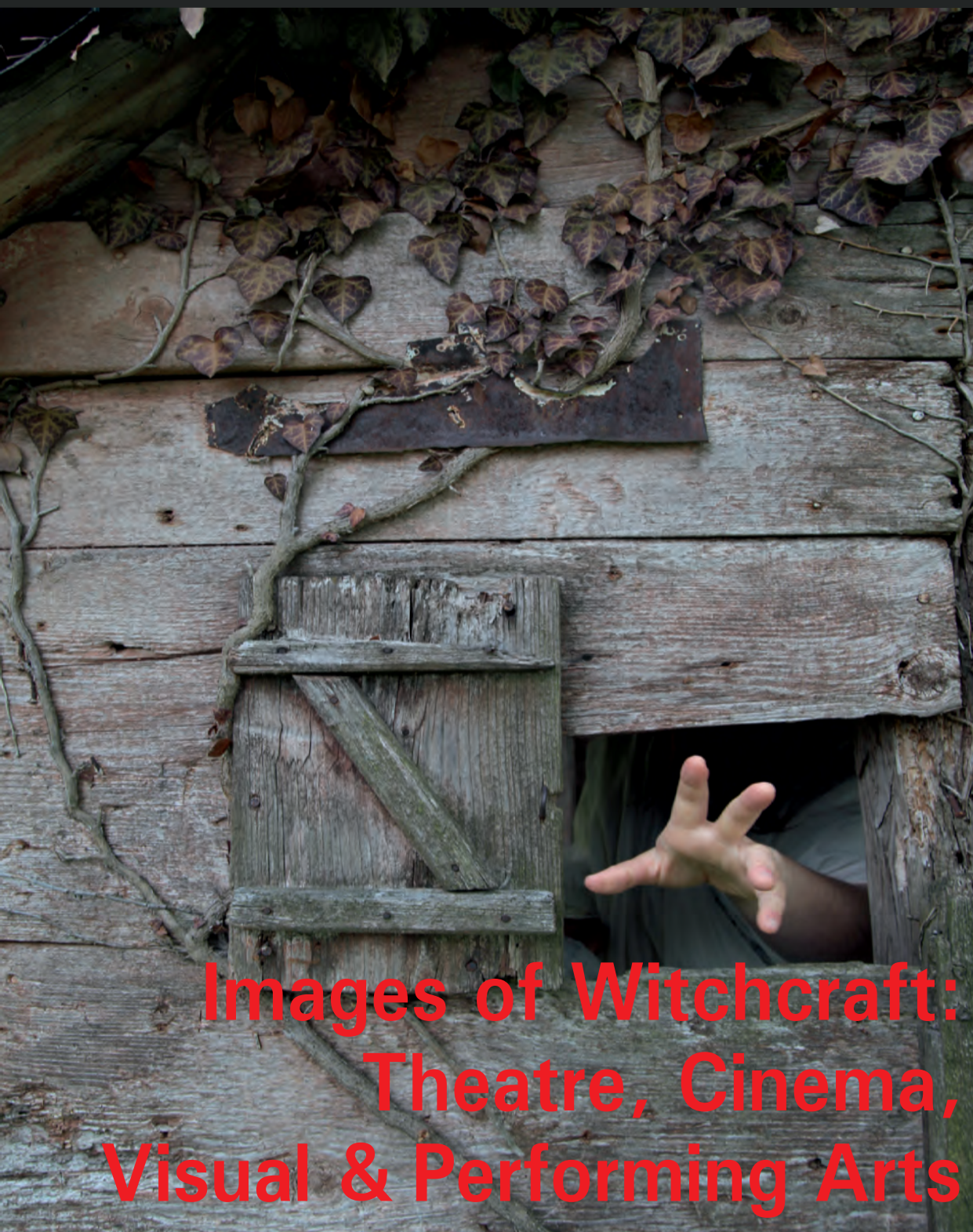


# DRAMATICA

STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI

1/2020



**Images of Witchcraft:  
Theatre, Cinema,  
Visual & Performing Arts**

**STUDIA  
UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
DRAMATICA**

**1/2020**

**March**



# STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI DRAMATICA

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## Special Thematic Issue

### *Images of Witchcraft: Theatre, Cinema, Visual & Performing Arts*

*Issue Editors: Ioan Pop-Curşeu, Delia Enyedi*

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## *Foreword*

### **IOAN POP-CURȘEU\***

This special issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica* is devoted to a research topic developed in a project supported by the Ministry of Education and Research, in a grant UEFISCDI PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0067, contract number 135/2018, with the title *Iconography of Witchcraft, an Anthropological Approach: Cinema, Theatre, Visual Arts* (IWACTA). In the Romanian cultural context, the implementation of the project seemed very important from a scientific and institutional point of view, by its possibilities of making some significant contributions to the field of visual anthropology.

The research team, composed by Ioan Pop-Curșeu, Delia Enyedi, Daria Ioan, Rareș Stoica and Valer Cosma, intended to analyze how the witch was represented in cinema, theatre, visual arts, and how the fascinating iconography of witchcraft was related to complex socio-cultural structures, practices and interactions. In this respect, we built complex repertoires of movies, theatrical shows and visual representations of witches in cultural spaces all over the world. We worked on iconographical typologies, trying to understand what determines the apparition and development of such typologies, by using a very strict historicist approach that took into account all the details of the studied phenomena.

It is true that the scientific approaches to witchcraft, as a social and cultural phenomenon, are very complex and that many aspects have been addressed and systematized by previous researches, as shown in some works

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with an encyclopedic profile.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, there are still many aspects to be discovered and analyzed. For example, the iconography of witchcraft has been a main research topic for Charles Zika, but only regarding the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries and the images in the limited sense of the word (paintings, engravings, drawings).<sup>2</sup> The theatrical iconography of the witch, not very often addressed by researchers, deserves a better scientific place, because the theatre was a great reservoir of socio-cultural representations of witchcraft, for example in Elizabethan England – as shown by Diane Purkiss.<sup>3</sup> But, besides Shakespeare and Elizabethan dramatists, there are still many aspects to be discovered in the multi-layered link between theatre and witchcraft.

During the implementation of the project, the IWACTA research team organized an international conference, at the Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2019. We tried to bring together eminent scholars of witchcraft, Ph.D. students, visual artists and performers who presented their researches to a large and very interested audience. The participants came from 15 different countries (including Romania) and most of the continents were represented in Cluj: Europe, Africa, Australia, North America... The papers presented at the IWACTA conference were stimulating and solid, so our research team was able to make a characteristic selection for this special issue of *Studia*. This issue will be paralleled by a thematic volume, to be published later in 2020, gathering other significant scientific contributions delivered during the Iwacta conference.

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. The Western Tradition*, Ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2006), *Beyond the Witch Trials. Witchcraft and magic in Enlightenment Europe*, Ed. Willem de Blécourt, Owen Davies (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), *Witchcraft Continued. Popular Magic in Modern Europe*, Ed. Willem de Blécourt, Owen Davies (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), Michael D. Bailey, *Historical Dictionary of Witchcraft* (Lanham, Maryland, and Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2003), *Magie et sorcellerie en Europe. Du Moyen Age à nos jours*, Ed. Robert Muchembled (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft. Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), *Exorcising our Demons. Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History. Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005 [1996]), 180-276.

## FOREWORD

For this work session of researchers and academics, Ph.D. students, artists and interested people, the special guest, the keynote speaker was an eminent scholar: Willem de Blécourt, Honorary research fellow at the Meertens Institute, KNAW, Amsterdam. His name and works are well known to everyone who wants to study historical anthropology, witchcraft, lycanthropy, fairy tales or magic. The work of Willem de Blécourt started with a historical investigation of the witchcraft accusations in the Netherlands. It was the theme of his Ph.D. dissertation, but also a line of continuity in his researches, because he has been publishing very interesting papers based on Dutch material.<sup>4</sup> But Willem de Blécourt incessantly diversified his approach and wrote papers on topics regarding the history and metamorphosis of witchcraft all across Europe, from North to South and from West to East. He worked alone, or in collaboration with other scholars interested in witchcraft. Nowadays, Willem de Blécourt is the greatest editor of scientific literature on magic and witchcraft. With Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies, he is the editor of a prestigious series *Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic*, published by Palgrave & Macmillan.<sup>5</sup> Willem de Blécourt supervised several volumes on magic and witchcraft, to which he has also brought his contribution with a number of papers. De Blécourt also focused his reflections on a very fertile topic: the study of fairy tales. He investigated the genealogy and evolution of fairy tales, as well as the origins of some literary types. Of course, even in fairy tales, he searched for characters and narrative situations linked to the universe of witchcraft and magic.<sup>6</sup> Witchcraft in cinema and TV film is the most recent field of study for Willem de Blécourt, with some excellent printed results,<sup>7</sup> but also with papers yet to come. Willem de Blécourt's contribution to *Studia*

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<sup>4</sup> Willem de Blécourt, "The Flying Witch: Its Resonance in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands," *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 11, no. 1 (2016): 73-93, doi:10.1353/mrw.2016.0010, "I Would Have Eaten You Too: Werewolf Legends in the Flanders, Dutch and German Area," *Folklore* 118, no. 1 (2007): 23-43, "Bedding the Nightmare: Somatic Experience and Narrative Meaning in Dutch and Flemish Legend Texts," *Folklore* 114, issue 2 (2003): 227-245.

<sup>5</sup> See the catalogue at: <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14693> (accessed March 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Willem de Blécourt, *Tales of Magic, Tales in Print. On the Genealogy of Fairy Tales and the Brothers Grimm* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Willem de Blécourt, "Witches on Screen," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, ed. Owen Davies (Oxford: OUP, 2017): 253-280.

*Dramatica*, on *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, is directly related to his recent interest in cinema and television series.

As stated before, we've selected some papers presented at our conference for this special issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica*. In its first section, the journal intends to propose some openings on the study of witchcraft in theatre and performance. Ștefana and Ioan Pop-Curșeu, in their paper *The Mask of the Witch: from Ritual to Carnival and Theatre*, try to gather data on the use of witch masks in carnival processions, relating them to ancient ritual practices. In this respect, the theories of Carlo Ginzburg on witchcraft are recalled and their validity is put into question. Then, the carnivalesque material is paralleled to the emergence of theatre and of scenic representations of witches and witchcraft practices.

Three papers, signed by Alexandra Jeler, Elisabeth Lacombe, Turkan Yilmaz, focus on Elizabethan drama, especially on the representation of witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The interpretative perspectives are very diverse. Jeler adopts a point of view inspired by religious and philological studies, deciphering the various meaning of the appellation of the witches in Shakespeare's play ("weird sisters"). Lacombe establishes a connection between the demonological treatises that are interpreting witchcraft in relation to humours (melancholy), and the fictional representations of witches in Elizabethan plays. Yilmaz adopts a more political perspective, contrasting the enigmatic yet egalitarian and free society of the witches (in *Macbeth* and *The Witch* by Thomas Middleton) and the hypocritical norms of the plays' societies specifically related to sexuality and freedom of the individuals.

Three other papers, signed by Pierre Philippe-Meden, Suzana Marjanić, Ophélie Naessens, are focusing on performances, showing that the witch figure is very important for contemporary artists, in order to question the imperatives of a patriarchal society and to formulate aesthetic and political statements. Philippe-Meden approaches a legendary performance by artist and dancer Rita Renoir, called *Le Diable*. Marjanić offers valuable insights on Croatian contemporary art scene, while Naessens focuses on the so-called Witch Blocks and on the work of artists such as Camille Ducellier, Tatiana Karl Pez, Myriam Mihindou. The last paper of the first section of this special issue presents a novel, *The Witches of Smyrna* by Mara Meimaridi (2001), and its adaptations for TV and especially for the stage.

Compared to ancient iconography of witchcraft, one should also notice that there is a modern and contemporary iconography that still needs to be analyzed, as it was developed in various media (printed press and comic books, video art, Internet, music shows), and especially in cinema, from silent film to 3D and 4Dx contemporary movies. Speaking of cinema, there are not so many works yet that focus on the figure of the witch in horror and fantasy movies,<sup>8</sup> so the understanding of this matter should be extended by relating it to the iconographic tradition.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, a study of the mechanisms of illusion would be fundamental, because cinema uses specific tricks of editing in order to create its enchanting and powerful witches, characters with as many appearances as ancient Circe (silent movies as *Häxan*, films signed by Roger Corman, Terence Fisher, Mario Bava, Dario Argento, Paul Naschy, Roman Polanski, or the *Harry Potter* series are only a few examples for the great technical means cinema can use in order to produce artistic verisimilitude in the realm of the supernatural).

In the second section of our issue of *Studia*, the papers are focused on some aspects of this rich and fascinating matter offered by cinema and TV. As in the first section, we tried to group the papers in a logical and historical sequence. Delia Enyedi proposes a solid historical study on the figures of the witch in silent cinema. David Melbye focuses on a rich era of horror film, presenting new insights on the “satanic cinema in the seventies.” Two papers, by Willem de Blécourt and Alex McCann, take into account the world of witchcraft in TV series, which have a remarkable worldwide echo

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<sup>8</sup> Estella Tincknell, “Feminine Boundaries. Adolescence, Witchcraft, and the Supernatural in New Gothic Cinema and Television,” in *Horror Zone. The Cultural Experience of Contemporary Horror Cinema*, ed. Ian Conrich (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010): 245-258, Heidi Breuer, “Hags on Film. Contemporary Echoes of the Early Modern Wicked Witch,” in *Crafting the Witch. Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York & London: Routledge, 2009): 137-162, Douglas E. Cowan, *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), Tanya Krzwynska, *A Skin for Dancing in: Possession, Witchcraft and Voodoo in Film* (London, Flicks Books, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> I tried to do so in a paper from 2015, analyzing the aesthetical opposition between the extraordinary beauty of the witch and her monstrous ugliness in some films that can be paralleled to paintings dating back to 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries: Ioan Pop-Curșeu, “Corps de sorcières, entre horreur et beauté. De la peinture au cinéma, avatars d’une tradition iconographique,” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Series dramatica* 60, no. 1 (2015): 119-130.

with the apparition and development of new platforms such as Netflix. Willem de Blécourt places the series he discusses, namely *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, in a large network of comparisons with comics, animated series, films and other media products. He studies the cultural sources and borrowings used in the series. *Chilling Adventures...* introduces interesting developments in witchcraft media mythologies, by setting the short plots in a more clear Satanic and (counter-)Christian realm. Alex McCann constructs a feminist analysis of Samantha from *Bewitched* series, through lenses borrowed from a seminal book of second wave feminism: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

Till Kuhnle, in his paper, starts an original investigation, putting into light the sources of an emblematic erotic film of the seventies: *Successive Slidings of Pleasure* by Alain Robbe-Grillet (1974). As stated by Robbe-Grillet himself, this film was highly influenced by *La Sorcière (Satanism and Witchcraft)*, published by French historian Jules Michelet in 1862: Till Kuhnle carefully presents the subtle links between the written essay and the filmic text. Even if Michelet was criticized through time by various historians, his romantic method and his views – deprived of any scientific foundation, but yet fascinating for artists – live a new life in some contemporary essays on witchcraft (those of Diane Purkiss, Mary Daly, Silvia Federici, Barbara Ehrenreich & Deirdre English, authors that think and write like Michelet did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although they haven't read his *La Sorcière*).

Claudia Negrea's paper is concerned with the coming-of-age subgenre in cinema and with the analysis of the importance of witchcraft in this specific narrative frame and visual structure. She proposes two case studies, the Norwegian film *Thelma* by Joachim Trier and the American film *The Witch* by Robert Eggers. Daria Ioan focuses on photography and on the representations of magic through still images, describing her own work as a photographer, together with a team of students. As for the last paper of this issue of *Studia*, signed by Rebeca Dogaru, it offers a case study of witchcraft images and metaphors in the music of the British extreme metal band Cradle of Filth. It should be pointed out here that witchcraft in rock music and in stage performances by rockers could be a valuable argument for an entire volume of essays and articles. There is a very rich matter a researcher interested in this topic would find not only in the musical compositions, but also in performances

## FOREWORD

staged by bands and artists such as Coven, Black Widow, Jethro Tull, Ozzy Osbourne, Black Sabbath, Venom, Inkkubus-Sukkubus, Bishop of Hexen, Witch Mountain, Witchfinder General, Nightwish and many others seems to us of a great interest.

A general view on this issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica* could point out the richness of the content, as well as the variety of approaches. Within two different sections, we tried to cover many aspects, from ancient carnivalesque rituals to contemporary performances, through Elizabethan theatre, and from silent film to TV series and rock music. In these 16 papers and in the two reviews, a sort of history is depicted, a history dealing with artistic representations of witchcraft. Even though these representations know how to take advantage of the specific freedom of artistic creation, they remain solidly grounded in anthropological and historical facts. These facts were cited and analyzed each time they shed a light on art...

On the other hand, the methodological frames and the means of interpretation are very diverse and – at the first glance – even irreconcilable. Historicism and religious history, feminism, psychoanalysis, philology shape some of the papers published here and, sometimes, these different approaches are even combined in the attempt to better understand the artistic representation of witchcraft. This issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica* may be seen as a radiography of what is thought nowadays on witchcraft in scientific and scholar circles. We should emphasize, though, that we are aware of the fact that each interpretation is inscribed in history, that mind frames and reading strategies change over time and that our present understandings of witchcraft may perhaps not be completely acceptable in twenty or fifty years.

In a sort of a preliminary conclusion, it should be noted that what we tried here is to provide valuable insights on the images of witchcraft, to open paths for visual anthropology researches and for interrogations on the still persistent mystery of witchcraft and magic... In fact, our focus on images – in a wide sense of the word – is based on the conviction that images fascinate and attract more than scientific theories and historical approaches do, and that they will be as interesting and appealing for people in the future, as they are for us now, in this trouble and bizarre present, when only magic seems able to deliver the humanity from its viruses.



# **THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE**





*The Mask of the Witch:  
from Ritual to Carnival and Theatre*

IOAN POP-CURȘEU, ȘTEFANA POP-CURȘEU\*

**Abstract:** This paper tries to approach a problem of great interest for theatrical anthropology: the mask of the witch, raising some questions concerning its origin and antiquity. In order to propose some possible answers, the paper briefly re-examines Carlo Ginzburg's view on witchcraft in *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath (Storia notturna)*, with emphasis on some elements that are still useful, in spite of the criticism this seminal book provoked. Then, some occurrences of witch masks in carnival processions are discussed, with regard to Latin or Germanic cultures. The subsequent question is: are these masks old ones, with a long evolution and permanent changes in form and signification, or – at the opposite – are they recent, appearing in carnivals only after the end of the witch-craze, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? The article ends with some examples of witch masks used in theatre (Shakespeare – Ion Sava, Court Ballets): their carnivalesque origins – more recent or more ancient – are underlined.

**Keywords:** mask, witch, witchcraft, carnival, theatre, folklore.

**Acknowledgements:** This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Education and Research, UEFISCDI PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0067, contract number 135/2018, under the title *Iconography of Witchcraft, an Anthropological Approach: Cinema, Theatre, Visual Arts*, project manager Ioan Pop-Curșeu.

A study focused on the mask of the witch through various periods of history is both challenging and risky, because it involves a vast amount of knowledge in religious history, anthropology, folklore and art, and because

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it requires generalization and systematization of fascinating and sometimes incomprehensible phenomena, extended in time and space. We'll try, though, to propose an outline of this extensive study, to trace some maps and to establish some perspective points, that could be useful for future researches regarding the anthropological basis of theatrical practices. On the other hand, our approach intends to throw light on a related topic: the possibility to find folkloric sources for the witches' sabbath stereotype.

### Brief Review of Literature. Is Ginzburg Still Useful?

First, let us take into consideration the word *mask* itself. Nowadays, it is present in the great majority of modern European languages (Romanic, Germanic, Slavic) and it means a very fascinating prop present in the theatrical and social practices. But compared to other words of equal cultural importance, the *mask* has low and unclear origins. The word is not Greek, nor Classical Latin, but of "barbarian" origin, and its first appearance is medieval. Jean-Claude Schmitt shows that medieval idioms used several words to designate the "mask," each one of them meaning both the object itself and the "supernatural powers" that were associated to the ritual and the artistic use of masks: *larva*, *persona*, *masca* in medieval Latin, or, in vulgar languages, "faulx visage," "fol visage," "sot visage" in French, or *visor*/*vizor* in English. The feminine noun *masca* was used for the first time in 643, in *Loi des Lombards*, as a term borrowed from Germanic populations who came into contact with Latin speaking clerks. The modern words borrowed from Latin appeared at the end of the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance: *talemaschier* (14<sup>th</sup> century) and *masque* (1511) in French, *Maschera* in Italian (in Boccaccio's work), *mask* in English (1534).

But in Southern France and maybe in Italy, the word had a meaning that is capital for our study: "witch." Gervase of Tilbury says at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century that the *Lamiae* who devoured children were named, in vulgar idioms, *mascae*. The meaning "witch" for this word is attested in Provençal in 1369.<sup>1</sup> This semantic evolution, also noted by other

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le Corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps. Essais d'anthropologie médiévale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 139-140.

researchers<sup>2</sup> encourages a study, at the crossroads between anthropological phenomena and theatre, in order to underline once again the magical roots of mask and masking, as well as the importance of the witch as a stage figure in some periods of the history of theatre.

So, first of all, before getting to the problem of theatre, we should examine ritual witch masks or masks used in bewitching/ healing/ magical rituals. There are several cultural areas that could interest us, but our focus will be on European documents, even if it is very tempting, for the pleasure of comparison, to refer to remarkable examples from other geo-cultural spaces.<sup>3</sup> In this context, it is mandatory to re-examine Carlo Ginzburg's theories on witchcraft, based on his seminal work *Storia notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba*.<sup>4</sup> Ginzburg believed in the survival of some ancient fertility cults and extasy religions during Christianity, linked somehow to shamanic practices, found on a vast geographical area, from China to Ireland. In *Storia notturna*, the anthropologist tries to hold together the puzzle, gathering isomorphic phenomena, but without succeeding to offer a historical explanation to the facts he uses and to the similarities he detects (except for the role played by "Scythians" as cultural turning point between the nomadic peoples of the steppes and the ancient inhabitants of Europe). For Ginzburg, some details one can find in the witch trials from 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries are not determined by the stereotypes constructed by the inquisitors, but by the fragmentary resurgence of forgotten religious beliefs and practices. The fly of witches and the orgiastic sabbath are not (only) a construct of theologians, but a religious belief or even a reality that must be interpreted. Carlo Ginzburg relates the sabbath to Diana, the goddess of the Moon, of the hunt and of

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Meuli, *Schweizer Masken. 60 Abbildungen und eine Farbtafel nach Masken der Sammlung Eduard von der Heydt und aus anderem Besitz: mit einer Einleitung über schweizerische Maskenbräuche und Maskenschmitzer* (Zurich: Atlantis Verlag, 1943).

Cesare Poppi "Persona, larva, masca: masks, identity and cognition in the cultures of Europe," in *Rupa-Pratirupa: Mind, Man and Mask*, ed. S.C. Malik (New Delhi: IGNC/Aryan Books International, 2001), 128-154.

<sup>3</sup> One can find precious materials referring to the magical value of the masks in extra-European areas, in N. Ross Crumrine & Marjorie Halpin (ed.), *The Power of Symbols. Masks and Masquerade in the Americas* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> English edition: Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, Translated by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

the wilderness, who was still revered after the triumph of Christianity. She was wandering in the woods, followed by a cortege of bizarre creatures, humans and animals, capable of penetrating in the world of the dead and of coming back to earthly life, during an ecstatic state, obtained through various means, including the use of hallucinogenic substances.

