beat his wife, and tried to rape another woman, Wirth performed the sort of 'tyrannical' masculinity that appeared witchlike to contemporaries because it threatened patriarchal order.¹⁴⁶ However, Wirth's case also helps us understand why men were less easily made into witches than women. His trial shows that, while practical care work with all its risks was dominated by women, the gatekeepers of the mediation networks that strove to maintain the social peace between neighbours (clerics, medical experts, neighbourhood intermediaries, and city councillors) were almost all men. Wirth's privileged access to these networks as a citizen-craftsman gave him a greater chance of managing the witchcraft suspicions against him without going to court than would have been available to a woman or a peasant, as well as preferential legal treatment once he was accused. This kept him out of gaol and enabled him to flee Rothenburg without being arrested and possibly forced into making a confession. However, Wirth was still banished and lost his family, citizenship and property as a result of his trial, an outcome with which Georg and Apollonia Leupold would presumably have been satisfied.

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¹⁴⁵See above, n. 11.

¹⁴⁶See also Kent, 'Tyrannical Beasts'.

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