The symbolic function of the creatures in Diana's suite had to be emphasized through a visible sign: the mask. Carlo Ginzburg devotes a whole chapter to masked processions and rituals, especially those who are related to ecstatic journeys in the underworld, or to fertility rituals and beliefs. Ginzburg's approach is typological, not historical, even if he mentions some sermons from late Antiquity that criticize the use of the masks by Christians: a sermon by Asterius and one by Caesarius of Arles (who mentions the *ceroulus* and *vetula* masks). Like someone who is preoccupied not to forget something, Ginzburg gathers data about masked processions from all the corners of Europe (and not only): the Celto-Germanic cultural area with various animal masks, South-Eastern Europe (known for the goat masks), the Romanian *călușari*, the south-Slavic *kresniki*, the Hungarian *regös* and *táltos*, the Greek *karkantzaroi*, the Swiss masks from Lötschental, the *berserker* of the Norsemen, and even Halloween and Caucasian masks. According to Ginzburg, all these data constitute a coherent picture:

We propose to treat these animal disguises as a ritual equivalent of the animal metamorphosis experienced during the shamanic ecstasy, or alternatively an equivalent of the ecstatic cavalcades astride animals which constitute a variant thereof. If we accept this hypothesis, the majority of the rituals performed both in the West and East during the January calends slot into place in a coherent picture. Child alms-collectors, tables laid for the nocturnal divinities, and animal disguises represented different ways of making contact with the dead – the ambiguous dispensers of prosperity during the crucial period when the old year ends and the new begins.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 185-186.

The ideas of Carlo Ginzburg about shamanism surviving through masked rituals are seducing, but criticisable<sup>6</sup> and only partially useful for our approach. The great problem of Ginzburg's inventory is that the author doesn't analyse the similarities and the differences between the masks he mentions, nor the historical context of their appearance and use, or their circulation through time and space, or their magical functions. The reader is unsatisfied, because the description is scarce and the information sometimes unclear. What kind of magic is performed through these masks? Are they used for divination? For healing rituals? For apotropaic purposes? Are they used as a means of achieving the transformation into an animal with the purpose to absorb its vital force? Are they making possible the descent to the realm of the dead in order to bring back a promise of prosperity and fertility?

But should we, only because of this methodological imprecision, reject Ginzburg's book as a whole? We don't think so: on the contrary, *Storia notturna* should be regarded as an exhortation to develop Ginzburg's intuitions and to search for some clear evidences (if any) in favour of his hypotheses. First of all, one should note that the geographical distribution of the masked processions is not uniform in Europe. There is a concentration (not exclusive) in the isolated regions of the Alps, the Pyreneans, the Carpathians and the Balkans, as well as in other mountainous areas of the old continent. Ginzburg himself defines this phenomenon as it follows: "Along the entire Alpine arc seasonal ceremonies celebrated by groups of masked men have continued to this day."<sup>7</sup> This brings us back to the studies Hugh Trevor-Roper devoted to religious history and to his attempt to explain witchcraft and witch-trials based on a so-called "mountainous" hypothesis:

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<sup>6</sup> Willem de Blécourt, "The Return of the Sabbat: Mental Archaeologies, Conjectural Histories or Political Mythologies?" in *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (Houndmills & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 128: "These far-reaching conclusions are based on an analysis that is vaguely structural, profoundly phenomenological, only morphological in name and hardly historical: it is selective instead of serial and devoid of contexts."

See another critical approach of Ginzburg's theories: Alessandro Testa, "Ritual Zoomorphism in Medieval and Modern European Folklore: Some Sceptical Remarks on a Possible Connection with a Hypothetical Eurasian Shamanism," *Religio* XXV, no. 1 (2017), 21: "more methodological prudence should be used when comparing different cultural phenomena on the basis of purely formal resemblances."

<sup>7</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 193.

The mountain origin of the witch-craze is by now well established. [...] This prevalence of witchcraft, and of illusions that can be interpreted as witchcraft, in mountainous areas doubtless has a physical explanation. Rural poverty, as Michelet observed, naturally drives men to invoke the spirits of revenge. The thin air of the mountains breeds hallucinations, and the exaggerated phenomena of nature – the electric storms, the avalanches, the cracking and calving of the mountain ice – easily lead men to believe in demonic activity. [...] In the Middle Ages the men of the mountains differed from the men of the plains in social organization, and therefore they also differed in those customs and patterns of belief which grow out of social organization and, in the course of centuries, consecrate it. Theirs, we may almost say, were different civilizations. [...] The mountains, then, are the home not only of sorcery and witchcraft, but also of primitive religious forms and resistance to new orthodoxies.<sup>8</sup>

We won't examine here if there are some geographical coincidences between witchcraft trials and masked processions (both seem to be somehow linked to the mountains and to some specific mountainous regions), but an extensive and comprehensive study in this respect should be taken into consideration in the near future. Our goal is more modest. In the first place, we would like to underline the magical value of the masked processions (that passed from ritual to theatre). Secondly, we would like to propose a partial repertory and some brief analyses of the mask of the witch *per se*, as it appears in some ritual parades, in Latin or Germanic cultural areas, or in some modern theatrical performances. It is obvious that carnival and the *carnivalesque* are the perfect symbolic junction between ritual and theatre, the turning and spinning point of ideas, images and significations.

### **Witch Masks in Carnivals and in Carnivalesque Practices**

As we stated at the very beginning of this paper, the difficulties of the research are innumerable. The sources and documentation are unequally distributed through time and space and there is some sort of *taboo* regarding witches and magic in popular cultures and folklore. In fact, a witch is not often

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<sup>8</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth Centuries," *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century. Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001 [first edition 1967]), 94-99.

designated as such, but through periphrases and metaphors that are used as protecting strategies. In a carnivalesque procession, in a masked ritual or – sometimes – on a stage, the witch will be individualized as *old lady*, *fair lady*, *healer*, *grandma*, because people believe that, by avoiding the magical figure's real name, they avoid the possibility of a supernatural aggression against them. This caution is a source of real difficulties for our approach, but we'll try though to discuss some examples, originating from the great cultural and linguistic areas of Europe.

The carnival and the carnivalesque, as we said, were the main frame in which the survival, the evolution and even the birth of new masks were possible. In Europe, one can find various cultural patterns. The use of masks was – and it still is sometimes – frequent mostly around the winter solstice, or – in Christian terms – between Christmas and Epiphany (25<sup>th</sup> of December - 6<sup>th</sup> of January). But masks were – and somewhere still are – used at the end of winter, during the Carnival, before Ash Wednesday, at the beginning of the difficult period of forty days of fasting before Easter. As Georges Dumézil pointed out in his seminal book, *Le Problème des centaures* (1929), “nos mascarades modernes, comme les mascarades des peuples moins avancés, marquent, ou ont marqué, des *coupures du temps*, des *changements d'année*.”<sup>9</sup> But Dumézil requires circumspection, by showing that the Indo-European calendars were not coherent in the partition of the year, in the conception of the seasons, or in the vision of the structure of time. Anyhow, one can retain Dumézil's idea about masquerades marking the *coupures du temps*, the transitions, the changes: moments when a magical action is required in order to master the transformations of nature, the metamorphosis of the Sun, the caprices of weather. In this kind of magical practices, masks play a fundamental, symbolical, role.

### **Carnival Witch Masks in Romance Cultural Regions**

The masked traditions are vivid in Romance regions, as they echo maybe the Saturnalia, or other pagan rites linked to the calends. In Sicily, for example, the mask of the witch was used in carnivals. One mask dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and conserved nowadays at the Ethnographic Museum in Palermo, shows a clear brown face with a large rictus, a big nose and lots

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<sup>9</sup> Georges Dumézil, *Le Problème des Centaures* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1929), 4.



of coloured stains and lines. It is both tragical and comic, but its gaiety seems somehow a sadistic one.<sup>10</sup> This kind of mask was a tool that served the splitting of the personality and the performing of magic rituals.

In various regions of Spain, the figure of the witch, or her traditional accessories are not unknown in carnivalesque masquerades, as one can see in Julio Caro Baroja's seminal book on carnival. For example, in the Basque region, in Oyarzun, the period of carnival begins the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February giving the possibility to use masks to a community eager to do so. These are grotesque masks, made of a sheep's hairy skin, that suggest the head of a beast ("un morro de animal"<sup>11</sup>). The wearers of these masks hold in their hands a grotesque stick or an animal skin, but also what is called in Basque language "sorguin-goaziak" ("tijeras de bruja," *witch scissors*), used to frighten people. Julio Caro Baroja mentions that people of Oyarzun regarded these masks as being linked to witchcraft, or possessing magical powers: "Por lo expuesto tenemos derecho a subrayar el carácter en cierto modo hechicero que le daba la mayoría de la gente en aquel pueblo al artefacto que llevan los enmascarados para espantar. Este carácter se ve también en Labourd."<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting here that the famous witch hunter Pierre de Lancre developed a severe repression against the witches in Labourd at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The story of this repression is presented and analysed, among others, by Baroja himself, in *Las brujas y su mundo (The World of the Witches)*.<sup>13</sup>

These are not the only witch-like figures in the Basque masquerades. In the French part of the Basque country, in Soule for example, the carnival is split in a "red" masquerade and a "black" one. Amongst the characters of the black masquerade, there are some *caldereros*, boilermakers. The popular imagination considers, all along the region and far beyond it, that these poor craftsmen are sorcerers, capable of divination and of the worst forms of *maleficium*.<sup>14</sup> We won't insist here on the masks of devils and demonic

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<sup>10</sup> See the reproduction of this mask: Jean-Michel Sallmann, *Les Sorcières, fiancées de Satan* (Paris: Gallimard Découvertes, 1998), 88.

<sup>11</sup> Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval (análisis histórico-cultural)* (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1984 [1965]), 198.

<sup>12</sup> Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval*, 198: "Due to the above, we have the right to underline the somewhat witch-like character that most people in that town gave to the artifact that the masked men raised to scare people away. This character is also seen in Labourd."

<sup>13</sup> Julio Caro Baroja, *The World of the Witches* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

<sup>14</sup> Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval*, 196.

figures, frequent in carnival rituals, although frequently associated with the witches' behaviour, as they do not concern our topic but marginally. Baroja mentions very often these sorts of masks.<sup>15</sup>

At another extremity of Europe, the witches are amongst the most well-known figures of Romanian traditional culture. During the winter processions, they accompany sometimes the devils, covered by their hideous or comical masks, in larger groups usually called "the ugly people." We must underline here, as suggested before, that the witch is rarely named as such, due to ancestral fears and taboos. In exchange, the old woman (*baba*), is a frequent apparition (masked most of the time), with her *old man* (*moș*), or alone. This old cunning woman is regarded by popular wit (proverbs, legends, *historiolas*) as more intelligent than the devil himself. She is thought to have characteristics and behaviours of a witch. She makes and breaks the marriages, she is the best midwife, she can heal – or harm – using herbs, because she is the depositary of an ancient knowledge. Her mask concentrates in itself some traits of grotesque femininity: big hooked nose, hair made of hemp, or even more macabre traits: mouth without teeth, wide empty eyes and a haired, diabolical face. She has always a big kerchief on her head, knotted under her chin.



**Fig. 1.-2.** Masks from Dărmănești, Bacău in *Măști, Masks, Masques* (Bucharest: Muzeul Țăranului Român, 2002), 143, 152.

<sup>15</sup> Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval*, 175, 199, 211, 218, 228, 233, 234, 245, 265, 268.

It is very interesting to notice that the mask of the old woman in Central and Eastern Europe winter folk traditions often overlaps with the mask of the gypsy woman, known as a charm maker.<sup>16</sup> And, as we'll see later, when discussing the witch as a theatrical mask/character, in Romanian 19<sup>th</sup> century dramatic literature, fertility charms and love philtres are frequently associated with the old women/witches' actions (sometimes of Roma origin).



**Fig. 3.** Old woman mask, Vintileasca, Vrancea in Oana Petrică ed., *Măști populare din România* (Bucharest, 2001), 39.



**Fig. 4.** Old gipsy woman mask, Săbăoani, Neamț, in Oana Petrică ed., *Măști populare din România* (Bucharest, 2001), 42.

### Carnival Witch Masks in Germanic Regions

The old woman and the old man are also frequent in Western Germanic carnival masquerades, as Baroja points out, relating them to the death of the past year.<sup>17</sup> And indeed, Jörg Kraus specifies in his study “Der Weg der Hexe in

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<sup>16</sup> Ioan Pop-Curșeu, “The Gypsy-Witch: Social-Cultural Representations, Fascination and Fears,” *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor / Journal of Ethnography and Folklore*, New Series, no. 1-2 (2014), 23-45.

<sup>17</sup> Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval*, 224, 245, 270, 281.

die Fasnacht," that although the image and face of the witch are very present in the art of the Renaissance, the popular culture shows much more interest for the mask of the old woman (*die Alte Weib*).<sup>18</sup> The custom to put on old women's masks and clothes seems to be very ancient: the author is quoting a text of Saint Pirmin (753 AD), who forbade Christians to go around masked as deers or old women, nor to be travestied.<sup>19</sup> Actually, if we go back in time, we can agree, with Rudwin J. Maximilian, who discusses Frazer's theories, in a book that is still readable and quotable, even if frazerism is nowadays hardly acceptable in scientific anthropological researches.<sup>20</sup> Rudwin J. Maximilian states that the mask of the old woman has taken upon itself different personifications of Death or Winter, who had to be expelled ritually from the community at the beginning of the New Year, in order to purify the rural or urban communities from all evil:

The effigy of Death is also known as Old Woman, and that of Winter as Mrs. Winter or Ugly Woman, or Winter's Grandmother, i.e. Old Woman or Witch. In its simplest form the effigy of Death, Winter or Carnival was carried or carted out of the village, or thrown over the boundary of the next village. But it was also thrown into the water, beheaded, hanged, burned, not uncommonly, in the Lenten fires, or buried, often under straw or drung. These ceremonies of burning, burying, or drowning the spirit of vegetation may have been in themselves fertility charms.<sup>21</sup>

In the Flemish and Dutch cultural regions, the interest for these figures is also very present, as we can see it through the history of witch hunting and in folk traditions, extensively studied by Willem de Blécourt.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jörg Kraus, "Der Weg der Hexe in die Fasnacht," in *Wilde Masken. Ein anderer Blick auf die Fasnacht*, ed. Gottfried Korff (Tübingen: Tübingen Vereinigung für Volkskunde e. V., 1989), 57-76.

<sup>19</sup> Jörg Kraus, "Der Weg der Hexe in die Fasnacht," 61.

<sup>20</sup> Rudwin J. Maximilian, *The Origin of the German Carnival Comedy* (New York, London, Paris, Leipzig: G. E. Stechert & Co, 1920).

<sup>21</sup> Rudwin J. Maximilian, *The Origin of the German Carnival Comedy*, 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> Willem de Blécourt, "The Flying Witch: Its Resonance in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands," *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 11, no. 1 (2016): 73-93, doi:10.1353/mrw.2016.0010, "I Would Have Eaten You Too: Werewolf Legends in the Flanders, Dutch and German Area," *Folklore* 118, no. 1 (2007): 23-43, "Bedding the Nightmare: Somatic Experience and Narrative Meaning in Dutch and Flemish Legend Texts," *Folklore* 114, issue 2 (2003): 227-245.

We have actually one of the oldest representations of witches' masks in carnivals in Bosch's paintings and in Peter Bruegel's famous canvas *The Combat of Carnival and Lent*. But if for Hieronymus Bosch the documentary value is uncertain as the fictional component of the visual elaboration plays an essential part, one can notice that Bruegel treats his characters in a very realistic way, even when aiming at an allegorical meaning of the ensemble, as in the quoted painting. Bruegel is a very fine observer of the social reality of his time and, in this respect, the two masked characters who are accompanying the leader of the Carnival's procession, seem to have been given a special attention since they are in the foreground.



**Fig. 5.** Detail of Pieter Bruegel The Elder, *The Combat of Carnival and Lent*, 1556, oil on panel.

The first one is wearing an old woman's mask with prominent chin and long nose, its head and body covered with a long cap (probably a bedcover) tightened around the neck with a white cloth. The person wearing this costume must be a man in disguise, a usual custom in carnivals, because we can see his legs up to his knees. He is holding a specific jar, used by farmers to separate butter from milk, which is not a superfluous detail, as we know that witches were often accused to steal milk from other people's cows in rural areas. The second mask is more like an apprentice witch (probably worn by a child). This small character wears a large red hat, pierced by a spoon, and carries on his shoulder a broom stick with two lighted candles attached to the broom. Its white shirt almost touches the floor and the bag hanging at his waist seems heavy. One can find the same kind of bag worn by another character masked as an old woman, which appears in an engraving after Pieter Bruegel's *Feast of Fools* (see fig. 6). This kind of bag was probably used to carry money and small objects. A fact of great significance is that this evident reference to an existing carnival mask disappears in Bruegel the Younger's replica of his father's painting, where the appearance of the first "old woman" is rather common, while the second one is completely neutralised. Her face became a white, neutral mask, as if the painter had wished to make us forget about the original character. The choice is probably due to the increase of the persecutions against witches in the Low Countries.

The old woman is often seen in folklore as the devil's instrument or as being cleverer than the devil itself (fig. 8). But, although in these paintings there is no evident association of the old women/ witches with the masks of devils, there are lots of hints to the Evil side represented by the Carnival in its opposition to Lent. As we have already discussed it in another study,<sup>23</sup> Bruegel depicted here, on the side of the tavern, all the sins one had to stay away of, the capital sins that were obsessing the mediaeval Christian. They became visible and got a face thanks to the masks of the Carnival: the ugly faces of pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth.

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<sup>23</sup> Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, *Pour une théâtralité picturale: Bruegel et Ghelderode en jeux de miroirs* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2012).



**Fig. 6.** Detail of *The Feast of Fools*, engraving by Grave van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel, 1559.



**Fig. 7.** Detail of Pieter Bruegel The Younger, *The Combat of Carnival and Lent*, beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, oil on wood.

Taking a look more specifically to the folkloric cultures of German speaking populations, one could observe that the witches are even more present in carnival masquerades than in Latin cultural areas. Maybe this is linked not only to these pagan rituals connected to the “burning” of the Old, Ugly Winter but also to the intensity of the witch hunts in the German world: we have here a possible connection that should be explored in future researches. Let’s take as an illustrative example the region of Tyrol. It is there that, at least symbolically, the great prosecution against witches found its starting point, by a strange tangle of events. Following the issuing of the papal “Witch Bull” of 1484, *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, the Dominican inquisitor Heinrich Kramer arrived in the summer of 1485 in the Alpine valleys of Tyrol in order to fight against heresy and to eradicate the diabolical sect of witches. His preaches had a clear result: fifty women and two men were denounced. Finally, seven women were imprisoned, when the authorities of the city of

Innsbruck asked Kramer to leave Tyrol. First, he resisted, but, threatened by the imprisoned women's husbands, he took the good decision... Unfortunately, two years later, in collaboration with Joseph Sprenger, he published the famous *Malleus Maleficarum*, responsible for the death of thousands of supposed witches. The county of Tyrol, though, stayed immune to the witch-craze during the coming decades. Maybe this relative tolerance contributed to the transformation (or the survival?) of the witches as carnivalesque figures.



**Fig. 8.** Detail of Pieter Bruegel's *The Dutch Proverbs* ("The woman who is able to tie even the devil to a pillow" – often associated with Dulle Griet), oil on canvas, 1559.

Jörg Kraus states that, for the carnival, the oldest surviving mask of a witch comes from Tyrol (old witch mother *larva*) and that it dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the provinces of Tyrol and Salzburg, the carnival comprises a symbolic confrontation between the beautiful and the ugly Perchten, who impersonate the dual nature of an old feminine divinity called "Frau Perchta," who was, according to Henri Rey-Flaud and other scholars, the leader of the Wild Hunt. The "Schiachen Perchten," ugly Perchten, are a group whose members arise among the audience an aesthetic disapproval, doubled by an ethical one. This group includes characters whose behaviour is both repellent



and bad, from a moral point of view: two witches with broomsticks, the devils and the fools. The role of witches and fools is to use a large variety of tricks, meant to animate the entire procession. The people who cross the witches' paths will be swept away with the brooms, or be caught and brought before the King Herod for a parody of judgement, very witty and amusing. The "Schiachen Perchten" often frighten the girls in the audience.<sup>24</sup>

A related carnivalesque custom can be found in the Lower Inn Valley, in the same province of Tyrol. A group of masked men, called Berschtln goes from farm to farm, enter the houses with "devilish noise" and "perform crazy dances." They are lead by "an energetic witch-like figure" with "a big broom:" with it, she pretends to sweep the whole house from top to bottom". Their action is thought to have a positive consequence: the Berschtln "drive out the wicked spirits who have settled in farm and fields during the long winter nights."<sup>25</sup> Sometimes, these figures are called Perschtln, a name that is even closer to that of the Perchten and clarifies the origin and morphology of these witchy figures of carnivalesque processions.

Carlo Ginzburg was very interested in the goddess Perchta, who was, according to the system he tried to build, a multi-form female divinity revered by ecstatic women (perceived as witches by the communities they belonged to). The name of the deity varied, according to time and place: Diana, Holda, Abundia, Madonna Oriente, Bensozia, Herodias, Perchta.<sup>26</sup> Ginzburg noted, on the traces of several researches done by Karl Meuli or Dönner (*Tiroler Fastnacht*) that the passage of the Perchten from farm to farm was regarded by rural communities as a promise of fertility and abundance:

Up until the last century in a number of localities in Austria and Bavaria, groups of "beautiful" and "ugly" Perchtas confronted each other during carnival; later, only the "beautiful" remained. Their name preserves the trace of an ancient cult: Perchta (whom canonist and inquisitors identified with Diana and Herodias) was one of the names of the nocturnal divinity,

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe: A Descriptive Survey* (Memorial University of Newfoundland, A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, April 1973), 54-72.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 36-39.

<sup>26</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 6-7, 91, 258, 262-263.

harbinger of prosperity, to whom the ecstatic women paid homage. In the Tyrol the belief that the passing by of the Perchta procures abundance endured for a long time. In Rumania, as we have seen, Irodeasa and Doamna Zânelor still live in the ceremonies of the *călușari*.<sup>27</sup>

But the masquerades related to Perchta were not the only carnivalesque rituals where witches appeared in Tyrol and other Austrian regions. The "Huttlerlauf" of Thaur, in the region of Hall, Tyrol, is centered around masks called Huttler. They wear costumes made of rags, remnants of various materials and bits of wood. They are usually accompanied by some witches and the crops are thought to depend on the visit of this composite procession.<sup>28</sup> The Bockreiter, or goat-rider of Absam, had a beardless face mask and his head and shoulders were covered by a big, red neckerchief. He rode on a horse made of a stick, whose head was adorned with large horns and a red tongue, and whose tail was long and hairy. A witch, even more grotesque than the Bockreiter, drove the horse by its horns and agitated her broomstick. She wore an ugly costume and a terrifying face mask.<sup>29</sup>

While approaching the witch's carnivalesque masks, it is necessary to take into consideration the historical evolutions. Not each type of mask is still in use; sometimes, the contemporary rituals are far from the ancient practices and beliefs. With regards to the survival of the witch figure and its capacity to adapt itself, we may take a look at the contemporary carnival in the town of Imst (Tyrol), called the "Schemenlauf."<sup>30</sup> Karl Meuli showed that the word "scimo, scemo," in Old High German, and "scheme" in Middle High German, meant phantom, or spirit of the dead people. The Schemenlauf is, therefore, "the running of the spirits," a period of disorder and violence, with many different masks dancing in the streets of Imst. The witches are a very important group in this Tyrolian carnival: their numbers go from 6 or 8 up to 32. They wear a traditional dress, the dirndl, a white apron and a red skirt, but the element that individualizes them is the face mask. Susan Jackson gives a description of a witch mask, based on a record from 1938, realized by Dönnner in his book on the Tyrolian carnival:

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<sup>27</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 193.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 131-134.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 138-139.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 95-117.

Her full mask, consisting of several parts, is covered with warts on the cheeks, neck, and forehead. There are bristles on her pointed chin and she has a crooked nose. [...] Her repulsive mouth, ringed with boar teeth, is movable, enabling her not only to drink and smoke but also to snap at people. The half masks over nose and chin are almost constantly in motion.<sup>31</sup>

The group of witches is under the direct supervision and control of a superior figure, the witch-mother. In the procession, there is a witches' cauldron and each one of them carries a broom, used to scare or to amuse the audience. One should not try to take the broom away from a witch. The offended witch and all her sisters will answer badly, by a punishment that is not always just theatrical. But, usually, the most important activity of the witches of Imst is to dance, on a special music, played by a band whose role is to accompany them during the whole procession.

In neighbouring Switzerland, witch masks are at least as interesting and as numerous as in Austria. The carnival of the valley of Lötschental, in the canton Valais, was extensively studied by scholars, in books and articles. The main mask of this carnival, called the "Tschäggättä" or "Roitschäggättä," may be linked to witchcraft and magical practices. The mask provokes fear and astonishment. Carved in wood, it has a big, hooked nose, large, strange eyes, and a mouth with sharp, rare teeth. The hair is made of sheep wool or animal fur. The behaviour is savage and violent, and this determined many punitive measures taken by the authorities. The Tschäggättä scare women and children and they make an awful noise wherever they pass. They have a large cowbell attached to a belt, and a wooden stick, sometimes decorated. The costume is made of fur (domestic animals, such as goat or sheep, are used for this purpose). From a morphological and a functional point of view, the Tschäggättä can be assimilated with a witch, a spirit or a demon. The similarities with the Schemenlauf are quite remarkable, maybe tracing an idea of alpine continuity.

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<sup>31</sup> Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 114-115.

The witches are not only present in the Valais carnival masquerades. In the March region of the canton Schwyz, on the shores of Walenstadt lake, or in central and Eastern Switzerland, the witches play an important role, as they bring – in a carnival parade – fear and amusement at the same time. In the March region, the witches, with their hideous masks, similar to those of the Tschägättä, announce the opening of the carnival, on the eve of the 6<sup>th</sup> of January. Werner Röllin states that the witches' masks in the March region are recent and influenced by the circulation of the carnivalesque ideas and types, although he gives some examples dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup> Röllin gives even a chronological list of the witch masks types in the March region.<sup>33</sup> In Staretschwil (Aargau), the "Polteri," mannequin representing winter and the past year, is hanged and then burnt on the public market (square), while a group of witches, adorned with typical masks and holding their brooms, are dancing happily around the stake. What an irony to think that, in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, under more sinister circumstances, in many regions of Switzerland, there were the witches that stood on the stake, while many communities watched them burn and rejoiced at this barbarian spectacle! In Einsiedeln (Schwyz), the old hunchback witch is present amongst various masks, with outfits specific of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup> In Wollerau (Schwyz), in 1939, a local carver invented a type of wooden mask, very popular since then, as the

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<sup>32</sup> Werner Röllin, "Zu Diffusion einer Maske ('Märchler Röllli')," *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde / Archives suisses des traditions populaires* 76, Heft 1-2 (1980): 124 ("24.Febr. 1892: Hexen, Röllli, Dominos und andere Vermummte zeigten sich in solcher Anzahl...", "3.Febr. 1883: Nur Hexen zum Gaudium der Jugend auf Lachens Strassen.").

<sup>33</sup> Werner Röllin, "Zu Diffusion einer Maske ('Märchler Röllli')," 130:  
 1955 Amaliahexen in Galgenen,  
 1959 Stockberghexen in Siebnen (angeblich als Wiederaufnahme und Ersatz einer in der Obermarch im 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhundert existenten Tannchrieshexe),  
 1961 Waldhexen in Siebnen,  
 1965/66 Dürrbachhexen in Schübelbach,  
 1975 Moorhexen in Tuggen,  
 1977/78 Schipflochhexe in Altendorf.

<sup>34</sup> Werner Röllin, "Entstehung und Formen der heutigen Schwyzer Maskenlandschaft," *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde / Archives suisses des traditions populaires* 74, Heft 3-4 (1978): 158-159.

“Wollerauer Hexen.” This model spread to Wiler, where a new local type of “Hexe” was born.<sup>35</sup>

We have been giving above some examples of witch masks used in (alpine) carnivals of various cultural regions of Europe. There is an important question that emerges here: what is the origin of the witch masks in carnivals? While trying to find an answer, we may follow at least two paths of interpretation, but they both require much methodological caution. First, there is the possibility of cultural survivals and transformation of ancient figures and images which can be taken into account, be it related to fertility rituals, as those described by Ginzburg, or not. The witch-like figure of the Swiss Tschäggättä, the Berschtln, Perschtln or Perchten of Austria and Germany, with their direct connection to the Wild Hunt, suggest that the witches in carnival processions come from the night of the times and that they embody ancient magical beliefs and fears. The typical marks of these archaic masks, as well as the functional similarities one can observe constitute an argument in favour of the survivalist interpretation. On the other hand, a close attention paid to chronology is mandatory. It could be rewarding to observe, for each case we discussed, the first mention of the apparition of a certain type of witch mask. As we noticed in two cases, a Sicilian and a Tyrolian one, there are witch masks dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For the previous centuries, it is very difficult to gather details on witch masks used in carnivals: information is, at best, scarce, if not nonexistent. A hypothesis to be taken into consideration is that this kind of mask might be a creation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the witch hunts calmed down and witchcraft was regarded as a delusion and a source of amusement, not as a real threat for the good functioning of society. This hypothesis could be underpinned by lots of historical details: for some witch figures and masks, anthropologists found information of the precise year they appeared in carnival processions. A similar hypothesis is given as tenable by Werner Röllin, who worked on the chronology of apparition of diverse types of witch masks in Swiss carnivals:

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<sup>35</sup> Werner Röllin, “Entstehung und Formen der heutigen Schwyzer Maskenlandschaft,” 155-156, 164 (a photographic image of the Wollerauer Hexe).

Ganz jung sind die eigentlichen Hexenlarven. Keine geht in ihrem Ursprung vor das 19. Jahrhundert zurück. Die spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Hexenprozesse waren eine so schauerliche und heisse Angelegenheit, dass niemand gewagt hätte, Hexen und Hexenverbrennungen an der Fasnacht zu verulken. Hexenlarven sind daher erst im späten 18. Jahrhundert denkbar, wurden doch auch im Lande Schwyz nach 1753/54 Frauen als Hexen gefoltert, bis sie sich selbst entleibten. Der heutige "Hexenrummel" ist auch im Lande Schwyz als das Produkt des 20. Jahrhunderts zu betrachten.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, some contemporary witch masks are obviously inspired by film and television, by cartoons or publicity. It is obvious, in this respect, that even if witches replaced older figures, ancient pagan goddesses they once served and followed, they are marvellously adapted to contemporary life and to the new forms of carnival...

### **Witch Masks in Theatre**

In fact, the carnival, a popular feast in continuous movement and transformation, with its permanent shows and its spectators, serves as a passage to the universe of theatre. It is in the course of the long historical evolution of the carnival that the ritual dimension of the mask gradually became a spectacular, aesthetic one, but without completely losing its ritual, sacred roots. In the following lines, we'll focus on the presence and use of witch masks in theatre, taking into consideration some examples that can be related to the carnivalesque *larvae*, "schemen" and other weird figures.

In the first place it is of importance to take into consideration the fact that the passage from ritual to theatre through carnival depends on the status of the witch, who gradually becomes a literary character, a presence which does not only embody the fears or hidden desires of a community, but a presence

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<sup>36</sup> Werner Röllin, "Entstehung und Formen der heutigen Schwyzer Maskenlandschaft," 181. Werner Röllin mentions though a historical record of the 18<sup>th</sup> century about the masks of the witches, in connection with those of the devils, 180: "Thomas Fassbind bezeugt die Existenz von Allgemeinformen einzelner Maskengattungen wie Teufel, Hexe im 18. Jahrhundert. Diese waren aber noch wenig differenziert."

playing a part in a story, interfering with other characters' existence. A certain mental distance is needed in order to operate the transfer from society to the stage. The German term *Verfremdung* could be useful here with its Brechtian connotations, because this mental theatrical distance paradoxically allows the author and the spectator to move away from the "real" witches but also to make a close-up on their appearance and behaviour, creating thus different types, going from the treacherous beauty of young witches to the monstrous or weird ugliness of old ones.

We don't know exactly when this transfer to the stage was operated, but it seems that it is during the Renaissance that the medieval archaic old woman or midwife was enriched with the qualities of rediscovered figures of Antiquity: Circe, Hecate, Medea.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the old witch would be the instrument of the evil/devil in rural areas and stories, whereas the urban and more cultured circles would prefer wizards, magicians and alchemists.

This could be the reason why we can find cunning old women/ witches in short stories, legends, miracles and fabliaux at the end of the Middle Age and at the beginning of the Renaissance. Hans Sachs' carnival play, *Der Teufel mit dem alten Weib*, dating back to 1545, is one of the few texts written to be performed, but it still proves the interest for the old woman (having the characteristics of the witch) as a farcical character, with a high probability for its interpreter to have been wearing a mask similar to those seen in Bruegel the Elder's already mentioned painting. If we talk about the high-culture of the Renaissance, the privilege goes to the masculine withholders of magic powers, growing in importance because of their association with the development of science and universal knowledge. The Germanic Faustian figure became more and more complex during the 16th century, when the witch hunt grew considerably and a large number of demonological texts, such as *Malleus Maleficarum* or Jean Bodin's *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers*, formatted the minds of the social and religious groups. Of course, when talking about masks, it is less a dramatic or tragic character such as Dr. Faustus who would be associated with a mask, than the false alchemist, Bartolomeo, in Giordano Bruno's *Il Candelaio* (published in 1582) or, later, Subtle in Ben Jonson's *Alchemist*, or the magician in Pierre Corneille's *L'Illusion comique*.

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<sup>37</sup> See Charles Zika, "Images of Circe and Discourses of Witchcraft, 1480-1580," *Zeitenblicke*, no. 1 (2002), 1-38, <http://www.zeitenblicke.historicum.net/2002/01/zika/zika.html>

It is only with W. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in 1606, that witches really came into playwrights' attention. But here too, as a few years later in *The Tempest*, they are rather savage spirit-like presences than characters with a consistent reality, in opposition to Prospero, the civilised intellectual magician. The witches in *Macbeth* have stirred up much interest because they were no more those incarnations of evil other characters talked about, evoked or invoked, as it was the case with the witch Sycorax, Caliban's mother. They had no individual names, but they were present, and were seen and heard. So, when it comes to the staging of the play, one has to show these witches. We don't know exactly how they appeared on the Elizabethan stage, but as women were not allowed to play, male actors must have worn masks.<sup>38</sup>

The Romanian stage director Ion Sava (1900-1947) conceived in 1945 *Macbeth with masks*, considered to be one of the most revolutionary performances of the Romanian stage directing. Born in Moldavia, Sava was well acquainted with traditional Romanian masks of old women and old men, of devils, animals and spirits, widespread in the region. His personal artistic talent overlapped this rich cultural heritage. At the same time, his penchant for the grotesque and the carnival world, as well as the strong influence E. G. Craig's works had exerted on his visionary theatre, led him to assert that theatre could not exist in the absence of masks. The reason he gave was that on stage one has to confront the manifestation of the supernatural, of fantasy, legends and myths, through the apparition of imaginary beings, who are beyond humanity, beings who populate our dreams, our desires and phantasms.

Despite the critics and the lack of understanding he had to confront himself to during an unfavourable historical moment, when theatre was dominated by a naturalistic approach, Ion Sava decided to use almost 100 masks with the help of the sculptor Ion Tureatcă (1906-2000) and of the surrealist painter Jules Perahim (1914-2008), in charge with the settings. The fact that Ion Sava paid a special attention to the witches, and explained their essential part in the Shakespearean play is extremely interesting. In one of his articles, published in October 1945 he highlights "the richness of the magic frame"

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<sup>38</sup> François Laroque, "Mythe, magie et représentation du mal," in *Le Mal et ses masques*, ed. Gisèle Venet (Lyon: ENS Editions, 1998), 32-49.



inspired by Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, frame that gives, together with the black magic formulas in the text, a "fantastic, strange and supernatural value" to the play.<sup>39</sup> From the director's point of view, these "old women whose faces have nothing human, are the weird personification of the Antic Hecate," but multiplied. And Sava was not wrong since we know that Hecate was represented in Antiquity with three faces or three bodies. She was worshipped at the cross-roads and was associated "with the chthonian realm and the ghosts of the dead," as a patron goddess of witchcraft.<sup>40</sup>



**Fig. 9.** Witch masks conceived by Ion Sava (objects and drawing) for his *Macbeth*, 1946.

And as Sava wanted a larger number of witches than those specified by Shakespeare, some witches would not have been embodied by actors but would have been reduced to their mask, for technical and stage design reasons:

<sup>39</sup> Ion Sava, *Teatralitatea Teatrului [The Theatricality of Theatre]* (Bucharest: Ed. Eminescu, 1981), 304.

<sup>40</sup> *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Edited by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 671-673.

The witches and the ghosts in Macbeth, due to the fact that the text needs them, have to float through the stage, and then disappear, evaporate in the airs [...] an actor would not be able to solve this kind of demand better than a mask that gently unloosens, and, pulled by a string, can disappear in the stage attic, taking its costume of veil along with it.<sup>41</sup>

As we can see in the drawings done by Sava himself, and from the masks that have been used for the performance and still kept at the Theatre Museum of the National Theatre in Bucharest, the appearance of these weird sisters balanced between the long crooked-nose-face (resembling to a nightbird with its beak and big round eyes – the barn owl: *striga/strix aluco*<sup>42</sup>) and the flat face, where the absence of the nose and the same big wide opened eyes oriented the spectator more in the direction of the spirits of the dead and even of an incarnation of Death itself.

Ion Sava called them “old-women-witches” (*babe vrăjitoare*) with an expression combining the two hypostasis we have already encountered in Carnival masks, showing indirectly not only the persistence of beliefs and magical practices in Romanian rural areas, but also how much Sava was indebted to the 19<sup>th</sup> century images of the witch, although he recycled them through an Avant-guard artistic filter. It would be important to open a small parenthesis and specify here that the Avant-guard experiments led by Marcel Ianco (who was a Romanian himself<sup>43</sup>) with his Dada masks, or the expressionist representations of human faces, like those inspired by E. Munch’s *Scream*, are likely to have had a certain influence upon Ion Sava’s theatrical vision of the witches.

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<sup>41</sup> Ion Sava, *Teatralitatea Teatrului*, 305.

<sup>42</sup> In folkloric literature the witch can take the appearance of a bird, for example in south Moldavia, Tecuci, as one may see in Artur Gorovei, *Credinți și superstiții ale poporului român* (Bucharest: Editura Grai și suflet – Cultura Națională, 1995), 260, 287.

<sup>43</sup> See a note made by Hugo Ball in his diary in the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 1916: Hugo Ball, *Dada à Zurich. Le mot et l’image (1916-1917)*, trad. Sabine Wolf (Dijon: Les presses de réel, 2006), 38-39; and Ștefana Pop-Curșeu “Tristan Tzara, Marcel Iancu și fascinația dadaistă pentru reciclarea măștilor,” *Studii și cercetări științifice. Seria Filologie*, no. 40 (2018), 41-52.



Fig. 10. Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, detail of lithograph, 1895. CC BY 4 The Munch Museum; [blog.britishmuseum.org](http://blog.britishmuseum.org).

Coming back to the mask of witches in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and later on, it is quite clear that Shakespeare (there where his texts have not been censored as they were in France for example) left a very interesting legacy from this point of view too. A legacy that still has to be closely investigated and that still represents a challenge for theatre stage directors.

As for other occurrences, there are documents where witch costumes are signalled very probably with masks, in Court Ballets. In England, at the Royal Court, a ballet that implies the presence of witches is Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queenes* (1609), where eleven witches were impersonated by male dancers and they appeared "all differently attir'd; some, with rats on their heads; some on theyr shoulders; others with ointment-pots at theyr girdles; All with spindells, timbrells, rates, or other venieficall instruments, making a confused noyse, with strange gestures." At a certain moment they danced armed with brooms, in the circular dance of witches' sabbath.<sup>44</sup> The

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<sup>44</sup> See Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque. Dance, Costume, and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 187-199, quoting B. Jonson (II, 96-9) (II, 29-36).

leading Dame of these witches incarnated the image of Discordia,<sup>45</sup> inspired from the ancient Gorgon, and she appeared “her frock tuck’d, hare hayre knotted, and folded with viper; in her hand, a Torch made of a dead-Man’s arme, lighted; girded with a snake, to whome they all did reverence.”

Barbara Ravelhofer, in her study of *The Early Stuart Masque*, also talks about the *Shrovetide Masque*, in 1633, where a male dancer called Mr. Boye “played a witch in a sky-blue taffeta gown, for which role he had been provided with an artificial hump.”<sup>46</sup> This sort of ballets and masquerades is representative for the noble theatrical amusement that would have a real expansion in France, especially at the Court of Louis XIV.<sup>47</sup> In France, the figures of the witches and magicians appear in several court ballets: *Ballet du Château de Bicêtre* (1632), *Ballet de la nuit* (1653), *Ballet des noces de Pélée et Thétis* (1654). Among the sumptuous outfits, documents attest the use of witch and wizards costumes, with bat wings and small diabolic faces on the belly, knees, elbows and shoulders, adapting thus in a baroque way a specific characteristic of the late medieval devils’ masques and costumes from the Mystery Plays.

Indeed, we have here all the composing elements of styled witch portraits, that were to be revisited during Romanticism in combination with folkloric influences and that the theatrical genre of the Fairy Plays and the Operettas/Musical comedies were to continue to stage with a special effervescence during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is actually in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in cinematographic productions, that these baroque images of supernatural empowered women would become clichés, in the fantasy genre.

Even in Romania, after 1848, when writers started to write original plays in Romanian, they were inspired by characters coming from the Western theatre and from the local folkloric culture, among which the old cunning witches could not miss. We have thus famous old women characters such as Baba Hârca, in the homonymous operetta by Matei Millo (1814-1897) and Baba

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<sup>45</sup> Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia del cavaliere Cesare Ripa Perugino*, Tomo secondo (Perugia: Nella Stamperia di Piergiovanni Constantini, 1765), 227-229.

<sup>46</sup> Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque*, 178.

<sup>47</sup> See the complex study of Marie-Françoise Christout, *Le Ballet de Cour au XVIIe siècle* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1987).

Rada, the good witch, who transforms herself in a fairy after she is drowned by the desperate crowd that fears drought and evil spells, in the fairy-play *Sânziana and Pepelea*, by Vasile Alecsandri (1821-1890).

In general, literature historians and ethnographers agree with the assertion that the modern image of the old witch with crooked nose comes from a generalisation of a type that has been fixed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially due to the adaptation of fairy-tales for the stage. *Hansel and Gretel* is such an example, where the witch played an important part, as a theatrical masked character in Humperdinck's operetta, then in the numerous filmic adaptation through the 20<sup>th</sup> century starting with Méliès, and still evolving in the contemporary productions. But this is another story and a study to come. It is undeniable that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, under the influence of symbolism and expressionism, carnival masks came again into the attention of artists and theatre people, playwrights and stage directors. Great names such as Edward Gordon Craig and Maurice Maeterlinck, Meyerhold and Antonin Artaud preached a coming back, a reloading of all the theatrical legacy and powers of the carnival, its energies, marionettes, costumes and masks.

It is impossible to analyse here the importance of the witch mask in that period and the fascination it exerted, but we would like to quote at least one example, as it is representative for the existing trend: the Flemish playwright Michel de Ghelderode in whose theatre the figure of the witch is a turning point for intrigues. Three of his plays: *La Pie sur le gibet. Farce d'après Breughel l'Ancien* (1935), *Mademoiselle Jaire* (1934) and *D'un diable qui prêcha merveilles. Mystère pour marionnettes* (1934), as well as other texts inspired by the medieval theatrical atmosphere of Pieter Bruegel's visual universe, revisit and shed a new light upon the witch and her presence on stage. Foolish and scary, medieval and childish, malefic and tender, the witch is an ambiguous character, always manipulating the others, but who is herself a puppet in the hands of the Devil, a prisoner of her own condition. This could be, in short, the portrait of the witch as it has been imagined by the Flemish playwright. Often being the core of the farcical conflict, her presence highlights the deep discrepancy between the manifestation of a human desire and

phantasm and the actual powers of witchcraft, illusory but real at the same time, mirroring the powers of the stage and the powers of a rediscovered theatricality.<sup>48</sup>

In modern and contemporary theatre, the witch has not known the same burst of interest like in cinema, excepting theatre productions for children and puppet theatre,<sup>49</sup> where the witch is the bad character *par excellence*. But in the 1960's, there was a revival of the ritual dimension of theatre. It was less the European classical witch that interested the stage directors, than strange and more exotic figures of oriental goddesses of light and darkness, equivalents of the Furies, of Artemis/Diane or of the dark Hecate.

A last example that we shall give is a performance staged in the 90's by the Romanian director Mihai Măniuțiu (b. 1954). Măniuțiu has always treated in a subtle artistic manner the presence of ritual masks on stage, being fascinated by the expressions of good and evil, of the sacred and the infernal. The exceptional character of this performance is given by the original staging, directing and acting solutions found by Măniuțiu, which reconnect theatre and magic, and embody the phantasm, the weirdness, the forces of the Beyond. From the point of view of the images of witchcraft, the masks conceived for the performance *The Illuminated Week*, after Mihail Săulescu, in 1990, are extremely engaging. Măniuțiu used horned devilish masks, as well as spirits masks, and masked presences of death, which are all from the same realm recreating the ambiguous universe of these weird forces of the evil. The mask, says Mihai Măniuțiu, means "going away in order to come back, taking spiritually a distance from his own being so far as to touch the limit where one has the feeling to lose himself, all this in order to return inside oneself as if in an unknown place, towards an I not yet unveiled."

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<sup>48</sup> Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, "La sorcellerie et la sorcière dans le théâtre de Michel de Ghelderode," in *Pour une théâtralité picturale : Bruegel et Ghelderode en jeux de miroirs* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2012), 184-198.

<sup>49</sup> See a beautiful Czech example of a witch as a wooden puppet from around 1900: Piotr Bogatyrev, "Czech Puppet Theatre and Russian Folk Theatre," in *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press, 2001), 91.



Fig. 11.-12. Mihai Măniuțiu, *The Illuminated Week* (after Mihail Săulescu).

What are the conclusions we can draw at the end of this paper, that gave us the opportunity of a long voyage, both in time and space? Of course, as we suggested in the first lines of the text, our approach was full of dangers, first of all methodological ones: we did our best not to avoid, but to solve them. What we managed to point out was meant to open perspectives and bridges for further researches. A problem that has no definitive answer here (but can we really imagine such an answer?) is: How old is, *really*, the mask of the witch in the carnivalesque processions? The elements of a possible answer that we tried to sketch have a certain solidity, but further studies could, of course, refine the chronological data and bring new documents and evidences into discussion. By investigating even closer the links between carnival and theatre, from the Renaissance to the present, other dimensions of the problems raised here could be illuminated. Another issue that deserves a profound reflection in the future – and we are eager to begin it – is: At what extent the carnivalesque rituals, as the clerics of the past knew them, played a role in the birth of the stereotypes related to witchcraft during the great witch-hunts, especially in the imaginary genesis of the witches' sabbath?

On the other hand, if one places the mask of the witch on an aesthetic ground, where there are less shadows than in the anthropological approach of the problem, it is clear that one faces an essentially theatrical apparition. The

witch, with or without a mask (but especially when she wears one) produces a strong effect on the spectators and manages to materialize their phantasms and fears, but also to seduce them. No one else, among the great cultural characters, manages to reach such an intensity of contradictory affective states!

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*The Weird Sisters.  
Historical-Religious Genealogies*

ALEXANDRA JELER\*

**Abstract:** The present paper offers a historical-religious analysis of Shakespeare's *Weird Sisters* and their multifaceted and equivocal nature. Their ancient origins are examined, starting from the Norns and the Anglo-Saxon force of fate, *wyrd*, then proceeding into Greek and Roman mythology and beliefs, coming to the conclusion that the *Weird Sisters* are part of a destiny complex in which they play the role of agents in delivering Macbeth's fate. In the second part of the paper, the figure of the witch is analyzed both off stage, in popular belief and the Protestant faith, and on stage, as the *Weird Sisters* are moulded from fair fairies into foul witches, so as to reflect the interests of the early modern English audience. It is argued that the *Sisters* reflect the historical and religious changes occurring in English society as paganism is repressed and Christian elite ideas demonize all forms of magical practice and supernatural entities.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, Macbeth, *Weird Sisters*, witch, pagan, mythology, fairy, fate.

"Fair is foul and foul is fair"<sup>1</sup> – nothing is what it seems in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a play in which ambiguity reigns at the crossing between the human and the supernatural worlds. The three *Weird Sisters* are complex and equivocal characters born from a mixture of worlds and beliefs, both ancient and Jacobean, both Pagan and Christian, encompassing several realities. Diane Purkiss writes that the *Sisters*' very meaning stands in their "indeterminacy, and hence chaos,"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1.1.9.

<sup>2</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 211.

thus in their inability to pertain to only one realm, reality or identity, eluding any attempts at a comprehensible definition. In this paper, I am going to examine their underlying personas, aiming to deconstruct Shakespeare's creations into the sources that they originate from and to identify the characteristics which connect them to ancient, folk and Protestant systems of belief. Concurrently, I will identify the possible roles they play in the fulfilment of Macbeth's fate, as well as their purpose off stage, in the perception of the audience, while proving there is a strong link between the historical context and the Sisters' final form.

Firstly, I am going to proceed by turning my attention towards antiquity, locating the three figures in Nordic and Anglo-Saxon beliefs, and subsequently in Roman and Greek mythology, focusing on the way in which the Weird Sisters are connected to the notion of fate and its divine counterparts. I will attempt to demonstrate the role they play inside a fate complex that enables them to be the agents of divine will inside Shakespeare's play. In the second part of the paper, I am going to concentrate on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Pagan and Christian beliefs that contributed to the Sisters' construction, which is ultimately an illustration of the ways in which early modern English society reshaped itself under the influence of Protestantism and King James I. My starting point will be *Holinshed's Chronicles* and the early representation of the Weird Sisters as fairies, which leads me to analyse popular Pagan beliefs and the ways in which these persist as an underlayer of the Sisters' identities. This will be followed by an examination of the process of demonization of magical practice and supernatural beings, and the way in which the figure of the witch was consequently viewed on and off stage. I will examine the effects the said changes had on the characters of the Weird Sisters, using significant scenes and aspects related to their status and condition, thus arriving at the significance they had for the Jacobean audience.

I will not include in my analysis the character of Hecate, nor the scenes 3.4 and 4.1, due to the fact that their authorship is unclear, many critics suspecting they might be later abridgements written by Thomas Middleton.<sup>3</sup> I'll take into account Shakespeare's knowledge of ancient culture and literature, as critics agree that he had read the comedies of Plautus and Terence, Seneca's tragedies, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as well as Plutarch, whose

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<sup>3</sup> Janette Dillon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 114.

*Parallel Lives* he used as a source for his Roman plays. He therefore must have been aware of the Roman and Greek values and myths, and able to incorporate them into the structure of the Weird Sisters. The second part of my interpretation, involving the figure of the witch in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, is based on Shakespeare's age's growing interest in witches, to which Emma Wilby, Diane Purkiss and Robin Briggs have devoted comprehensive studies.

Much has been written about the Weird Sisters in the context of the play, by critics such as A. C. Bradley, Susan Snyder, Nick Moschovakis or G. Wilson Knight, but very few studies focus on their origins and historical context. Diane Purkiss analyzes early modern English views towards witches in connection to the Sisters, but does not explore their ancient descent. The most comprehensive study on this subject is that of Laura Shamas, who writes on the Weird Sisters from an archetypal and mythological point of view. However, she does not expand enough on their connection to the Anglo-Saxon *wyrd*, nor does she explore the folk relationship between witches and fairies. In this paper I attempt to bridge the gaps, distinguishing and assembling all the sides of the Sisters' nature, by using information from books on early modern witchcraft, as well as studies on Anglo-Saxon fate written by Jacob Grimm, Adrian Papahagi, Anthony Winterbourne and Eric Gerald Stanley.

The discussion on the religious-historical origin of the Weird Sisters must appropriately begin from the source of their name, whose etymology points to Anglo-Saxon times. This implies an analysis of the familiar figures of the Nordic goddesses of fate, and the perhaps less familiar notion of the Anglo-Saxon *wyrd*, which springs forth from the aforementioned triad and develops as an unshakeable force of fate. The Norns are "those women who shape what must be,"<sup>4</sup> meaning they preside over people's destiny and mould the course of their lives according to unseen laws. They are in the number of three, a significant number which is present throughout different mythologies which include similar figures who impersonate fate. Each of the Norns is master over a section of time: past, present and future, therefore having an intemporal quality and being placed beyond time's constraints. In literature, Norns are mentioned in the Old Norse poem *Voluspá*, where it is said that

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<sup>4</sup> John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 243.

they “allotted life for mankind,/ they decided on fate.”<sup>5</sup> They are also ambivalent, having done “both good and evil,”<sup>6</sup> necessarily bringing about what has been ordained. Out of the three, the most important for our analysis is *Urðr* (*Urth*), whose name is taken from the preterite plural of the verb *verða*, which means “to become.”<sup>7</sup> She thusly represents “that which has become”, namely which has already been decided, and which has to manifest through her power. Such great power over humankind will permit *Urth* to be transformed in people’s minds into a singular merciless force which was much feared by the fatalistic Anglo-Saxons: *wyrd*.<sup>8</sup>

Adrian Papahagi, in his comprehensive study on representations of Anglo-Saxon fate in literature, describes *wyrd* as having various meanings.<sup>9</sup> Firstly, it is fate itself, in the form of a hostile, violent and malevolent force, which is occasionally personified. In the early Glosses, it is also equivocated with the Parcae, Roman equivalents of the Norns. Eric Gerald Stanley also analysed King Alfred’s Old English translation of Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae* in comparison with the original Latin text. Boethius describes fate as being ruled by the Roman Furies. However, the Old English translator, who equivocated *fatum* with *wyrd* (in this instance an impersonal element), also equivocated the Furies with the Parcae.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that the two triads were considered interchangeable, the Parcae becoming masters of *wyrd*, while also adopting the Furies’ duty of punishing mankind’s crimes. This also implies that *wyrd* was strongly associated not with a merciful, but with a punishing fate. Generally, in Anglo-Saxon poetry, *wyrd* is ruthless, a bearer of death, and it is fully inexorable. It always acts in unexpected ways and causes destruction.<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare’s Weird Sisters are likewise associated with violence, death and

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<sup>5</sup> Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1996), 39.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Shamas, *We Three: The Mythology of Shakespeare’s Weird Sisters* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 73.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology Vol. 1* (London: Forgotten Books, 2014), 405.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Winterbourne, *When the Norns Have Spoken: Time and Fate in Germanic Paganism* (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 87-88.

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Papahagi, *Wyrd: Ideea destinului în literatura engleză veche* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2004), 20.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Gerald Stanley, *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past: The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism and Anglo-Saxon Trial by Jury* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 85.

<sup>11</sup> A. Papahagi, *Wyrd*, 29.

the ruin of Macbeth, and they seem to respect a form of higher knowledge that they hold.<sup>12</sup> Stanley admits that it is difficult to tell from each occurrence to what extent *wyrd* was personified and whether the said personification is a product of classical influence or if it developed analogously with what happened to the ancient goddesses, the Parcae.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, we are provided with more than one possible interpretation, which permeate into the construction of the Weird Sisters. In the Anglo-Saxon context, it can be presumed, owing to their name and prophetic abilities, that they are either personalized forms of *wyrd*, presented in a triadic form under the influence of the Norns and/ or the Parcae, or merely agents in the human realm of an impersonal and all-powerful force of fate.

Continuing this hypothesis, we can proceed with an analysis of the Weird Sisters' role in the fulfilment of destiny, through a comparison with the ancient Roman and Greek train of belief. I have mentioned that the Roman Parcae, or their Greek equivalent, the Moirai, might have influenced the personification of *wyrd*. They were divine triads whose responsibility was to preside over every man's destiny, since birth, through marriage and until death,<sup>14</sup> similarly to the Norns. The Weird Sisters are also individualized in act 1, scene 3, since each of them refers to a particular period of time, greeting Macbeth with a different title: the past Thane of Glamis, before winning the battle, the present Thane of Cawdor and the future "King hereafter,"<sup>15</sup> thus offering an overall perspective on his destiny. However, they lose the connection that the Parcae have with birth – they seem to only be interested in this particular period in Macbeth's life, delivering his decline. Interestingly, they are also missing from Macbeth's death, despite how closely related all forms of the Fates are to it. Because of this absence, the possibility of them having a role in Macbeth's tragic end cannot be seriously considered. Their function in his life seems to begin and end with their prophecies, which, although ominous and proven true, only testify that the Sisters are trustworthy messengers. Furthermore, the Parcae represent the divine will itself, with which some sources say not

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<sup>12</sup> William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>13</sup> E. G. Stanley, *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Grimal, *A Concise Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 328.

<sup>15</sup> 1.3.49-51.



even Zeus could mingle. They have hegemony not only over people, but even over gods, their very birth being tied to the birth of time.<sup>16</sup> Although both the ancient triad and the Weird Sisters are portrayed as old women wearing robes, the Parcae hold a divine dignity that goes beyond human condition. The Sisters, on the other hand, are overflowing with limitations. They are themselves victims of the passage of time and of a merciless fate, liable to be affected by shortage and old age. They are not images to be worshiped, but rather they are often to be pitied. They are far from the all-encompassing Fates who rule over time; their ancient divine nature is restricted to a supernatural influence in a limited period of time and on a set of specific events.

The Parcae are usually represented as spinning the thread of life, which ties man's destiny to the will of the divine, this tie having a fundamentally magical value.<sup>17</sup> Megan Cavell, in *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies*, shows that *wyrd* too was linked to binding, when examining the poem "Solomon and Saturn II", where *wyrda*, in an impersonal form, is equivocated with *ropas*, meaning ropes.<sup>18</sup> She further illustrates how in another Old English poem, *The Riming Poem*, *wyrd* is represented as the weaver of destiny, while also alluding to its function as a bearer of death.<sup>19</sup> Its ultimate task is to bind man to his death and assure the bond does not break. Although Shakespeare's Sisters do not occupy themselves with weaving, Laura Shamas, in *We Three*, claims that the way they spin fate is through the circular dances that hold ritualistic value when cursing the sailor with their incantation at the end of act 1, scene 3.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, I would argue that their very prophecy is a manner of binding Macbeth to his own destiny and, ultimately to his tragic ending. Once aware of it, he cannot escape it, and is doomed to follow to the very end the thread that the Sisters tied to his soul.

The role the Weird Sisters fulfil in the context of the play can be better understood if we make a comparison with an ancient destiny complex that

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<sup>16</sup> Irina Nemeti, "Parcae – Ursitoare. Studiu de mitologie contrastive," accessed June 1, 2019, [https://www.academia.edu/4941133/Irina\\_NEMETI\\_\\_Parcae\\_\\_Ursitoare\\_\\_Studiu\\_de\\_mitologie\\_contrastiv%C4%83](https://www.academia.edu/4941133/Irina_NEMETI__Parcae__Ursitoare__Studiu_de_mitologie_contrastiv%C4%83), 214.

<sup>17</sup> I. Nemeti, "Parcae", 215.

<sup>18</sup> Megan Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 273.

<sup>19</sup> M. Cavell, *Weaving Words*, 274-275.

<sup>20</sup> L. Shamas, *We Three*, 72.

E. R. Dodds illustrates in *The Greeks and the Irrational*. He talks about *ate*, which is a state described as “a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness.”<sup>21</sup> Under its influence, people no longer have proper control over themselves. The complex *moira-Erinys-ate* is further explained by Dodds.<sup>22</sup> *Moirai*, spoken of in the singular, was the morally neutral fate which ought to be fulfilled. It needed a personified form which could act in its authority among humans. The Erinys, that correspond to the aforementioned punishing goddesses, the Roman Furies, are the personal and immediate agents of *moira*, whose duty is to ensure that the course of fate is respected through accordingly distributing *ate*. They too are in the number of three. Much like the Weird Sisters, their appearance is frightening: snakes are braided in their hair and they are holding the whips with which they bring terror to their victims. Most of all, they punish murderers, whom they strike with insanity.<sup>23</sup>

In *Macbeth*, the same principle is illustrated through the complex *wyrd-Weird Sisters-visions*. *Wyrd* is the impersonal fate which exerts its hegemony through a physical triad represented by the Weird Sisters. Their duty is to ensure that Macbeth fulfils his destiny, both of becoming king and of becoming a murderer. They do this by filling Macbeth’s impressionable imagination with visions of greatness and of spilling blood. The prophecy in act 1, the vision of the bloody knife in act 3, as well as the procession of kings in act 4 irreversibly grip him because, as A. C. Bradley points out, his imagination “is productive of violent disturbance both of mind and body.”<sup>24</sup> These visions have an effect comparable to that of *ate*, as Macbeth becomes incapable of controlling his murderous urges, and his consciousness is tormented. Thus, starting from the moment of contact with the Weird Sisters, he can only act under the visions’ influence. Similar to the Erinys, the Sisters punish Macbeth’s unavoidable crime with unease and sleeplessness. They become, as G. Wilson Knight writes, “avengers of murder, symbols of the tormented soul.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently, it can

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<sup>21</sup> E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 5.

<sup>22</sup> E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks*, 7-8.

<sup>23</sup> P. Grimal, *A Concise Dictionary*, 142.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Cecil Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1926), 352.

<sup>25</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), 176.

be presumed that the three sisters are part of a more complex system of destiny in which they play a crucial role, but they do not represent the hegemonic power.

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Withdrawing from Ancient times, we can inquire into the transformation which the goddesses of fate undertook in *Macbeth*, in order to become Shakespeare's emblematic witches. Once again, we begin our investigation by taking a second, more thorough look at the etymology of their name, which allows us to understand not only their ancient legacy, but also their place in the early modern English society. F. Anne Payne attempts to reconstruct the meaning of the elusive and comprehensive term *wyrd* by examining its modern derivations. According to her, the later formed adjective 'weird' describes "an experience that an observer contemplates with uncomprehending but compelling uneasiness."<sup>26</sup> It is exactly such an experience that the three sisters provide for Macbeth and Banquo, as they stare in disbelief, disturbed by their appearance and prophecy. This special compelling and disconcerting quality might be a remnant of the sisters' relationship with the Anglo-Saxon power of fate, a permanent mark which is necessary in order for them to efficiently deliver people's destinies. *Wyrd*, according to Payne, is "alien to the individual; it is the force which balances his errors, punished him, at best tolerated him. *Wyrd* is always the Other."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the Sisters are utterly foreign to the two men, being clearly situated outside human society and even seeming bizarre, unearthly creatures – they "look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth."<sup>28</sup> They are perceived by Macbeth as delivering misfortune upon him and delighting in causing him misery. Alien from humans, they cannot properly relate to them and, once the prophecy and the visions are delivered, they detach themselves completely from the story, being absent in the rest of the play. The Weird Sisters are therefore also *wayward*, an alternative spelling of their name, meaning outside of human nature.<sup>29</sup> This otherness relates not only to their status as partially supernatural beings, but also to their status as witches, ergo outsiders of society, considered the dangerous and unreliable *Other*, and persecuted for it.

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<sup>26</sup> F. Anne Payne, "Three Aspects of Wyrd in *Beowulf*," in *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, ed. Rober B. Burlin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 15.

<sup>27</sup> F. A. Payne, "Three Aspects", 16.

<sup>28</sup> 1.3.42.

<sup>29</sup> L. Shamas, *We Three*, 16.

We can now proceed to examine this hostile society by unravelling the further historical-religious layers which comprise the Weird Sisters and which Shakespeare adopted and merged together. The main source that Shakespeare used for the play was *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, written in 1577, which preserved Macbeth's encounter with the Sisters. Holinshed presumed they were "some Nimphes or Feiries, endowed with knowledge of prophesie."<sup>30</sup> The illustration that accompanies the narration presents three reasonably attractive women, dressed in beautiful and elaborate clothing. This might seem odd when reading the contrasting description Banquo offers in act 1, scene 3, of women "withered, and so wild in their attire", with choppy fingers and skinny lips. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to explain how and why this transformation occurred.

Shakespeare's Weird Sisters were also initially represented as fairies on stage, if we are to believe the only explicit account that remains, written by Simon Forman in 1611. Interestingly, he makes no mention of witches, but rather describes the characters in the same manner Holinshed did: as "three women feiries or Nimphes."<sup>31</sup> Shakespeare did not stray from the chronicle account in the early staging of the play, perhaps still exploiting the fashion of representing fairies on stage as part of the cult of Elizabeth I, since he probably wrote the play not long after the Queen's death. This type of fairies, which he also incorporated in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was not, according to Frances Yates, a representation of popular tradition, but rather a product of courtly Arthurian tradition and Christian Cabala belief.<sup>32</sup> However, the three sisters in *Macbeth* have an underlayer of fairy characteristics which rather pertain to folklore beliefs.

Emma Wilby, in *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, describes how, according to many sources from early modern British times, fairy belief was very strong among the common folk,<sup>33</sup> who lived in a world immersed in the supernatural. While Catholicism was exercising its influence in Britain, popular and Christian

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<sup>30</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles*, accessed August 14, 2019, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/holinsheds-chronicles-1577#>, vol. 1, 243-244.

<sup>31</sup> Nick Moschovakis, "Introduction: Dualistic 'Macbeth'? Problematic 'Macbeth?'," in *Macbeth: New Critical Essays*, ed. Nick Maschovakis (New York: Routledge, 2008), 6.

<sup>32</sup> Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), 174.

<sup>33</sup> Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 22.

beliefs were cohabitating, since the Church was quite lenient, allowing people to continue soliciting the help of magical practitioners, while also attending mass.<sup>34</sup> They were careful not to upset fairies and held them in reverence, because they were ambivalent creatures,<sup>35</sup> thus capable of both good and harm, a description similar to that of the Norns. These beings interacted with magical practitioners and, according to testimonials from witch trials, became their familiars, directing them in acts of healing and divining.<sup>36</sup> It was the fairies who could foretell one's destiny, as Holinshed already knew when writing his chronicles, and that is possibly the cause for the fact that, as Laura Shamas writes, the word *fairy* derives from the Latin *fata*, meaning fate.<sup>37</sup>

The Weird Sisters have kept this undeniable power of precognition, which remains inherent to their origins. They are not fully human, their shape being uncertain: "look not like th'inhanitants o'th'earth / And yet are on't."<sup>38</sup> This may relate to the physicality of fairies, who, according to Wilby, are "somewhere on the spectrum between human flesh and bones and pure spirit."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the Sisters never physically walk out of a scene, but, as Macbeth himself remarks, "they made themselves air into which they vanished."<sup>40</sup> They seem to shift between matter and spirit, changing their composition at will and being both part of the human and the spirit worlds. Another fairy aspect that Shakespeare used is the connection between fairyland and the dead, since there are many accounts of people who had passed over being seen living in fairyland like they had on Earth.<sup>41</sup> The ease with which the sisters invoke the dead kings' procession<sup>42</sup> with the simple word of "Show!" seems to attest they have easy access to dead souls. On the other hand, this scene can also be interpreted using an elite mind-set, which developed during the time Shakespeare wrote his plays. The occult Renaissance was being censored

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<sup>34</sup> E. Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 113.

<sup>35</sup> E. Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> E. Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 3-5.

<sup>37</sup> L. Shamas, *We Three*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> 1.3.42-43.

<sup>39</sup> E. Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> 1.5.4-5.

<sup>41</sup> E. Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> 4.1.107-125.

by forces such as Protestantism, which violently proclaimed its power. Elite Christian ideas started to assert themselves more brutally over paganism and “any magical beliefs which did not easily assimilate into Christian doctrine and ritual were associated with the Devil.”<sup>43</sup> Fairies were beginning to be considered, according to James I’s 1597 treatise titled *Daemonologie*, “illusions that was risest in the time of Papistrie”, sent by the devil for “the senses of sundry simple creatures.”<sup>44</sup> He goes against works such as Reginald Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), which argue that devils, because of their non-corporeal nature, could not collude with humans.<sup>45</sup> Rather, James I fully recognizes them as powerful beings who malevolently mingle into the affairs of humans through various means, among which the figure of the witch gained notoriety. Following this mind-set, the aforementioned invocation of the kings’ souls would be dismissed as part of the tricks and apparitions that the devil can fool people with, because, according to James I, “the deuil may forme what kinde of impressiones he pleases in the aire”<sup>46</sup> and witches “can make spirites... to follow and trouble persones.”<sup>47</sup>

Magical practitioners were demonized and therefore became liable to be punished, regardless of the type of magic they performed. King James I was part of the movement whose goal was to prove that “such diuinish arts have bene and are,”<sup>48</sup> and that they should be eradicated, his purpose being explicitly written in the preface of his treatise. Eventually, through the Witchcraft Bill of 1604, which made no distinction between *maleficium*, namely “the manipulation of occult forces at a distance with malevolent intent,”<sup>49</sup> and healing magic, the King condemned to the death penalty anyone who commuted with spirits, regardless of whether they had caused harm or not. This decision also arose, perhaps most strongly, from the fear people had regarding practitioners of magic: in the popular mind, one who could heal

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<sup>43</sup> E. Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 47.

<sup>44</sup> James I, *Daemonologie* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2002), 36.

<sup>45</sup> Stuart Clark, “Witchcraft and Magic in Early Modern Culture,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of the Witch Trials*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo, William Monter and Stuart Clark (London: The Athlone Press, 2001), 126.

<sup>46</sup> James I, *Daemonologie*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> James I, *Daemonologie*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> James I, *Daemonologie*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> E. Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 42.

by magic must surely be able to do harm with it too.<sup>50</sup> And it was certainly so in the mind of James I, who feared himself to be a target of the witches' malicious powers. As Emma Wilby writes, "it is here, where magical forces were at their most ambiguous, that the figure of the magical practitioner merged into that of the witch."<sup>51</sup>

As E. R. Dodds explains, when a new belief system emerges, it either comes to exist side by side with the old one, or the old one lives as a half-conscious part of the new.<sup>52</sup> The first possibility can be found in English communities in early Catholic times, when pagan tradition was still tolerated. Shakespeare's witches are instead a testimony of the second possibility. The new Christian belief in the demonic origin of witches can be found not only in *Macbeth*, but also in Holinshed's fairies and their powers: the old system of belief was merely transformed, but not erased. Therefore, Shakespeare must have adapted his play to the time and people's taste in theatre, and specifically to James I's interests. According to Diane Purkiss in *The Witch in History*, witch trials peaked in the 1580s and 1590s. By the Jacobean age, when Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, they were decreasing in number, but the figure of the witch became more and more fascinating on stage, due to the theatricality that magical practice entailed<sup>53</sup> and to the special interest that James I took in witchcraft as a source of entertainment.<sup>54</sup> It was not only a matter of pleasing the patron king, but also a matter of the audience's preferences, who delighted in plays such as Ben Jonson's *The Mask of Queenes* and Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*. The fair courtly fairies became the foul witches, and their foulness became a fair spectacle for the people. Shakespeare delivered to the audience what people of his time wanted.

And indeed, the three witches are a mixture of terrifying powers and elements meant to entertain, which to a 17<sup>th</sup> century audience would make them seem frightening, despicable, and yet liable for mockery. On the surface, the Sisters seem to exercise their power over Macbeth as forces of evil who drive him to murder, and yet they are not truly capable of such an influence.

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<sup>50</sup> Stuart Clark, "Witchcraft and Magic," 112.

<sup>51</sup> Emma Wilby, *The Visions of Isevel Gowdie: Magic, Witchcraft and Dark Shamanism in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>52</sup> E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks*, 179.

<sup>53</sup> D. Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 184-188.

<sup>54</sup> D. Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 199.

As Snyder claims, “they are able only to abet human villainy rather than bring it about.”<sup>55</sup> Their real power seems rather small, not nearly as strong as Lady Macbeth’s influence, and their short-versed incantations seem childish compared to the lady’s complex renunciation of the very humanity inside of her.<sup>56</sup> They are separated from other characters through their “incantatory verse,”<sup>57</sup> short and rhyming, which is meant to enhance theatricality and can be best observed in the cauldron scene:

**First Witch**

Round about the cauldron go;  
In the poison’d entrails throw.  
Toad, that under cold stone  
Days and nights has thirty-one  
Swelter’d venom sleeping got,  
Boil thou first i’ the charmed pot.

**ALL**

Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

**Second Witch**

Fillet of a fenny snake,  
In the cauldron boil and bake;  
Eye of newt and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,  
Adder’s fork and blind-worm’s sting,  
Lizard’s leg and owlet’s wing,  
For a charm of powerful trouble,  
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

**ALL**

Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Susan Snyder, *Shakespeare: A Wayward Journey* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 173.

<sup>56</sup> 1.5.39-53.

<sup>57</sup> D. Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 210.

<sup>58</sup> 4.1.4-21.



In its entirety, the scene appears to have the same role of entertainment, because of the elements which Purkiss calls “infantile in their dirtiness:”<sup>59</sup> toads, bats, snakes, lizards mixed together in a foul potion, as well as parts of the demonized and scapegoated people: Jews, Tartars and even witches. Once again, the prominent status of witches as part of the Other emerges. They are associated with loathsome creatures, as well as marginalized groups who were not considered to belong in society. The public was fascinated, and yet disgusted by their nature and their shocking potion-making, which is a representation of ‘demonological witchcraft.’<sup>60</sup> It was associated in the early modern period with a demonic pact, which is not shown or mentioned in *Macbeth*, because it is already assumed by the audience, although the witches’ masters’ identity remains ambiguous. It is also connected to the witches’ Sabbath, a notorious procession which sparked sick curiosity into the minds of people. On the Sabbath, according to Purkiss,<sup>61</sup> unbaptised babies were sacrificed, an element which is indeed part of the witches’ brew: “finger of birth-strangled babe.”<sup>62</sup> Such a detail must have provided the shocking experience that the audience craved. The use of parts of corpses seems to have been generally associated with witches in people’s conceptions, since James I included in the Witchcraft Bill of 1604 the illegality of grave-robbing.<sup>63</sup> All in all, the witches are delighted by all this foulness, declaring the charm to be “firm and good,”<sup>64</sup> and thus proclaiming themselves to be as unclean as the ingredients.

On the other hand, the Weird Sisters’ poverty and ugliness anchor them not in the theatrical world, but in the hostile reality of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. If we are to analyse James’ treatise, it is clear that the three sisters are a close image of the witch typology he describes. They are portrayed as ragged, poor women who seek, as the King writes, to “hurte men and their gudes”, driven by their “great miserie and povertie”, having turned to the devil himself to

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<sup>59</sup> D. Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 213.

<sup>60</sup> E. Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel*, 29.

<sup>61</sup> D. Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 211.

<sup>62</sup> 4.1.30.

<sup>63</sup> Edward H. Thompson, “Macbeth, King James and the Witches,” accessed October 10, 2019, [http://faculty.umb.edu/gary\\_zabel/Courses/Phil%20281b/Philosophy%20of%20Magic/Arcana/Witchcraft%20and%20Grimoires/macbeth.htm](http://faculty.umb.edu/gary_zabel/Courses/Phil%20281b/Philosophy%20of%20Magic/Arcana/Witchcraft%20and%20Grimoires/macbeth.htm).

<sup>64</sup> 4.1.38.

alleviate their condition.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in 1584 Reginald Scot described the suspects for witchcraft as “blear-eyed, pale, foul, and full of wrinkles.”<sup>66</sup> Considering this, it is obvious why Shakespeare chose to replace the beautiful image of Holinshed’s fairies with the dreadful description provided by Banquo. It was simply an adaptation to the main concerns of the times. Walter Clyde Curry moreover points out that the figure of the witch would have been more terrifying to the audience than a representation of the devil himself, which had become at least partially ludicrous for the audience.<sup>67</sup> The witches were rooted in a reality where the devil can take hold of humans and help them do harm. They were, in the minds of the many, a real-life danger.

The danger posed by witches, however, was usually a relative one. As Robin Briggs shows, “witches were essentially reactive, responding to acts of aggression or hostility from others.”<sup>68</sup> Their harmful magic was mostly a form of protection from a hostile world in which they were not tolerated. Accordingly, the Weird Sisters are portrayed as being in a vulnerable position, that of begging for chestnuts. Their revenge is only enacted once they are condescendingly refused,<sup>69</sup> and their mode of operation is the causing of a powerful storm, a phenomenon commonly blamed on witches in Shakespeare’s time.<sup>70</sup> King James himself held Scottish witches accountable for the storms he encountered while sailing from Denmark to Scotland and wrote they “can rayse stormes and tempestes in the aire.”<sup>71</sup>

It is convenient, as Walter Clyde Curry<sup>72</sup> suggests, to consider that the three sisters have a demonic nature, due to their supernatural powers, and it would have been so for the Christian audience in Jacobean times too. He claims that they represent “the metaphysical world of evil spirits”, but also admits that they are “compounded out of many contradictory elements,

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<sup>65</sup> James I, *Daemonologie*, 17-18.

<sup>66</sup> Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 36.

<sup>67</sup> Walter Clyde Curry, “The Demonic Metaphysics of *Macbeth*,” *Studies in Philology* 30, no. 3 (July 1933): 400.

<sup>68</sup> R. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 113.

<sup>69</sup> 1.3.

<sup>70</sup> E. Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 42.

<sup>71</sup> James I, *Daemonologie*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> W. C. Curry, “The Demonic Metaphysics”, 396-400.

assimilated and fused by the artistic imagination into a unified whole". Such is Shakespeare's creation. James I and his entourage could have seen in the sisters exactly what they expected and wanted to see. But the layers underneath that give the characters "a certain dignity and mysterious quality which inspires awe in the beholder" are undeniably present and form a complex nature that should not be dismissed. Their supernatural abilities are limited, their weaknesses keep them rooted into their persecuted status in the real world, yet they still exhibit remnants of their once divine identities, which instil their strange compelling quality.

In this paper I have briefly tried to explore the main mythological and Pagan figures at the core of Shakespeare's *Weird Sisters*, beginning with *wyrd* and the Norns, advancing towards the Parcae and the Furies, and expanding on fairies and witches, spanning over different stages of Pagan and Christian beliefs, which I have collated with the Sisters' features and roles. I have identified their position inside a system of destiny, coming to the conclusion they are most likely the agents of a power of fate, rather than fate itself, and that their divine ancient nature is restricted. Inside a magic-infused Britain, they have proven to be an assortment of popular fairy abilities and stereotypical Jacobean age witches, this combination being a testimony of societal and religious-historical change. Meanwhile, they somehow still manage to escape from being completely known and defined, a side of them always disappearing into thin air. Even after numberless studies and analyses, they still stand inscrutable and otherworldly, persistently true to their name, and waiting to once again meet upon the heath.

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*Milk, Blood and Gall:  
Witches' Bodily Fluids from the Treatise to the English Stage*

**ELISABETH LACOMBE\***

**Abstract:** The relationship between humoralism and literature has been broached by many critics, often in the lovesickness or in the melancholic-as-genius aspect. Yet, barring a few individual cases, there has been no general study linking witches with humours in the seventeenth century English dramatical corpus. The present study attempts to fill this gap by identifying the medical or demonological treatises that influenced playwrights' representations of witches. Witches bodies are better understood by taking into account Thomas Laqueur's theory of the one-sex body, following the transformation of fluids into one another which is characteristic of their fundamental imbalance. Firstly, milk turns into gall inside witches-mothers rejecting their motherhood, then into blood inside witches feeding familiars in a distorted image of motherhood. The absence of blood in amenorrhoeic witches is shown as a recurrent cause for their melancholy which has physiological and psychological consequences, in particular a licentiousness that makes witches seek blood in its semen form. Black bile is thought to be the devil's humour, yet in the Weyer-Bodin controversy theoreticians do not agree on whether witches are melancholic women suffering from hallucinations or real agents of the devil. On the other hand, plays ascribe either physical or emotional causes as well as symptoms coherent with a melancholy disease to witches, and playwrights use symbolical representations of melancholy on stage. In conclusion, it is difficult to establish a typology of such representations, given that each witch is uniquely composed with a particular playwright's understanding of humoralism, often conflating several distinct ideas.

**Keywords:** witch, melancholy, blood, milk, demonology, humoralism, plays, seventeenth-century.

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Just like every other body during the early modern period, witches' bodies were encoded according to humoralism. Indeed, it is the foremost medical theory during the Renaissance, and according to it, blood, phlegm, black and yellow bile must be balanced for the body to be healthy, and excess or lack thereof is the cause of all sickness. Yet, humoralism is not altogether consistent, firstly because its main two sources, Hippocrates and Galen, offer sometimes conflicting explanations, and secondly because they spawned along the centuries various interpretations. Those medical treatises fuel literary representations, yet one cannot expect plays and theoretical treatises to be entirely one and the same in their representations of witches' bodies, nor the plays to be entirely consistent from one playwright to another. Indeed, some writers had a layman's understanding of melancholy, others a specialist's knowledge, but none expected said knowledge from the public.<sup>1</sup> Thus, they would use popular *topoi* on melancholy, and often avoid an explicit medical diagnosis.

My main purpose is to highlight the precise sources which English playwrights used to fuel their representations of witches, which resulted in complex characters that were defined by physiological as well as symbolic elements. Those representations are actually a conflation of several distinct ideas, sometimes contradictory ones, within Renaissance scientific literature on bodily fluids in general, and on melancholy in particular.

To grasp the full literal and symbolic meaning of references to such bodily fluids as milk, blood, or gall, Thomas Laqueur's theory of the one-sex body is key. In *Making sex*, he remarks on the fundamental fungibility of fluids in humoralism: "in the construction of the one-sex body the borders between blood, semen, other residues and food, between the organs of reproduction and other organs, between the heat of passion and the heat of life, were indistinct and, to the modern person, almost unimaginably – indeed terrifyingly – porous."<sup>2</sup> My exploration of bodily fluids follows their transformations within witches' bodies, from milk to blood or gall, and from blood to black bile, with a final emphasis on black bile that threatens to infect their entire body, as well as spread to anyone in contact.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), 70.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 42.

Milk, though not one of the four humours, is as essential a fluid to the understanding of humoralism as blood or bile. It is considered blood turned white by the heart's heat, for instance 17<sup>th</sup> century English physician John Sadler writes that "the childe, while it is in the matrice is nourished with this bloud; and it is as true, that being out of the womb, it is still nourished with the same; for the milke is nothing but the menstruous bloud made white in the breasts; and I am sure womans milke is not thought to bee venomous, but of a nutritive quality, answerable to the tender nature of an infant."<sup>3</sup> This nutritive, physiological quality is thus linked with a moral quality, tenderness. Moreover, Marylynn Salmon underlines the ubiquitous idea that milk could heal the sick and old, as well as babies because "the white, frothy appearance of breast milk indicated its highly concocted, and therefore powerful, state."<sup>4</sup> Finally, it is symbolically charged with positive connotations, such as charity in Pero and Cimon's story, or tenderness and grace, in the *Virgo Lactans*. These connotations are also present in plays, as apparent in *Macbeth* (1606) through the simile made by Macbeth: "pity like a naked newborn babe."<sup>5</sup> Hence various Christian values are embodied in the mother's tenderness for her newborn child, in the milk feeding it by synecdoche, and in the said newborn by a sympathetic transfer.<sup>6</sup>

If milk is used as a symbol of the mother's tenderness for her newborn, witches, on the contrary, tend to reject the positive qualities of motherhood, and of breast-feeding. One of the most well-known examples is Lady Macbeth, referring to milk three times in Shakespeare's play. She utters "yet do I fear thy nature,/ It is too full o'th'milk of human kindness"<sup>7</sup> while talking about Macbeth,

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<sup>3</sup> John Sadler, *The sickes vomans private looking-glasse wherein methodically are handled all uterine affects, or diseases arising from the wombe; enabling women to informe the physician about the cause of their grieffe*, (London: Anne Griffin, 1636; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2003), 9-10, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A11278.0001.001>.

<sup>4</sup> Marylynn Salmon, "The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America", *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 2 (1994): 247-69; [www.jstor.org/stable/3788897](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3788897), 251.

<sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), (I.7.21), 132.

<sup>6</sup> "Sympathetic" here is to be taken in its Renaissance meaning, where anything can be influenced by something with which it has any physical proximity, or symbolic link.

<sup>7</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.5.14-15), 123.



exhibiting a transfer of this feminine quality onto him, and a criticism of the positive value born by milk. In “Come to my woman’s breasts,/ And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers”<sup>8</sup> occurs the first transformation of milk into another bodily fluid. Gall is usually a synonym for bile, but it can be either of the two humours, yellow or black bile. This refusal of all motherhood poses a threat through the corruption of the milk’s very essence and colour: it becomes venomous rather than curative. Her refusal of motherhood is final in: “I have given suck, and know/ How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me:/ I would, while it was smiling in my face,/ Have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums,/ And dash’d the brains out.”<sup>9</sup> Aside from the usual association between milk and tenderness, the brutality and corporality of this baby’s death is the most shocking corruption of a mother’s role in the eyes of the audience. Thus, rejection of motherhood goes through a rejection of tenderness as a virtue, of milk itself, and a final destruction of the newborn’s body.

Similar violence is to be found in John Studley’s translation of Seneca’s *Medea* (1581): “With crimson colourd blood of babes harte, their alters wil I staine. Through liuers, lounge the lightes & through euery gut and gall.”<sup>10</sup> The literal evisceration of her own children announced by Medea is emphasized in the English version by the use of such central organs as the liver – where blood is produced, the gall – where yellow bile is produced, and the heart – seat of life; as well as by emphasis on the red colour. The mother’s milk freely given is symbolically transformed into the babies’ blood violently taken. Medea’s breast is itself corrupted by her rage, as pointed out by “sweete the poyson rancke within the brest,”<sup>11</sup> and as evidenced by the adjectives associated with it: “smothering,”<sup>12</sup> “burning,”<sup>13</sup> “boylyng,”<sup>14</sup> “brazen,”<sup>15</sup> “cancred,”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.5.45-46), 125-126.

<sup>9</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.7.54-58), 135.

<sup>10</sup> John Studley, *The seventh tragedie of Seneca, Entitled Medea, translated out of Latin* (London: Thomas Colwell, 1581; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2002), (I.127-130), 3, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A11912.0001.001>.

<sup>11</sup> John Studley, *Medea*, (I.217), 4.

<sup>12</sup> John Studley, *Medea*, (IV.9), 31.

<sup>13</sup> John Studley, *Medea*, (I.161), 3 and (III.6), 18.

<sup>14</sup> John Studley, *Medea*, (II.303), 11.

<sup>15</sup> John Studley, *Medea*, (I.148), 3.

<sup>16</sup> John Studley, *Medea*, (V.208), 44.

“stewing.”<sup>17</sup> Heat, this natural and positive quality that turns blood into milk is here in excess, and since overheating had negative consequences on the blood,<sup>18</sup> it thus poisoned the milk. The witch becomes infanticidal because her body is imbalanced.

The witch need not be specifically a mother to embody an anti-mother figure, in particular when she is a striga. Ben Jonson references the greco-roman origin of the witch in two of his works. In *The Masque of Queens* (1609), the fifth hag says: “Under a Cradle I did creep,/ By Day; and, when the Child was a sleep,/ At Night, I suck’d the Breath; and rose.”<sup>19</sup> The blood, as well as the breath are seen as the vehicle of the spirit, thus sucking one is quite the same as sucking the other. Here the playwright is influenced by Bartolomeo Spina and his treatise *Tractatus de Strigibus et Lamiis* as well as by the *Malleus Maleficarum*<sup>20</sup> from which he takes up the idea of witches sucking children’s blood and spirit. The symbolic connection between breath and blood is more explicit in *The Sad Shepherd* (1637), where Maudlin is acting like a striga: “Thence shee steales forth to [...] Writhe Childrens wrists! and suck their breath in sleepe!/ Get Vialls of their blood.”<sup>21</sup> Here the destruction of life is doubled by the simultaneous use of breath and blood, by the physical pain convoqued by “writhe”, and associated again with sleep, *id est* when the child is most vulnerable.

Nonetheless, the most ubiquitous inversion of motherhood performed by witches is the breast-feeding given to their familiars, letting them suck their blood instead of milk. It seems to be a specifically early modern English obsession, given that familiars are nearly absent in continental treatises and trials. In one trial’s instance, the body of the witch Alice Samuel showed a third teat, and we are told that “the jailor’s wife took the same teat in her hand, and

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<sup>17</sup> John Studley, *Medea*, (IV.479), 39.

<sup>18</sup> Marylynn Salmon, “The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America”, 258.

<sup>19</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens*, in *Complete Works of Ben Jonson* (Delphi Classics, 2013; British Library, Early English Books Online, 2015), 2069-2070, [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:99844873](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99844873).

<sup>20</sup> See the annotations in the playwright’s hand in Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* (London: N. Ores, 1609).

<sup>21</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd*, in *Complete Works of Ben Jonson* (Delphi Classics, 2013), (II.8.24-30), 1945.

seeming to strain it, there issued out at the first as if it had been beesenings, which is a mixture of yellow milk and water: at the second time there came out in similitude as clear milk, and in the end very blood itself."<sup>22</sup> The presence of "beesenings", which we would call colostrum today is interesting, as it was considered impure because of its color and consistency.<sup>23</sup> Colostrum turns into milk then blood, reversing the expected order or transformation: such an unstable state for bodily fluids is unnatural and dangerous.

Of course, whether spirit familiars have a real need of being fed blood is debated at the time. In daemonologist Matthew Hopkins' interpretation, though they have none, it allows the devil a greater hold on the witches' souls: "He seekes not their blood, as if he could not subsist without that nourishment, but he often repairs to them, and gets it, the more to aggravate the Witches damnation [...] But in this case of drawing out of these Teats, he doth really enter into the body, reall, corporeall, substantiall creature."<sup>24</sup> Thus, the witch gives her blood, which is her life force, for a familiar that does not need it. Yet the idea that the Devil still needs to be embodied is somewhat ambiguous. Explicit scenes with stage directions showing the familiar sucking the witch's blood appear in [III,3] of Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* (1616); [II,1] and [IV,1] of Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome's *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634); and [IV,1] of William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621). The familiars are described and identified as animals whose drinking of blood is usual "There was a bat hung at my lips three times/ As we came through the woods and drank her fill,"<sup>25</sup> and they are a typical feature of witches stories within the diegesis: "I have heard old beldams/ Talk of familiars in the shape of mice,/ Rats, ferrets, weasels, and I wot not what,/ That have

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<sup>22</sup> *The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three witches of Warboys* (London, Widow Orwin, 1593). Reprinted in Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 297.

<sup>23</sup> Marylynn Salmon, "The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America", 257.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches* (London: R. Royston, 1647; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2009), 4, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A86550.0001.001>.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, ed. Marion O'Connor, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), (III.3.7-8), 1151.

appeared, and sucked, some say, their blood."<sup>26</sup> They exhibit the greatest variety of pets possible, as well as the variety of name they could be given. Those names reference real occurrences (Tommy, Elizabeth Sawyer's dog)<sup>27</sup>, their spirit nature (Puckling), but mostly the breast-feeding function, such as Suckling, Mamilion, and Mawsy (jaw). The sucking of blood is shown as quite corporal, and the mixing of animal and human categories would have been considered highly diabolical by the audience.<sup>28</sup>

The breast-feeding of familiars is associated with a tenderness one could expect of a mother towards her human child. Elizabeth Sawyer is a doting mistress to her black dog: "Ho, ho, my dainty,/ My little pearl! no lady loves her hound,/ Monkey, or paroquet, as I do thee."<sup>29</sup> The Lancashire witches are likewise affectionate with their familiars: "Come Mawsy, come Puckling,/ And come, my sweet Suckling,/ My pretty Mamilion, my joy!/ Fall each to his duggy/ While kindly we hug ye/ As tender as nurse over boy. / Then suck our bloods freely."<sup>30</sup> One can note a multiplication of surnames and possessives to show the motherlike affection their witch bestows upon them.<sup>31</sup> The comparison "as tender as nurse over boy" enhances the maternal relationship between the witch and her familiar, presenting an "obscenely distorted inversion of the normal mother child relationship."<sup>32</sup> The positive association of milk and tenderness is thus defiled by the transformation of milk into blood and of the newborn into a demon. Furthermore, connotations of bestiality are present through the sexualization of the animal: "There's one comes down to fetch his dues,/ A kiss, a coll, a sip of blood."<sup>33</sup> There is a series of innuendos in words such as "duggy" (breast sexualized, dug), "coll" (embrace), "kiss",

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<sup>26</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, in *A Woman killed with kindness and other domestic plays*, ed. Martin Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), (II.1.100-103), 147.

<sup>27</sup> James Serpell, "Guardian Spirits or Demonic Pets: The Concept of the Witch's Familiar in Early Modern England, 1530-1712", in *The Animal-human Boundary: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Angela N. H. Creager and William Chester Jordan (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 175.

<sup>28</sup> James Serpell, "Guardian Spirits or Demonic Pets", 181.

<sup>29</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (IV.1.162-164), 176.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, ed. Gabriel Egan, (London: Nick Hern, 2002), (IV.1.107-113), 72-73.

<sup>31</sup> For instance "dainty," "my little pearl," "tomboy," "tomalin," "my sweet," "my pretty," "my joy."

<sup>32</sup> James Serpell, "Guardian Spirits or Demonic Pets", 181.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (III.3.49-50), 1152.

“hug”, “loves”, “lips”. In *The Witch of Edmonton* a sexual relationship is quite explicit: “Stand on thy hind-legs up. Kiss me, my Tommy,/ And rub away some wrinkles on my brow/ By making my old ribs to shrug for joy/ Of thy fine tricks.”<sup>34</sup> The choice of using an actor inside a dog costume to play Tommy and the stage direction “[She embraces the Dog]”<sup>35</sup> allows the bestiality to be physically represented on stage rather than simply alluded to. Incest is joined with bestiality to create a representation of the witch as the quintessential “anti-mother”.

Blood is associated with the heart, it is moist and warm, the precise opposite of black bile. Robert Burton, in his famous 17<sup>th</sup> century treatise *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), defines it this way: “Blood is a hot, sweet, temperate, red humour, prepared in the mesaraic veins, and made of the most temperate parts of the chylus in the liver, whose office is to nourish the whole body, to give it strength and colour, being dispersed by the veins through every part of it. And from it spirits are first begotten in the heart.”<sup>36</sup> Blood is thus seen as the location of the spirit, as one’s principle of life and vitality, but also in a moral sense, as one’s sins and virtues. By consuming it or sharing it, one could receive its positive (or negative) qualities, hence the first transfusion experiments, based on the idea that by giving sheep’s blood to a man he would receive its placidity. Menstruation fits into this system in a slightly different way depending on the Hippocratic or Galenic theory.<sup>37</sup> The first view was of menstruation as a purification: women being colder than men could not purify their blood through sweat, and instead did it through their menses.<sup>38</sup> The second view was of menstruation as a plethora, an excess of blood from the digested food, which was discharged periodically through one of the “Natural passages.”<sup>39</sup> Whether one agreed with the plethora or the purification system, the result was the same: women’s bodies needed to menstruate to be healthy.

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<sup>34</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (IV.1.157-160), 176.

<sup>35</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (IV.1.160), 176.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Hen. Crips & Lodo Lloyd. 1652; Project Gutenberg, 2004), 167, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10800>.

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15-18. The author notes a third theory appearing in the middle of the seventeenth century, but deems it a modernized version of the Hippocratic purification theory.

<sup>38</sup> Patricia Crawford, “Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Past & Present*, Volume 91, Issue 1, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1981, 47-73, <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/91.1.47>, 50.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Crawford, “Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England”, 51.

If a woman did not menstruate, according to the Hippocratic system, her blood would putrefy, or to put it in Sadler's words: "The suppression of the Termes is [...], making the blood viscuous and grosse,"<sup>40</sup> *id est* turn into an unnatural black bile. According to the plethora theory, if the blood had nowhere to go, it would make its way up until it reached the brain. French daemonologist Pierre Le Loyer (Peter De Loier) analyses the consequences as it follows: "Then the same blood, not finding any passage, troubleth the brain in such sorte, that it causeth many of them to have idle fancies and fond conceits, and tormenteth them with diverse imaginations of horrible specters."<sup>41</sup> Hence amenorrhoea was a state considered unhealthy for women, and caused melancholy,<sup>42</sup> either through unnatural black bile, or by an overabundance of blood turned adust into the brain. The two theories are similarly connected to melancholy by Burton: "that menstruous blood turned into melancholy, [...] by putrefaction or adustion,"<sup>43</sup> and the playwrights do not seem to make any difference between them.

Witches, being often old, were therefore melancholic because of their amenorrhoea: "why should an old witch be thought free from such fantasies, who [...] upon the stopping of their monethlie melancholike flux or issue of blood, in their age must needs increase therein."<sup>44</sup> Reginald Scot suggests thus that old age and its inevitable amenorrhoea leads logically to melancholy and to an increase in "fancies."<sup>45</sup> One stage example is Lady Macbeth, whose amenorrhea was diagnosed by Jenijoy La Belle.<sup>46</sup> The well-known quote "Make thick my blood;/ Stop up the access and passage to remorse,/ That no compunctious visitings of nature/ Shake my fell purpose"<sup>47</sup> refers to such an affliction through the "thick" – akined to "viscuous and grosse;" the "visiting

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<sup>40</sup> John Sadler, *The sicke vvomans private looking-glasse*, 14-15.

<sup>41</sup> Peter De Loier, *A treatise of specters*, trans. Zachary Jones (London: Printed by Val. S., 1605; Boston Public Library, 2016), 110, <https://archive.org/details/treatiseofspecte00loye>.

<sup>42</sup> Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England", 54.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 410.

<sup>44</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1584), ed. Brinsley Nicholson (London: Elliot Stock, 1886; Princeton Theological Seminary Library, 2009), 42, <https://archive.org/details/discoverieofwitc00scot>.

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*, 177-178.

<sup>46</sup> Jenijoy La Belle, "'A Strange Infirmitie': Lady Macbeth's Amenorrhoea," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1980): 381-86, doi:10.2307/2869201.

<sup>47</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.5.41-44), 125.

of nature" – synonym for the menses in 17<sup>th</sup> century medical language; and "access and passage" – the "natural passage" of the uterus. I would like to underline the use of remorse and compunctious in relationship with blood, exemplifying the positive quality associated with this fluid that Lady Macbeth denies.

The usual interpretation is that the absence of menstruations is a way for Lady Macbeth to try to turn herself into a man.<sup>48</sup> It is in keeping with Laqueur's one-sex body, since for a Renaissance audience Lady Macbeth could indeed literally change her sex by the power of her imagination. Yet it is not the only change that derives from her amenorrhoea. If melancholy blood reached the brain it also had a psychological impact, as evidenced by Burton describing the melancholic's symptoms: "Some think they see visions, confer with spirits and devils, they shall surely be damned, are afraid of some treachery, imminent danger, and the like."<sup>49</sup> It can explain Lady Macbeth's hallucinations in [V,1],<sup>50</sup> the fear she tries to deny by her question "What need we fear,"<sup>51</sup> as well as the threat of her pending damnation implied in her remark "Hell is murky."<sup>52</sup> The Doctor also mentions her "infected mind,"<sup>53</sup> which is to be interpreted in a very literal way. Those hallucinations are associated with a lack of sleep by 17<sup>th</sup> century English physician John Pechey: "The signs of it are [...] much Cogitation, Suspicion, Shame-facedness, Dejection of Mind, disturbed Sleep, frightful Dreams, a preposterous Judgment; [...] and sometimes the Melancholy is so high, as that they grow almost Distracted, and are ready to make away with themselves."<sup>54</sup> This is coherent with the Doctor's assessment of the situation: "she is troubled with thick-coming fancies/ That keep her from her rest,"<sup>55</sup> with the sleepwalking, and with the interpretation of Lady Macbeth's death as a suicide.

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<sup>48</sup> Sarah Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*, 171-172.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 457-458.

<sup>50</sup> The "Out, damned spot!" in William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 216-220.

<sup>51</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (V.1.32), 218.

<sup>52</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (V.1.31), 218.

<sup>53</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (V.1.62), 219.

<sup>54</sup> John Pechey, *A general treatise of the diseases of maids, bigbellied women, child-bed-women, and widows together with the best methods of preventing or curing the same* (London: Henry Bonwick, 1696; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2006), 245-246, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A53915.0001.001>.

<sup>55</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (V.3.58-59), 225.

In plays, witches look for a sexual partner in what appears to be an attempt to replace their missing blood. Their licentiousness is a symptom of their melancholy, because according to 17<sup>th</sup> century physicians, adust black bile released hot vapours that stimulated sexual appetite<sup>56</sup> – hence the common advice for young melancholy women to get married. Several witches exhibit those symptoms, such as Erictho in John Marston's *Sophonisba* (1606): "Know we, Erictho, with a thirsty womb,/ Have coveted full threescore suns for blood of kings.[...] We, in the pride and height of covetous lust,/ Have wish'd with woman's greediness to fill/ Our longing arms with Syphax' well-strung limbs[...] Now are we full/ Of our dear wishes. Thy proud heat, well wasted,/ Hath made our limbs grow young."<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Hecate covets Almachildes in *The Witch*: "'Tis Almachildes: fresh blood stirs in me,/ The man that I have lusted to enjoy;/ I have had him thrice in incubus already;"<sup>58</sup> and Elizabeth Sawyer has a relationship with Tommy in *The Witch of Edmonton*: "Have I given up myself to thy black lust [...] I am on fire, even in the midst of ice,/ Raking my blood up."<sup>59</sup> The first common metaphor is of the seed as heat. Indeed, Laqueur points out that semen is a greater form of blood: it is a quintessential bearer of life, and in particular of heat.<sup>60</sup> The warm quality of this blood turned semen is obvious in "proud heat", the image of the sun with the "blood of kings" *id est* Syphax's semen, and "fire", made more intense by the antithetic "ice" recalling the coldness of melancholy. Another element is the systematic association of lust and blood which is a commonplace in early modern times<sup>61</sup>. Blood is characterized by its movement in "fresh blood stirs in me", and "raking my blood up". Moreover, the sinful nature of such relationships is enhanced by the repetition of "coveted," "covetous lust," "woman's greediness," "I have lusted to enjoy," and "thy black lust." The colour black could be here a way

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<sup>56</sup> Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77.

<sup>57</sup> John Marston, *The Wonder of Women, or The Tragedie of Sophonisba* (London: John Windes, 1606; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2003), (V.1.9-21), 22, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A07083.0001.001>.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (l.2.195-197), 1137-1138.

<sup>59</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (V.1.4-11), 186.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making sex*, 38.

<sup>61</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 131-132.



to point out the role of black bile in lust. It is not love, but an insatiable sexual appetite caused by the humoural imbalance.

Nevertheless, such a transient transfer of heat as the one obtained in congress does not cure them: by spending blood through seed, one loses life. When one is young and has too much blood it can be positive, but if one is old and lacks blood, it is all the more dangerous.<sup>62</sup> In plays, it can be ambiguous, for instance, Erictho seems at first to have won heat and blood: her "thirsty womb" is "full" after the sexual act, and her "limbs grow young" because of it, but it is at the expense of Syphax's heat, which is "wasted." Hecate has "thrice already" used Almachildes' heat, but still covets him, and the reference to the "incubus" form will immediately be associated by an early modern audience to the physical destruction of Almachildes, and his prematural aging. Furthermore, talking to Stadlin about her nocturnal visit to the Mayor's son, she remarks: "I think thou'st spoil'd the youth: he's but seventeen."<sup>63</sup> The insistence on his youth makes all the more tragic his destruction through coitus with the witch-incubus, with the verb "spoil" which should be taken in a physical way. Similarly, *Macbeth's* witch destroys the sailor by such a visit: "I'll drain him dry as hay:/ Sleep shall neither night nor day/ Hang upon his pent-house lid;/ He shall live a man forbid:/ Weary sennights nine times nine/ Shall he dwindle, peak and pine."<sup>64</sup> The images of destruction are enhanced by the comparison with hay, and by the triple use of "dwindle," "peak," and "pine"<sup>65</sup> reinforcing the corporal impact on the sailor's body. The insomnia, hallmark of melancholy is shown as a doubly negated sleep, and the sailor catches the typical dryness that reveals a lack of blood. Hence witches try in vain to compensate their lack of a hot blood by the sexual act, thus draining their partners of their blood and of their very life.

Black bile is one of the four humours in a man's body and is mostly positive. Burton defines it as "cold and dry, thick, black, and sour, begotten of the more feculent part of nourishment, and purged from the spleen, [it] is a bridle to the other two hot humours, blood and choler, preserving them in the blood, and nourishing the bones."<sup>66</sup> The melancholic is considered a thinker,

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<sup>62</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 146.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (1.2.32), 1134.

<sup>64</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (1.3.17-22), 110-111.

<sup>65</sup> Peak: become sick, pine: to lose flesh.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 167-168.

thoughtful and reserved, and is associated with genius.<sup>67</sup> But too grave an imbalance or corruption of the bile can lead to the production of an unnatural black bile, and cause sickness. Black bile is also associated with the Devil more closely than any other humour, and is thought highly contagious. For instance, 17<sup>th</sup> century French physician James Ferrand writes: "Whom so ever the Divell overcomes, he overcomes by Melancholy. And therefore the Physitians for very good reason call Melancholy, the Divell Bath."<sup>68</sup> The medical idea behind this is that melancholy impairs judgements. Burton is more explicit: "melancholy persons are most subject to diabolical temptations and illusions, and most apt to entertain them, and the Devil best able to work upon them."<sup>69</sup> The melancholic fantasies can make one reject God, which is why the humour is often associated with the work of the Devil.

Not only is black bile the devil's humour, but there is also the strong suspicion that witches, being the devil's instrument, can cause it in others. Some demonologists associate the act of bewitching to a contagion by black bile. For instance Scot quoting this common opinion amongst them writes: "Women are also (saith he) monethlie filled full of superfluous humours, and with them the melancholike bloud boileth; whereof spring vapors, and are carried up, and conveyed through the nosethrels and mouth, &c; to the bewitching of whatsoever it meeteth."<sup>70</sup> The fungible quality of humours allows them to leave the liquid state for a gaseous one, thus becoming contagious by mere proximity. Angus Gowland, studying Burton's relationship with this idea, shows that he was somewhat more moderate, arguing that indeed witches could cause melancholy, but refusing to give a precise explanation on how<sup>71</sup>. Hence not only is black bile symbolically linked with the Devil, but it can be caused by witchcraft, and even caught by simple contact with a melancholy witch.

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<sup>67</sup> See for further studies: Patrick Dandrey, *Les tréteaux de Saturne: Scènes de la mélancolie à l'époque baroque*, (Paris: Klincksieck, 2003) and Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1964).

<sup>68</sup> James Ferrand, *Erotomania or a treatise discoursing of the Essence, Causes, Symptomes, Prognosticks, and Cure of Love or Erotique melancholy*, trans. Edmund Cilmead (Oxford: L. Lichfield, 1640; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2006), 210, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A00695.0001.001>.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 223-224.

<sup>70</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, 227.

<sup>71</sup> Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 86-87.

Amongst theoreticians, two competing interpretations of the melancholy witch existed. In England, they are voiced by Reginald Scot, in *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584), and by James VI of Scotland, in his *Daemonology* (1597). But they take up and translate arguments first written respectively by the Dutch physician Johannes Weyer, author of *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563), and the French jurist Jean Bodin, author of *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1580). Weyer and Scot support the idea that witches are often “poore melancholike women, which are themselves deceived. [...] For as some of these melancholike persons imagine, they are witches.”<sup>72</sup> For them, witches are victims of their melancholy, suffering from hallucinations. On the contrary, Bodin and King James believe in the absolute reality of witchcraft and try to counter Weyer’s argument by stating that “they are [...] giuen ouer to the pleasures of the flesh, continual haunting of companie, and all kind of merrines, both lawfull and unlawfull, which are thinges directly contrary to the symptomes of Melancholie.”<sup>73</sup> Several inconsistencies and ambiguities allow such disagreements: firstly there is the juxtaposition of two theories, the Galenic model of depression and anxiety and the Aristotelian model linking genius with melancholy; secondly, the disease melancholy could be ascribed either to the natural black bile, or to the unnatural black bile caused by any of the four humours turned adust; finally the very word melancholic could refer either to the humour, to the melancholic complexion (a natural tendency to sadness and solitude), or to a sickness.<sup>74</sup> A third approach reconciling both visions should be mentioned, that of Burton: he is moderately sceptical, yet does not deny the power of the devil. His main argument is that each case is unique, with some examples in which melancholy is caused by the devil, and some by the humour.<sup>75</sup>

Barring a few exceptions, playwrights do not take a position in the controversy. One of those is Ben Jonson, whose witches are poor melancholic women without powers. For instance in *The Masque of Queens*, we can find

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<sup>72</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, 41.

<sup>73</sup> King James, *Daemonologie in Forme of a Dialogie Diuided into three Bookes* (London: Printed by Robert Waldegrave, 1597; Project Gutenberg, 2008), 25, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/25929/>.

<sup>74</sup> Sam Migliore, “The Doctor, the Lawyer, and the Melancholy Witch,” *Anthropologica* 25, no. 2 (1983): 163-92, doi:10.2307/25605124, 183. See also on the controversy Sydney Anglo, “Melancholia and Witchcraft: The Debate between Wier, Bodin, and Scot,” in *Folie et déraison à la Renaissance* (Bruxelles: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1976).

<sup>75</sup> Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 87.

the annotations: "All which are meer Arts of Satan, when either himself will delude them with a false form, or troubling a dead body, makes them imagine these vanities."<sup>76</sup> This idea of delusion is supported by the text, where the Dame exclaims: "All our *Charms* do nothing win/ Upon the Night; our labour dies!/ Our *Magick*-feature will not rise."<sup>77</sup> Even in *The Sad Shepherd* where the witch has some power, she is explicitly associated with melancholy: "A Witch/ Is sure a Creature of Melancholy,/ And will be found, or sitting in her fourme,/ Or els, at releife, like a Hare."<sup>78</sup> Not only is it a rare occurrence of "melancholy" used in conjunction with "witch," but her connexion to the hare, associated with melancholy and madness in early modern Europe undermines the reality of her witchcraft. The delusion of melancholy witches also appears in plays without them, like in John Ford's *Perkin Warbeck*: "Thus witches,/ Possessed, even to their deaths deluded, say/ They have been wolves and dogs, and sailed in egg-shells/ Over the sea, and rid on fiery dragons,/ Passed in the air more than a thousand miles,/ All in a night."<sup>79</sup> The hyperbolic accumulation of fantastical actions is undermined by the timeframe for doing them – one night, thus it ridicules the suggestion that any of it could be real, with an emphasis on "deluded." Yet most playwrights seem to use typical causes and symptoms of melancholy for their witches without undermining the reality of their powers within the diegesis.

Several causes of melancholy identified by theorists can be found in plays. Three main causes are old age, poverty, and ugliness, usually in conjunction. For instance, Burton notes that "This natural infirmity is most eminent in old women, and such as are poor, solitary, live in most base esteem and beggary, or such as are witches."<sup>80</sup> He devotes one subsection to poverty and want,<sup>81</sup> and exclaims: "To be foul, ugly, and deformed, much better be buried alive."<sup>82</sup> The socio-economical conditions of witches are usually ignored by the playwrights,

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<sup>76</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* (London: N. Ores, 1609), 11.

<sup>77</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* in *Complete Works of Ben Jonson*, (Delphi Classics, 2013), 2072.

<sup>78</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd*, in *Complete Works of Ben Jonson* (Delphi Classics, 2013), (II.7.16-19), 1943.

<sup>79</sup> John Ford (and Thomas Dekker?), *Perkin Warbeck*, in *John Ford 'Tis a Pity she's a whore and other plays*, ed. Marion Lomax (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), (V.3.103-108), 319-320.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 235.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 382.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 410.

except in *The Witch of Edmonton*, where the main protagonist becomes a witch because she is shunned for her poverty and ugliness: "And why on me? Why should the envious world/ Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?/ 'Cause I am poor, deformed and ignorant,/ And like a bow buckled and bent together."<sup>83</sup> This is a rare case where the witch defines herself as poor and ugly. Another common cause for melancholy is the excess of hot passions, such as anger, which creates "adust melancholy" by burning the humours and drying the body.<sup>84</sup> Burton devotes one subsection to envy and malice,<sup>85</sup> another to hatred, and desire of revenge<sup>86</sup> and one to "Anger, a perturbation, which carries the spirits outwards, preparing the body to melancholy, and madness itself."<sup>87</sup> Elizabeth Sawyer could also be melancholic because of her anger and thirst for revenge: "Would some power, good or bad,/ Instruct me which way I might be revenged/ Upon this churl, I'd go out of myself,/ And give this fury leave to dwell within."<sup>88</sup> She shares her hatred and desire of revenge with Medea: "Now sorowes smarte doth rub the gall/ and frets wyth sharper rage. [...] Be redye wrath, wyth all thy myghte/ that furye kyndle maye."<sup>89</sup> Medea's rage is more precisely situated in the gall, so one can presume she suffers from adust cholera, but Medea's melancholy might also be due to her lovesickness,<sup>90</sup> since her hatred is linked to her thwarted love for Jason.

The ambiguities of the melancholy theories bleed out into our dramatic corpus, where the distinction between natural, unnatural black bile, or melancholy arising from adust humours is never explicit and symptoms are not altogether coherent with the type of melancholy. For instance, adust melancholy is thought in its hot stage to produce an exaggerated joy.<sup>91</sup> Those symptoms are exhibited by the witches Mall: "We must a little laugh and

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<sup>83</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (II.1.1-4), 145.

<sup>84</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 24.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 296.

<sup>86</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 297.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 300.

<sup>88</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (II.1.105-108), 147-148.

<sup>89</sup> John Studley, *Medea*, (I.171-178), 4.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Toohey, "Medea's Lovesickness" in *Melancholy, Love and Time: Boundaries of the self* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 59-103.

<sup>91</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 34.

thank/ Our feat familiars for the prank"<sup>92</sup> and Meg: "Now let us laugh to think upon/ The feat which we have so lately done."<sup>93</sup> The Lancashire witches range from young to old, rich to poor and do not seem to have any of the emotional causes identified by Burton. Such a symptom is also present in Hecate: "Oh, what a dainty pleasure 'tis / To ride in the air / When the moon shines fair / And sing, and dance, and toy, and kiss."<sup>94</sup> Joy is usually expressed in the common activities of dancing and singing, associated with a witch's sabbat.

Most symptoms of melancholy are physical: the melancholic has usually a pale face with sometimes a hint of yellow, and is also associated with black.<sup>95</sup> In *The Masque of Queens*, the Dame calls to her the hags, including: "Thou, black-mouth'd *Execration*, stand apply'd;/ Draw to thee *Bitterness*, whose Pores sweat Gall."<sup>96</sup> Blackness and gall are two physical signs of melancholy, and the black mouth is also present in *Sophonisba* with "her black tongue."<sup>97</sup> Syphax further describes Erictho with these elements: "A loathsome yellow leanness spreads her face,/ A heavy hell-like paleness loads her cheeks."<sup>98</sup> The yellow is associated with yellow bile, and paleness with black bile. Heaviness is another sure physical sign of melancholy in witches.

The melancholic is not only likely to be very hairy but hair unkempt is also a sign of madness in the seventeenth century. For instance, Erictho "heaves proud her head/ With long unkemped hair loaden,"<sup>99</sup> showing the sure signs of madness and a pervasive heaviness. *Macbeth's* witches are "wild in their attire" and have "beards:"<sup>100</sup> not only are their beards unnatural for women, but wild could also be interpreted in relation to their hair. In association with heaviness, the flesh itself is lean, and dry. Overabundance of the dry humour is evidenced in *The Witch of Edmonton*: "I am dried up/ With cursing and with

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<sup>92</sup> Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (II.1.6-7), 26.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (II.1.22-23), 27.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (III.3.61-64), 1152-1153.

<sup>95</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 33.

<sup>96</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens*, 2069.

<sup>97</sup> John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.123), 21.

<sup>98</sup> John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.105-106), 20.

<sup>99</sup> John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.111-112), 20.

<sup>100</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.3.38) and (I.3.44), 112.

madness, and have yet/ No blood."<sup>101</sup> The madness is of course melancholy, in connection to a lack of blood. Of note are Erictho's "lean knuckles"<sup>102</sup> and the portrait of *Macbeth's* witches as "wither'd" and with "choppy finger laying / Upon her skinny lips."<sup>103</sup> Such a dryness is not only a sign of old age, but a physical imprint of melancholy on their bodies.

Melancholy can also manifest through an affinity to things dry and cold, like in *Sophonisba's* grave-robbing: "From half-rot sear-cloths then she scrapes dry gums/ For her black rites; but when she finds a corpse/ But newly graved, whose entrails are not turn'd/ To slimy filth, with greedy havock then/ She makes fierce spoil, and swells with wicked triumph/ To bury her lean knuckles in his eyes;/ Then doth she gnaw the pale and o'ergrown nails/ From his dry hand; but if she find some life/ Yet lurking close, she bites his gelid lips,/ And, sticking her black tongue in his dry throat."<sup>104</sup> The corpses Erictho plunders are characterized by their dry quality (dry gums, dry hand, dry tongue), and their cold "gelid lips." Black bile is also associated with earth, implied by the corruption of the dead, buried flesh. Furthermore, the consumption of entrails, full of black bile, but not yet "slimy filth" is a final mark of her close similitude to the corpses.

Finally, melancholics love solitude and darkness. They seek out desert places, and shun the light.<sup>105</sup> Those are consistent with some of the witches' abodes, for instance Maudlin's: "Within a gloomie dimble, shee doth dwell/ Downe in a pitt, [...] down unto the ground,/ 'Mongst graves, and grotts, neare an old Charnell house,/ Where you shall find her sitting in her fourme,/ As fearfull, and melancholique, as that."<sup>106</sup> The charnel-house, a repository for dead bodies, as well as the grotts (caves), and the pitts and dimbles (hollows in the landscape) are all places of loneliness and obscurity, and this choice of dwellings is explicitly connected to Maudlin's melancholy, here manifested psychologically by her fearfulness. Likewise, Erictho lives in a "desert"<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (IV.1.154-156), 176.

<sup>102</sup> John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.119), 20.

<sup>103</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.3.38) and (I.3.42-43), 112.

<sup>104</sup> John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.114-123), 20-21.

<sup>105</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 32.

<sup>106</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd*, (II.8.15-21), 1944.

<sup>107</sup> John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.100), 20.

and describes her abode as: "once a charnel-house, now a vast cave,/ Over whose brow a pale and untrod grove/ Throws out her heavy shade, the mouth thick arms/ Of darksome yew (sun-proof) for ever choke;/ Within rests barren darkness; fruitless drought/ Pines in eternal night."<sup>108</sup> The same typical places are even more explicitly linked to obscurity with an overabundance of synonyms for darkness.

At the end of this study, it should be emphasized that most English dramatists depict their witches without clear understanding of the distinction between the melancholic disorders.<sup>109</sup> The melancholic male *topoi* associated with sadness or lovesickness is replaced for these women by the excessive joy and desire of blood adust or by hallucinations and fearfulness. Sometimes the cause for their melancholy is physical, sometimes it is emotional, but it always links them to the devil. Nonetheless, all our witches share a characteristic imbalance of humours that betrays a sick and often monstrous body. They can transmit black bile to others, as well as take their most precious bodily fluids, semen or blood, – those fluids are not safe inside one's body and can be corrupted from outside. In short, witches embody one of the deepest fears of early modern England: contamination. As Firestone says in *The Witch*: "they are able to putrefy it, to infect a whole region."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.164-169), 21.

<sup>109</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 71.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (III.3.18-19), 1151.



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*The Clash between the Utopian World of the Witches  
and the Dystopian Society of Humankind in  
“The Witch” and “Macbeth”*

**TURKAN YILMAZ\***

**Abstract:** Witchcraft has been present in cultural and intellectual history of various societies, and inescapably the representation of witchcraft and a witch figure have been one of the shared interests in numerous literary works. Particularly, witchcraft as a theme was very popular among the famous dramatists of the Renaissance period in England. For instance, both *The Witch* by Thomas Middleton and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare have thick layer of witchcraft in their corpora. Accordingly, the present research is an attempt to highlight that, in contrast to the contemporary firm beliefs in and accusations against “witches,” these plays present the closed witch community as an almost a utopia through providing a stark contrast between the enigmatic yet egalitarian and free society of the witches and the hypocritical norms of the plays’ societies specifically related to sexuality and freedom of an individual.

**Keywords:** *The Witch*, Thomas Middleton, *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare, Renaissance drama, Witchcraft, female sexuality, female utopian world.

Witchcraft has always been present in cultural and intellectual history of various societies, and it has been a subject approached by so many scholars from varying disciplines ranging from anthropology to sociology. Because of its profound impacts on different historical socio-cultural, religious, and literary

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contexts, the witchcraft phenomenon has been and still is a fertile ground for different perspectives and discussions. Inescapably the representation of witchcraft and a witch figure have been one of the shared interests in numerous literary works. Particularly, witchcraft as a theme was very popular among the famous dramatists of the Renaissance period in England. For instance, both *The Witch* by Thomas Middleton and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare have thick layer of witchcraft in their corpora. When we seek to understand and examine the nature of witch hunts during the early modern period in England, we see that there is a clear bitter clash between the prevailed beliefs in the existence of witches among the society and the way the English dramatists mentioned above represented witchcraft in their works. Accordingly, the present research is an attempt to highlight that, in contrast to the contemporary firm beliefs in and accusations against 'witches,' these plays present the closed witch community as an almost a utopia through providing a stark contrast between the enigmatic yet egalitarian and free society of the witches and the hypocritical norms of the plays' societies specifically related to sexuality and freedom of the individuals.

To begin with, touching upon the history of witchcraft in England would provide the necessary background information about how and why these two well-known dramatists made use of witchcraft subject in the whole spectrum of their plays. First of all, it is important to note that due to the religious friction between the Catholic Church and Protestant Reformation, there is a radical difference between European and English witchcraft. For instance, whereas witchcraft was considered heresy in Catholicism, in Protestant demonology, it was not open apostasy of the sort depicted in the fantasies of witches' Sabbaths.<sup>1</sup> However, as Carol Karlsen states, "between 1645 and 1647, several hundred people had been hanged in the wake of England's most serious witchcraft outbreak" and "[m]ore than ninety per cent of these English witches were women."<sup>2</sup> Especially when the socio-historical and religious background for witchcraft is analysed in depth, it appears that English witchcraft, as James

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan Johnstone, "The Protestant Devil: The Experience of Temptation in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. 2 (2004): 176, doi:10.1086/380949.

<sup>2</sup> Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 2.

Sharpe notes, was certainly “a variation on a European theme.”<sup>3</sup> For both places, when the possible reasons for such an almost sex-specific crime are examined, the Judeo-Christian tradition of misogyny, which “equated women and their bodies with sin, carnality, and spiritual death”<sup>4</sup> and its impact on the English Reformation with regard to gender discourse seems to have a crucial role for making women become the target of witch-hunts. In the light of these patriarchal religious values, wrong perceptions of sexual anatomy of female body were prevailed. According to ‘one-sex model,’ which was valid until the late eighteenth century, women’s anatomy was perceived as identical to men’s; but women’s genitals were inward and thus women seemed lesser beings than men.<sup>5</sup> All these notions had a cumulative effect on the portrayal of women during the early modern period as being physically and spiritually much weaker than men. The perception of woman as the more sexually voracious of the sexes is represented in many archival writings of the Renaissance period as can be observed in Ludovic Mercatus’s writing on “womb hysteria” which refers to “an immoderate and unbridled desire to copulate, so strong and unquenchable that the woman appears mad and delirious as a result of this excessive and insatiable appetite” (qtd. in Aughterson).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the legal status of the *femme couverte* (a married woman) suggested that all women’s property came under her husband’s control during the couple’s marriage and so that the majority of women were deprived of their economic independence and most of their rights under law. Thus, as Susie Steinbach points out, “we find women concentrated in occupations that were considered female, many associated with domestic labour.”<sup>7</sup> Since public sphere was closed for women, women tended to pursue a few traditionally female employments such as domestic service, charring and laundering, making and mending clothes, nursing and midwifery, and tending animals. Some of these jobs begot a great

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<sup>3</sup> James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1997), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Sigrid Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany*, ed. Robert H. Brown (Massachusetts: Massachusetts UP, 1995), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History* (London: Phoenix, 2005), 112.

<sup>6</sup> Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Woman: Constructions of Femininity in England* (London: Routledge, 1995) 53.

<sup>7</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Women in England*, 9-10.

affinity between witchcraft and femininity. Besides, the communal fear sourced by any kind of unexpected setback to domestic routine such as the sudden death of a baby or an animal in a village life was the main reason for scapegoating which was a very common attitude related to witch trials. After all, as Sharpe describes:

[t]he early modern English community, whether rural or urban, was a place where gossip thrived, where reputations were evaluated, where discussable news was a welcome entity. In such an environment there is little doubt that witchcraft suspicions were among the more avidly discussed of topics.<sup>8</sup>

For the early modern English society described in the quotation reputation was of crucial importance in defining the society's behaviour pattern towards individuals. In regard to this point, Edward Bever points out the interpersonal violence as a fact of village life:

Indeed nearly every human relationship which went wrong might lead to a charge of witchcraft. [...] Early modern village life certainly included warm friendships and peaceful coexistence, but any attempt to understand early modern witchcraft must start by recognizing that the "internal viciousness of village interactions [...] and the brutality of interpersonal conflict" drove some members to pursue personal quarrels with a degree of persistence and ruthlessness that might harass an enemy even unto death.<sup>9</sup>

As can be inferred, in such a community described in the quotation above, a heightened tension between society and the individual, a tension between the accuser and the accused one paved the way for an endemic and chronic fear which would be resulted in the scapegoat phenomenon in witch trials. The main reason for this situation seems to be the communal sense of anxiety caused by any kind of interruption of domestic routine, such as the so-called unnatural death of individuals or animals, and by an increasing demand for explanation of the illnesses or misfortunes.

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<sup>8</sup> James Sharpe, *Instruments*, 163.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Bever, "Witchcraft, Female Agression, and Power in the Early Modern Community," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 4 (2002): 958. doi: [www.jstor.org/stable/3790618](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3790618).

In addition to these possible reasons, the literary works created by being based on the mentioned reasons were also quite effective in prevalence of the witchcraft phenomenon. For instance, *The Malleus Maleficarum* by Heinric Kramer and Jacob Sprenger (1486) is one of the most famous and discussed medieval treatises on female witches. Although proving the existence of witchcraft and supplying the European witch hunters with information on how to identify, interrogate and convict witches seem to have been the basic concerns of the work, the claims on and explanations for the defects of women are also outstanding. The authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum* belonged to the fifteenth century Dominican reform movement, which propagated celibacy, venerated the Virgin Mary, equated sexuality in women with sin and death, and in their work, they insisted on their essentialist approach to womanhood as a weaker sex being prone to temptation.

The English gentlemen Reginald Scot was the first to respond to the claims in the *Malleus Maleficarum* on witchcraft, and in his work, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), Scot rejected the existence of magic and witchcraft by applying to reason and religion. However, Scot's point was not related to the issue of femininity; he was merely against the idea of superstition which was caused by women and could have been a threat to divine power. In her book, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*, Diane Purkiss refers to Scot's work as sceptical on witchcraft but misogynistic in response to the idea that women might act as agents of supernatural causation.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the copies of Scot's empirical study were burned on the accession of James I, the author of *Daemonologie* and the sponsor of the translation of the Bible. In the introduction of his *Daemonologie*, the king states that his aim is to convince those who are sceptical about the existence of witchcraft, and Epistemon's words in *Daemonologie* reveal the common belief that ever since the serpent deceived Eve, he has tricked more women than men. As can be inferred, these historical works written either to prove or to reject the existence of witchcraft share a common aspect that is the constant representation of women as being inherently weaker than men. Nevertheless,

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<sup>10</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 64.



the representations of witches in *The Witch* and *Macbeth* show strong inclination to question the existence and effectiveness of such figures in society. Moreover, in both plays, the witches seem to be the wicked ones; yet when the plays are examined in depth, it appears that the members of the plays' societies are the real corrupt persons and their world is almost dystopian society due to its members' vices, while the witch communities are in harmony in their own microcosm.

As for *The Witch* by Middleton, although the title of the play provides a reader or audience with a strong impression that this is a play about a witch, it explores and offers various possible roles available for women such as a wife, an unmarried mother or a prostitute. As it is stated in Isabella's song (II.i.127-34),<sup>11</sup> whose lyrics allude to the plights of Isabella, Amoretta, Francisca, Florida and the Duchess in the play, a widow, typical known marital status of witches, is "one state more to try" (II.i.131). Accordingly, while the play's other female characters suffer from being sexually possessed and oppressed at the hands of male authority, the witches, Hecate, Stadlin, Hoppo, Hellwayn and Prickle, are free from any kind of patriarchal norms. By applying to a witch figure that is depicted as not being confined by any patriarchal values, Middleton examines and criticizes social norms for female sexuality and the cult of female chastity in the chaotic, dystopian world of the play's society.

*The Witch*, as Samuel Schoenbaum observes, is Middleton's first exploration of tragicomedy in which he, for the first time, uses women characters as the essential figures to investigate the nature of virtue itself.<sup>12</sup> However, in his later attempts such as *Women Beware Women* (1657) and *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* (1657), Middleton, as a playwright who acknowledged the mutual implication of sex and power, had destroyed the Jacobean opposition of lust and power thanks to his suspicion of dogma, his subversive use of irony, and his trick of reversing perspectives and withholding judgement.<sup>13</sup> Thus, his

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, ed. Elizabeth Schafer (London: A&C Black Limited, 1994), 30. All further references to the text will be taken from this edition.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Schoenbaum, "Middleton's Tragicomedies," *Modern Philology* 54, no. 1 (1956): 8. doi: [www.jstor.org/stable/435153](http://www.jstor.org/stable/435153)

<sup>13</sup> Swapan Chakravorty, *Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3-6.

empirical and close observation of the feminine life and femininity is reflected in *The Witch*, too. Accordingly, what combines and dominates the three plot lines in the play is the question of female chastity, and the presence or absence of virginity. The witches are included in two of three plots; yet their existence or their poisons do not affect the events of the plots.

Firstly, Isabella is a key female figure whose name directly involves in the female virginity discourse of the play's Isabella-Sebastian-Antonio-Florida plot. The first act of the play begins with Sebastian's claim that "She is my wife by contract before heaven, and all the angels" (I.i.3), and only one line after, he informs that "she's gone; another has possession" (I.i.4). Towards the end of the first scene of the first act, we discover that this is, in fact, the day of the marriage of Isabella and Antonio. From now on, the effort put by Sebastian and Antonio into defining who will 'conquer' Isabella's hymen is portrayed. On one hand, Sebastian resorts to the witches to make Antonio impotent by a charm on his wedding night, so that he can preserve Isabella's virginity for his own purposes. However, although the spell which Hecate puts on Antonio is successful, later, his plan to lure Isabella into bed brings him on the verge of violating her virginity with rape. That he subsequently gets what he wants has nothing to do with the witch but rather with "a fearful, unexpected accident" (V.iii.25). Beside the ineffectiveness of witchery, this scene also highlights the hypocrisy of men in relation to female chastity: Sebastian, who speaks about a heavenly union with Isabella, comes close to raping her by claiming that it is his right to do so. In addition, Sebastian makes so many misogynistic comments during the whole play. For instance, he complains that "honesty's a rare wealth in a woman" (II.ii.209) while he is disguising himself as Celio, Isabella's servant, to reach his aim. He does not hesitate about labelling Florida as a whore, following her affair with Antonio; yet he considers Fernando, who is the owner of the brothel in which Florida has a room too, as his best friend. On the other hand, the play's ostensible tragic hero is Antonio, who dies in the end; but his excessive reaction against Isabella's so-called infidelity and his exaggerated speeches on his honour as a man who has had a mistress for nearly seven years prevent us from sympathizing with him. Instead, the realistic aspect of Middleton's play represents male hypocrisy regarding female chastity and the distorted morality with respect to gender in sexuality.

Secondly, in the Duchess-Amoretta-Almachildes plot, The Duchess is a woman whose father is killed by her husband who “came to” her “bedside at the full of midnight, and in his hand that fatal, fearful cup, waked” her and “forced” her “pledge him” and her “father’s scorn” (II.ii.58-62). Thus, the Duchess who is driven by revenge wants to get Almachildes who desires her servant, Amoretta, to help her killing the Duke. Thus, the Duchess tricks Almachildes by blindfolding. This scene of the play is important because as Elizabeth Schafer points out:

[t]here is so much hullabaloo over which woman precisely Almachildes has penetrated: first it seems that it may be Amoretta, then that it may be the duchess and finally it turns out that it was a common prostitute. A bitter comedy emerges, focused around the grotesque comic device of the bed trick, where one woman is substituted for another without the man concerned noticing difference [...] In a play where the focus on female chastity and sex is so strong, the bed trick points uncomfortably to the utter reification of women in the act of sex, as each woman becomes an anonymous body to be penetrated, not an individual with distinguishing marks.<sup>14</sup>

Almachildes is, like Antonio and Sebastian, a hypocrite who complains that the woman he thought he was deflowering did not have an intact hymen, so she deceived him (III.i.1-14). However, he visits Hecate’s cave and asks for a love charm to be used on Amoretta. Although the love charm at first appears so powerful, it works only as a dupe, misleading him about the woman he is having sex with. Therefore, again, the witchery charm does not work in the play’s action.

On the other side, the Duchess, who refers to Hecate as a “mother” (V.ii.33) and reveals once more the witches’ acceptance by society, is the last person visiting the witches. She asks for a potion to kill Almachildes who helped her kill the Duke. Nevertheless, the poisons she gets from Hecate to make Almachildes meet “a sudden and a subtle” death (V.ii.2) turn out in the next and last scene either not to have worked or even been remembered.

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Schafer, Introduction to *The Witch*, by Thomas Middleton (London: A&C Black Limited, 1994), xxii.

Furthermore, the Duchess's acceptance to be executed as a murderer and her hard fight to clear her name of adultery shows, as it is observed in the case of Isabella and Francisca, that the obsession for chastity is not specific to the play's male characters; it has a vital importance also for the female characters.

Thirdly, in the plot of Francisca and Aberzanes, in which the witches are not included, Francisca is one of the "poor venturing gentlewomen" (II.i.43) who is under seventeen-years old, and in her soliloquy (II.i.35-62) she reveals the fact that Aberzanes secretly comes to her at night and now she is pregnant by him. She expresses her great fear of being killed by her brother, Antonio, if her secret sexual relationship with Aberzanes and her pregnancy are discovered. Aberzanes's solution to their predicament is getting Isabella out of the house so that she could give birth in secret. When Francisca has her baby, this time he pays an old woman to raise the child secretly. Obviously, he has no intention of accepting full responsibility for the baby. He makes his attitude clear when he speaks to Francisca and says: "Not I, pardon me;/ That let a husband do when he has married you;" (II.ii. 38). On the other hand, Francisca has the same attitude with Aberzanes; what makes her hate herself after giving birth is "how monstrous thin I look!" (II.ii.33), and before her childbearing, she does not seem to hesitate about spreading lies about Isabella to protect herself against exposure of her secret. Here, it is important to note that Isabella is the first person who discovers Francisca's secret and her first reaction is well worth examining:

Isabella: I'll call her stranger ever in my heart.  
She's killed the name of sister through base lust, (III.ii.50-51)

However, when Francisca enters, Isabella continues calling her "sister" (III.ii.74). Her hypocritical attitude and her accusations against Francisca then Aberzanes as if, as a woman, she was the only responsible person for the situation reveal how collaboration is impossible among women in this atmosphere of hatred.

On the contrary, when Hecate says “Come, my sweet sisters;” she really means “sister”, because the witches are in collaboration with each other. For instance, Hecate asks Stadlin for advice on the quantity of ingredients she adds to the cauldron (I.ii. 10-11) or they prepare for a night-time flight together (III.3). They do not harshly judge each other on their individual sexual activities as females. In this respect, it is possible to say that a witch community in the play reflects Middleton’s ideal society in which individual liberty is considered important, for, as David Holmes points out:

Middleton was a great lover of individual liberty, and this humanistic predilection no doubt played a large part in producing the balanced and objective outlook which his dramatic microcosms increasingly reveal [...] Middleton’s liberalism was considerably ‘advanced’ [...] Middleton was not an enemy of the aristocracy, or of any other class; nor was he opposed to the class system of social organization itself, for that matter. Yet [...] he was intolerant of the humbug in the social structure.<sup>15</sup>

Another important aspect of the play is that this is the only play of the period which represents almost all the sensationalist elements in Continental witchcraft, such as infanticide, sexual deviance or transvection, which were, as Julia Garrett puts forward, not common in English trials,<sup>16</sup> yet occupied a place in the broader public imagination. However, the hyperbolic and rumbustious characterization of the witches and their ineffectiveness on the main action in the play reveal Middleton’s incredulity towards the existence of witches. Thus, the play is not a deep exploration of witchcraft. Instead, it examines social norms for female sexuality and the cult of female chastity by applying to a witch figure that is depicted as not being confined by any social norms or values especially regarding sexuality. For this reason, the witches in the play are not represented as being capable of or interested in committing any crime associated with witches such as shaping anyone’s destiny or causing harm to someone. Instead, they are much more interested in satisfying their

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<sup>15</sup> David Holmes, *The Art of Thomas Middleton: A Critical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 146.

<sup>16</sup> Julia M. Garrett, “Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge in Early Modern England,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 46, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jem.2013.0002>

own lusts by openly sleeping with visitors or succubi or their own offspring, while, on the contrary, the play's human characters try to use the witches to make their sexual dreams real and make great efforts to hide their practice of sexual pleasures. As Marion O'Connor explains:

Conspicuously ineffectual in their plot relations to the courtiers, the witch and her colleagues appear almost innocent alongside them. For all her talk of incest and infanticide, the coven is not shown to be performing anything more noxious than their aerial song and dance routine. Within the fiction of *The Witch*, it is in the court that vices are enacted, and it is by the courtiers that crimes are committed, with ultimate impunity.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, it is possible to conclude that all machinations and the nature of both male and female characters in relation to female virginity and sexuality in *The Witch* expose Middleton's criticism of his own society. In fact, when the play is analyzed in depth, it appears that this play is not related to witchcraft at all, and the existence of the witches merely supplies the dramatist with the necessary material to mirror the obsession of his own society with female chastity. Although ostensibly the witches are there to supply the play with an action by their charms and poisons, as we observe, Hecate and her cohorts are represented as being incapable of determining the outcome or affecting the actions of the human figures; but the existence of their community which is marked by harmony and collaboration is vital because it creates the direct opposition with the dystopian, cruel and corrupt world of the play.

As in the case of *The Witch*, *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare also displays a clear contrast between the harmonic world of the witches and the chaotic world of the play's society. First of all, it is important to note that the existence of the witch scenes in *Macbeth* constitutes one of the most debated topics in the field of Shakespeare studies. It is mostly because the interpretation of the play changes drastically in accordance with how the play's witch material is interpreted, and on this point, the play itself offers a plurality of references to the sisters, which leads us to considerable variation in interpretations. For

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<sup>17</sup> Marion O'Connor, "The Witch," in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 1126.

instance, they are called “witches”<sup>18</sup> by Folio direction, yet only the sailor’s wife refers to one of them as a “witch” in the play (I.iii.6). Instead, they call each other as “sister” (I.iii.1-3), while Macbeth terms them as “imperfect speakers” (I.iii.70) and “the Weird Sisters” (III.iv.133), and Banquo mentions them as “the devil” (I.iii.107) and “the instruments of darkness” (I.iii.124). What is most striking is that they call each other as “sister” (I.iii.1-3), which is the visible mark of their sisterhood in their closed community.

Interestingly, the play offers strong implication about a combination or continuity between these indefinable creatures and Lady Macbeth, for her soliloquy when she invokes the “spirits” to “unsex” her, to “fill [her] with cruelty,” to “make thick [her] blood, and to “exchange [her] milk with gall” (I.v.39-47) portrays her as a witch-like woman. Accordingly, some scholars such as Peter S allybrass, who claims the triumph of feminine authority over patriarchy,<sup>19</sup> and Marvin Rosenberg, who interprets the Sisters in Freudian terms as the “projections of inner images of the powerful female-mother-figure who suborns the male, driving or luring him to his own destruction,”<sup>20</sup> concludes that Lady Macbeth and the witches function as coercive power in the play. However, when the historical and social contexts of the play are considered, it appears that the world of the play is dominated by the hierarchical norms of the feudal society and in such an atmosphere it is difficult to claim that Lady Macbeth and the witches manipulate Macbeth with remarkable effectiveness. Instead, the play deals with the paradox of violent action in defence of civilised values by reflecting the realities of the dystopian patriarchal system in the play’s society. Thus, Lady Macbeth and the witches, in fact, do not have any direct effect on the deeds of Macbeth. He, as a Scottish general and the thane of Glamis and later Cawdor, is a powerful man and a brave soldier who fulfils the ambitions of the feudal system around him, and the only way he knows to solve the problems or get what he wants is violence

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<sup>18</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Nicholas Brooke (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990). All further references to the text will be taken from this edition.

<sup>19</sup> Peter S allybrass, “Macbeth and Witchcraft,” in *Macbeth: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Alan Sinfield (London: Macmillan Education, 1992), 34.

<sup>20</sup> Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Macbeth* (Delaware: Delaware UP, 1993), 23. (First published in 1978.)

and murder. Outstandingly, he contemplates murdering the king before Lady Macbeth voices his wish and before his first encounter with the witches. This shows his remarkable capacity for evil, and he only seeks for “spur to prick the sides of my intent” (I.vii. 26-27). Thus, as Stephen Greenblatt points out, he deludes himself into believing in the words of the sisters and of his wife.<sup>21</sup>

The main reason for the ineffectiveness of the witches is that although they seem to have an inexplicable relation to Macbeth, they are not in close cooperation with him at all. As in the case of Macbeth’s contemplation of murdering the king before Lady Macbeth voices his wish, Macbeth’s first sentence in the play, “So foul and fair a day I have not seen” (I.iii.38), echoes the witches and the play’s motto: “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (I.i.12). This fact shows that Macbeth is not ‘bewitched’ by the witches; instead he already has a remarkable capacity for evil before his first encounter with the witches. Even if Lady Macbeth’s influence on him to kill the king is open to discussion, the fact that he is alone murdering the others and that he only visits Hecate at the end of his ‘fantastic’ career emphasizes his free will to decide upon events.

Another important aspect related to the existence of witch scenes in *Macbeth* is that the witches in *Macbeth* are treated as social outcasts by others in the play’s society. For instance, the first witch wants some chestnuts from a mortal female; but she is rejected and accused of being a witch, which is for the first and the only time in the play that “witch” is used to refer to the Sisters:

First Witch: A sailor’s wife had chestnuts in her lap,  
 And munched, and munched, and munched. ‘Give me’, quoth I;  
 ‘Aroynt thee, witch’, the rump-fed ronyon cries.  
 Her husband’s to Aleppo gone, master o’th Tiger;  
 But in a sieve I’ll thither sail,  
 And like a rat without tail,  
 I’ll do, I’ll do, and I’ll do. (I.iii.4-10)

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare Bewitched,” in *William Shakespeare’s Macbeth: A Sourcebook*, ed. Alexander Leggatt (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 83-84.



Now, she plans to take her revenge by destroying her husband's ship. On this issue, Terry Eagleton refers to the witches as the "unconscious" of the drama, "which must be exiled and repressed as dangerous but which is always likely to return with a vengeance."<sup>22</sup> In fact, the act of the first witch physically exemplifies what Eagleton means in his description of the witches as the unconscious of the play. Moreover, what happens between the witch and the sailor's wife exposes the fact that the witches in *Macbeth* are marginalized by the play's society. We find the same attitude in Hecate's complaining about mortals:

Hecate: And which is worse, all you have done  
Hath been but for a wayward son,  
Spiteful and wrathful who, as others do,  
Loves for his own ends, not for you. (III.v.10-13)

Here, Hecate is angry with her cohorts, for they appeared to "a wayward son," Macbeth. Thus, it is possible to say that although the Sisters seem to be close to Macbeth, which might pave the way for the idea that they are incorporated into Macbeth's society, they are, in fact, totally excluded from the social environment, and they also do not attempt or seek to be a part of society. This situation blurs the lines between their existence and inexistence in the play. In this sense, one of the most striking and thought-provoking interpretations of the witch material in *Macbeth* belongs to Stephen Greenblatt who argues that the witches in the play account for nothing:

They are given many of the conventional attributes of both Continental and English witch lore [...] they are associated with tempests, and particularly with thunder and lightning; they are shown calling to their familiars and conjuring spirits; they recount killing livestock, raising winds, sailing in a sieve; their hideous broth links them to birth-strangled babes and blaspheming Jews; above all, they traffic in prognostication and prophecy. And yet though

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<sup>22</sup> Terry Eagleton, "'The witches are the heroines of the piece...'" in *Macbeth: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Alan Sinfield (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Education, 1992), 47.

the witches are given a vital theatrical *energeia*, though their malevolent energy is apparently put in act, it is in fact extremely difficult to specify what, if anything they do or even what, if anything, they are.<sup>23</sup>

Greenblatt's perspective could be supported with Banquo's question, "What are these," (I.iii.37) when he and Macbeth first encounter them, and by showing how Macbeth echoes the same question, "Speak, if you can. What are you?" (I.iii.45) to which he receives in reply his own name: "All hail, Macbeth!" (I.iii.46). Thus, through these questions, it might be concluded that it is extremely difficult to specify what the witches are and what they do. Even their gender is blurred in Banquo's description of these creatures as "women" with "beards" (I.iii.43-44).

In the same vein, it is difficult to term what the witches tell Macbeth as prognostication or prophecy. For instance, Macbeth's ignorance of the latest news that he is made thane of Cawdor does not make the witches' words prophecy. Similarly, again Macbeth's ignorance of the fact that Macduff was born by caesarean section (V.vii.46-47) is not enough to interpret the witches' words as prophecy. Above all, throughout the whole framework, we never see them urge Macbeth to any specifically immoral act. Instead, they "are a projection of his own desires and superstitions [...] and are therefore neither instigators nor determinants of his behaviour."<sup>24</sup> In relation to this point, the use of amphibology in the witches' riddles which constituted a substantial part in the life and literature of Renaissance England does not make them powerful demonic creatures that are very much effective on the tragic hero's action. In fact, in contrast with Macbeth's description of the weird sisters as "imperfect speakers" (I.iii.70), their unreliable and unstable riddling language running through the play shows how they are outstandingly successful at equivocation. As Alexander Leggatt expresses, "[r]eversing the meanings of the words, they [the witches] reverse the poles of the moral universe," and in *Macbeth's* society, the witches do not have to put in a great deal of effort to

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, "Shakespeare Bewitched," 83-4.

<sup>24</sup> A. R. Braunmuller, Introduction to *Macbeth*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 71.

do so, since “words slide easily into their opposites.”<sup>25</sup> For instance, at the very beginning of the play, the second witch’s line, “When the battle’s lost, and won” (I.i.4), summarizes the dual and relativist construction of the play. However, even though the witches are experts of applying to it, it is the ‘real’ power of the language, not of the ‘magical’ power of the witches.

In conclusion, Macbeth, as a Scottish general and the thane of Glamis and later Cawdor, is a powerful man and a brave soldier who fulfils the ambitions of the feudal system around him. The only way he knows to solve the problems or get what he wants is violence and murder. Although he has some problems with the psychological results of his atrocities, in contrast with his wife’s psychological and physical discontinuity in this system, he fights until the last moment and is killed as a king. In this social background, Lady Macbeth is forced to disappear with a reported suicide, and the witches are obliged to fly away, for through the end of the play Macbeth leaves to allude to them.

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander Leggatt, *William Shakespeare’s Macbeth: A Sourcebook* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 127.

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« *Le Diable* » de Rita Renoir (1972).  
*Ethnoscénologie d'un mimodrame porno-sataniste*

**PIERRE PHILIPPE-MEDEN\***

**Abstract:** *“The Devil” by Rita Renoir (1972): Ethnoscenology of a satanic porn mime drama.* *Le Diable (The Devil)* was staged by Rita Renoir at the Théâtre de Plaisance in Paris in 1972. It is a mime drama devoid of text and music; her body only is present, her breathing, screaming, the forbidden aspects of life and its violence. Alone on the stage, Rita Renoir becomes the witch who evokes the devil and subsequently traps him with her charms. With her back to the public, she bends down exposing her buttocks and her sex, giving the public the role of the devil. The witch engages in copulation with the devil, and this violent lovemaking evokes visions of diabolic, grotesque and libidinous creatures. The male bourgeois audience was offended by the performance and there was even an attempt to rape Rita Renoir on stage, but she received the support of feminist journalists and art critics. This child of Satan and the *Women’s Lib* pushes the provocation to the extreme and reverses the roles, and it is the public that finds itself exposed to her glaring at them, stripping them and violating them. What is the meaning of Rita Renoir’s staging body and of her porno-Satanist ritual? Our Ethnoscenographic approach of Rita Renoir’s *Le Diable* consists of a descriptive analysis of a private collection archives of photographs and articles of the printed press.

**Keywords:** Rita Renoir, witch, striptease, theater, feminism, eroticism, body, performance.

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Rousse aux yeux verts et à la peau blanche, au corps filiforme et au visage animal, Rita Renoir a au point de vue phénotypique tout ce qu'il faut pour reconnaître en elle l'archétype de la sorcière. Issue de la très petite bourgeoisie parisienne, elle commence le strip-tease à l'âge de seize ans. Son esprit d'indépendance absolue s'accommode cependant mal du statut d'objet-sexuel au Crazy Horse. Tragédienne du strip-tease, elle s'affirme reine des nuits parisiennes puis pionnière de la performance avec Carolee Schneemann (*Meat Joy*, 1964), du happening avec Jean-Jacques Lebel (*Le Désir attrapé par la queue* de P. Picasso, 1967) et du théâtre expérimental avec Pierre-Étienne Eymann (*Les Immortelles* de P. Bourgeade, 1967). Se sentant brimée par la plupart des hommes de théâtre qu'elle rencontre, et qu'elle juge trop timorés pour se mettre à son niveau – à l'exception de Michel Simon aux côtés duquel elle tient le rôle de putain au grand cœur pour René Dupuy (*Du Vent dans les branches de Sassafras* de R. Obaldia, 1965) – elle entreprend la mise en scène d'un spectacle qu'elle appelle : *Le Diable*, qui est une double réaction contre le strip-tease et contre le théâtre. Rita Renoir est la sorcière des années soixante, soixante-dix, à laquelle *Le Diable* apporte le pouvoir sur la sexualité, le pouvoir sur la vie et la connaissance de soi.

### *Le Diable en Italie*

*Le Diable* (1972) est une pièce de théâtre érotique qui relève du strip-tease, du happening, de la pantomime porno-mystique et de la performance dans le sens explicite, radical et féministe du terme.<sup>1</sup> *Le Diable* est conçu, réalisé et performé par Rita Renoir, alias Monique Bride-Etivant (1934-2016),<sup>2</sup> avec la participation de son amant et collaborateur Jean-Pierre George qui en assure également la régie pour le son et la lumière. Les sources de Rita Renoir

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 1997). Rachel Middleman, *Radical Eroticism. Women, Art, and Sex in the 1960s* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Philippe-Meden, « Rita Renoir : strip-teaseuse, femme fatale et actrice surréaliste, » in *La Femme fatale. De ses origines à ses métamorphoses plastiques, littéraires et médiatiques*, ed. Cyril Devès (Lyon : CHRI, École d'art Émile Cohl, 2020), 316-333.

sont explicites : l'hystérie surréaliste,<sup>3</sup> Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille et, surtout, les expressions picturales de Jérôme Bosch, de Bruegel ou plus tard de Goya et William Blake. *Le Diable*, pour s'inscrire dans la continuité du happening, doit d'abord à l'idée que l'on s'en faisait dans les années soixante : souffrance, désintégration de la parole, comportement ritualisé, transe, exorcisme et « poursuite d'un "théâtre total" ». »<sup>4</sup>

Dans ses souvenirs de Rita Renoir, publiés sous le titre *Le Diable et la licorne*, Jean-Pierre George résume l'argument de la performance :

[...] une femme, délaissée par son amant qui la quitte pour se consacrer à Dieu, cherche à se venger et en appelle au Diable. [...] Une grande cape de soie sauvage noire sur les épaules et la masse de sa crinière fauve que révèle la faible lumière d'un projecteur tombant des cintres. Sitôt qu'elle a tracé le cercle magique et prononcé les invocations [...]. C'est une course égarée dans la peur. Trottinements des pieds nus qui la mènent sur des trajectoires incertaines et la jettent d'un côté à l'autre de l'espace, peur de ce qu'elle demande, peur de ce qu'elle désire, attraction et répulsion mêlées, bruit de la cape noire fouettant l'air ainsi déplacé, traversé, enjambé, oiseau de nuit aux trop larges ailes tournoyant dans l'angoisse. Ainsi ces avancées convulsives du corps la mènent au bord des infra-mondes, du premier cercle de l'enfer peut-être, et, d'un coup, comme on est emporté par l'effet d'une drogue forte, champignons ou acide, par une vague, dans un mouvement comme ralenti de son dos flexible, elle choit et s'évanouit précédée et suivie par le jeu de l'étoffe elle-même, la cape se posant sur le sol comme sur l'air, avec retard...<sup>5</sup>

Remémoration de scènes de sexe troublantes, violentes, d'images obscènes,<sup>6</sup> honteuses.<sup>7</sup> Dans ses visions hallucinées de diables grotesques,

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<sup>3</sup> *Le surréalisme et l'amour* (Paris : Gallimard/Electa, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Alain Virmaux, *Antonin Artaud et le théâtre* (Paris : Seghers, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Pierre George, *Le Diable et la Licorne* (Paris : La Table Ronde, 2004), 97-98.

<sup>6</sup> Estelle Doudet et Martial Poirson (éd.), *Scènes de l'obscène* (Paris : Revue d'histoire du Théâtre, 2016). Nelly Labère (éd.), *Obscène Moyen Âge* (Paris : Honoré Champion, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Murielle Gagnebin et Julien Milly (éd.), *Les Images honteuses* (Seysssel : Éditions Champ Vallon, 2006).



libidineux, la malmenant, la fouettant, l'humiliant, son corps est supplicié, possédé, cannibalisé.

Aucune improvisation ! Rita Renoir est en rupture avec l'idée naïve que l'on pourrait se faire de la performance exclusivement basée sur l'improvisation. Pour elle, l'improvisation est la résurgence d'une compétence acquise, mais oubliée. De fait, son personnage de sorcière est construit savamment, travaillé longtemps et perfectionné sur les scènes d'Europe, de France, d'Italie, de Suède, depuis le début des années soixante. En atteste d'une part son strip-tease inséré dans le film de Jacques Baratier : *Dragées au poivre* (1963), d'autre part les photographies extraites de sa tournée italienne (1970-1972). Cependant, entre 1963 et 1970, *Le Diable* s'est radicalisé.

Dans le film de Jacques Baratier, Rita Renoir émerge d'une obscurité déchirée d'éclairs et de coups de tonnerre métalliques. En pénitente du Moyen-âge, des chaînes aux poignets, elle avance jusqu'au nez de scène, le corps vêtu d'une cape qu'elle abandonne bientôt et d'une robe rouge fendue jusqu'à la taille de façon à laisser voir ses bas résille. La pénitente aux attributs de strip-teaseuse danse : une danse qui ne ressemble à rien, lancer de jambe classique, mouvement de bassin afro-cubain et gestuelle pantomimique ; elle trébuche et sourit d'un sourire bête, sa mâchoire très prononcée accentue son aspect bestial et béat, face caméra, elle a l'air de s'excuser. La mise en scène est là. Le strip-tease n'est plus ou se trouve irrigué d'une dramaturgie qu'il ignorait jusqu'alors. Précision et justesse dans le déséquilibre, le mouvement physique, le geste et l'expression sont calculés pour saisir l'assistance et elle est captée, mise en état d'attention, intellectuelle, mais surtout physique ! Pour seul décor apparaît une grande main blanche, main divine, main de Satan ? Main vers laquelle la pénitente s'avance, dansante, tourbillonnante à la manière d'une derviche pour se glisser entre les doigts et se tenir, droite, le ventre nu provoquant, au creux de la paume ; soudain : orage cérébral, orgasme, la robe qu'elle tenait à bout de bras, choit à ses pieds, découvrant ses seins nus et fiers. Rita Renoir s'effondre dans le creux de la main. Sur une toccata de Bach, de son visage, de ses yeux mi-clos et de ses lèvres entrouvertes perle une émotion de plaisir entremêlée de souffrance. L'obscurité l'absorbe. Spectateurs et spectatrices exultent.



**Figure 1.** Rita Renoir dans la main (1970). Photographie de presse à l'occasion de son numéro dans un cabaret romain. Collection privée.

Presqu'une dizaine d'années plus tard, en 1970, dans un cabaret romain, le journaliste théâtral Armando Stefani assiste à la performance. Sa description dans la presse érotique est explicite, aucun doute : c'est une évocation satanique ! Dans la salle plongée dans l'obscurité sont projetées sur une bache des diapositives informant qu'il y aura un rituel. Une invocation aux forces infernales du sexe à descendre sur terre pour prendre Rita Renoir. Projection du symbole de Baphomet, bouc-dieu aux seins de femme et maître du Sabbat. Le journaliste théâtral observe la froideur du public. Puis la sorcière apparaît ! Son mouvement physique est maladroit ! Pour qui sait voir, c'est maladresse maîtrisée :

Le goût pour cette chorégraphie suscite l'admiration la plus étonnée de ceux qui sont capables de la suivre dans toutes ses nuances, qui ne seraient déchiffrables qu'avec une imprégnation sérieuse, même par une élite d'initiés.

Le personnage que Rita Renoir invente est une femme qui apporte à son climax la folie érotique, une déviation onirique de tous les sens qui la submerge aux limites d'un réel plaisir charnel, jusqu'à une quintessence réaliste et inouïe [...]. Plaçant toutes les probabilités de ce que fut historiquement le phénomène de possession diabolique, qui avait des bases superstitieuses et populaires, cette artiste brillante lui apporte une touche spécifique, lui donnant les traits d'une sensualité fruste et vulgaire qui s'affine à mesure que progresse le contact luciférien. D'abord le signe de la croix faite sur l'aîne au lieu de la poitrine puis le plaisir donné par la bouche à un partenaire imaginaire et les mouvements et les sensations de l'orgasme, caresses phalliques prodiguées à deux mains, à des partenaires distincts ou au Diable lui-même.<sup>8</sup>

La performance fait beaucoup parler d'elle. Spectateurs et spectatrices accourent voir la sorcière gémir sous le fouet, ramper et marcher à quatre pattes, son corps ployé à l'extrême de l'endurance physique et s'abandonnant aux plus infimes vibrations du plaisir démoniaque !

Déconcertant est le mot qui revient pour qualifier l'effet de réel, l'effet de vie, produit par la sorcière dans la tête, dans le corps de celles et ceux qui sont venus la voir. *Le Diable* est invoqué dans les cabarets les plus populaires : « Putain ! » ou « Montre-nous tes seins ! » et autres exhortations sont lancées à la sorcière ! Aux journalistes qui l'interrogent sur l'idée de jouer dans des théâtres si populaires, Rita Renoir répond que c'est une question sociologique !

En réalité, depuis le début des années soixante, Rita Renoir s'attache à mener ses recherches théâtrales, sur le strip-tease, en dehors des clubs sélects à l'image du Crazy Horse Saloon. Expérimenter ses performances dans un bistrot d'ouvriers lui permet de se confronter à un milieu qui n'a rien d'élégant. Un espace sans cadre de scène, sans rapport frontal, sans décor et qui oblige à de nouveaux rapports au public. Dans le dernier volet du documentaire de Gianni Proia sur le monde de la nuit : *Mondo di Notte* (1963), Rita Renoir est filmée au milieu d'un bistrot des Halles à Paris, simplement vêtue de sous-vêtements en dentelle noire qu'elle ôte sous sa longue cape de velours rouge.

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<sup>8</sup> Armando Stefani, « Roma. Rita Renoir Sfida il Vaticano. Il Diabolico Rito di Rita, » *Men*, 28 Dicembre, 1970, 50. Traduit de l'italien par l'auteur.

Elle danse, tourbillonne, se jette au sol puis dans les bras de bouchers et forts des halles, des hommes virils, moustachus et enivrés, rassemblés autour d'elle et qu'elle interpelle sauvagement pour les exciter autant que les décontenancer :

Et mon âme ? Qui pense à mon âme ? Vous ? Surement pas vous ! Hé bien ! Tant pis ! Mais vous ressemblez à Platon... est-ce que vous auriez les mêmes goûts par que... Ha non ! Ha non ! Je vous interdis de me regarder avec ces yeux... avec ces yeux érotiques ! Je t'interdis de me regarder comme ça ! Tu entends ! ? Je t'interdis ! Ha ! Oui ! Tout se ligue contre moi ! Ha ! Oui ! Ha !

Un jeune homme noir, le seul présent dans le bistrot, vient alors s'asseoir sur le sol, dans un coin de la salle, pour interpréter sur ses percussions des rythmes afro-cubains. Rita Renoir termine son effeuillage. Les lumières du bistrot s'éteignent : des ombres de feuillages voilent alors son corps nu qui continue de danser frénétiquement, hystériquement, convulsivement ! Ambiance de rituel ! Le commentaire qui accompagne le film documentaire est explicite : « le strip-tease est devenu, en quelque sorte, une conquête sociale. »<sup>9</sup> Pour les ouvrières du bistrot, c'est le corps de la femme que Rita Renoir conquiert.

Rita Renoir incarne en elle-même la sorcière qui évoque le diable, fait l'amour au diable, a une histoire d'amour avec le diable qui la rend folle de sexe et d'horreur, qui la submerge d'obsession érotique. Mais, à la fin, c'est toujours le retour à la réalité du rang le plus bas et au désespoir ! En même temps, c'est une interprétation à travers laquelle la danseuse termine de détruire le strip-tease au sens classique et bourgeois du terme :

[...] pantomime érotique, spectacle ayant pour objet le déshabillage d'une femme jusqu'à nudité complète sur le rythme d'une musique particulière (généralement : instruments à percussion et à vent) et sur une trame justifiant ou rendant explicites les attitudes de l'effeuilleuse. Les mouvements de prédilection de l'effeuillage viennent souvent des danses orientales et surtout de la danse du ventre des Arabes, avec coups de reins en avant (pump, en américain) et ondulations rythmiques des hanches et du bassin

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<sup>9</sup> Gianni Proia, *Il Mondo di Notte n°3* (Julia Film, 1963). Pierre Philippe-Meden, « Le Strip-tease français du cabaret au théâtre expérimental (1950-1970), » *Horizons/Théâtre*, n°5 (2015), 6-20.

(grind, moudre) ; l'ensemble poursuit le même but : éveiller le désir érotique viril dans les limites d'une action visuelle. À ce titre, l'effeuillage est une illustration de la scopophilie ou « désir de voir » qu'il assouvit parfaitement. Spectacle éminemment cruel – singulier par opposition à collectif (music-hall par exemple) –, il dévisse le mécanisme érotique conduisant la « femme » (provisoirement habillée) à l'« objet » (provisoirement nue).<sup>10</sup>

À travers son strip-tease, Rita Renoir participe à déconstruire le mythe de la femme, objet, mère et putain à la fois.

À 36 ans, soignée par un entraînement ascétique et naturiste<sup>11</sup> sur l'Île du Levant – domaine de villégiature des artistes parisiens des années soixante –, son corps est toujours vif et chargé d'une agressivité « solaire » hors du commun. La journaliste théâtrale N. D. Diana a l'habitude de se rendre dans les salles des cabarets romains. Comme beaucoup, elle est venue voir Rita Renoir plus par complaisance que par intérêt véritable, avec la curiosité pour une étrangère en exil en Italie. Diana dédouane aussitôt Rita Renoir de toute accusation de spectacle hétérocentré !



**Figure 2. Figure 3. Figure 4.** Images extraites d'une brochure italienne de nature érotique entièrement constituée de photographies de la performance exécutée par Rita Renoir (1971). Collection privée.

<sup>10</sup> « Effeuillage, » *Dictionnaire de sexologie* (Paris : Éditions Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1962), 135. Voir aussi Denis Chevalier, *Métaphysique du Strip-tease* (Paris : Jean-Jacques Pauvert Éditeur, 1961).

<sup>11</sup> Arnaud Baubérot, *Histoire du naturisme. Le Mythe du retour à la nature* (Rennes : PUR, 2004). Sylvain Villaret, *Histoire du naturisme en France. Depuis le siècle des Lumières* (Paris : Vuibert, 2005).

La sorcière apparaît sur scène, bouge lentement, les jambes légèrement ouvertes, le ventre presque inexistant, légèrement tremblant, vivant et plein de désir et plongeant Diana dans un état à la fois d'hypnose, de tension profonde et susceptible d'exploser à tout moment. Soudainement : éclairs des projecteurs... gestes et cris rauques, semblent échapper au contrôle de la sorcière. Les commentaires des amis de Diana, tous des hommes, étaient au début audacieux voire proches du mépris, mais se transforment sans transition en attention participante, en excitation érotique, de telle sorte que l'assemblée semble sous l'emprise d'un délire des sens. Diana la regarde à nouveau. La sorcière lui donne l'impression qu'elle voit une femme pour la première fois :

[...] je la vois et je sens presque que ses mains sont mes mains et que ses doigts osseux et fragiles traversent mon corps à la recherche d'une vérité que j'ai cherchée en vain sur ma peau, sur les membres fragiles de mes amis si égaux à moi-même et si éloignés. Elle ne l'est pas : elle est moi-même en ce moment et elle me révèle le secret de ma nature que les autres appellent « tendance particulière », que les soi-disant normaux disent anormale. J'ai le sentiment de me parler à moi-même, de me voir et, en même temps, je ressens une sensation indéfinissable, quelque chose que je ne pourrais appeler de l'admiration ; mais c'est peut-être plus. Peut-être l'attrance, je ne dis pas l'amour par peur d'exagérer. [...] Je la regarde à nouveau et elle me confesse que je l'aime plus que je ne le voudrais. Mais je suis sûre qu'en tant que femme, j'apprécie en elle quelque chose de différent et en même temps de « plus ». Je suis fascinée par cette force qui émane de son corps, qui semble dominer toutes choses et personnes présentes. Je l'aime surtout parce que je vois en elle la transposition de ce que je souhaite voir dans un miroir en face de moi et qu'elle : Rita Renoir, soit mon image miroir, mon corps, mes mains, mes mouvements ; les mouvements cadencés d'une femme, qui parle à d'autres femmes comme elle.<sup>12</sup>

Au-delà de la question du genre, *Le Diable* de Rita Renoir révèle ce sur quoi repose l'art du spectacle vivant : la dimension symbiotique entre le performatif et le spectaculaire, entre ce qui se passe sur scène et ce qui se passe dans la tête du spectateur.

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<sup>12</sup> N. D. Diana, « L'Ultimo Peccato di Parigi », *Le Ore*, 25 janvier, 1971, 37-38. Traduit de l'italien par l'auteur.

### *Le Diable à Paris*

Deux ans de tournée en Italie permettent à Rita Renoir de peaufiner *Le Diable* pour s'attaquer à Paris, capitale théâtrale de l'Europe ! Dans un projet ambitieux, auquel Rita Renoir aurait voulu attacher une équipe d'acteurs, de danseurs, d'actrices et de danseuses dans une sorte de sacrifice collectif, mais... qui pour se sacrifier avec elle, contre « la pire des censures : le mérite théâtral ? »<sup>13</sup> *Le Diable* allait-il porter Rita Renoir au-delà des huées qu'au milieu des années soixante lui lançaient des comédiens à l'image de Madeleine Robinson et de Jean-Laurent Cochet parce qu'après tout une strip-teaseuse ne pourrait être autre chose qu'une prostituée de bas-étage ?<sup>14</sup>

### *Et moi qui dirai tout !*

*Le Diable* dans lequel Rita Renoir incarne son propre personnage de sorcière est mis en scène au Théâtre de Plaisance, à Paris, en 1972. La direction du théâtre prend ses précautions. Pour l'occasion la salle est interdite aux moins de 18 ans. Le spectacle est présenté dans le *Nouvel observateur*, magazine d'actualité hebdomadaire français du 6 mars 1972. Les âmes sensibles y sont averties : son aspect érotique sent le soufre ! La pièce comporte deux parties. La première est intitulée : *Et moi qui dirai tout*, la seconde : *Le Diable*. La presse politique française d'influence communiste et inscrite dans le prolongement des réflexions psychanalytiques de Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) soutient publiquement Rita Renoir.

Le magazine *Politique Hebdo* offre une description de sa performance. Dans la première partie, *Et moi qui dirai tout*, Rita Renoir raconte d'une « voix vulgaire et affectée » des anecdotes « sordides et tristes », difficiles à entendre, mais qui sembleraient avoir un caractère autobiographique : l'amour à New York pour de l'argent, le dégoût de soi-même, l'enfance (battue et violée par le père), enfin la participation à des « parties fines » dans la haute société lyonnaise où des gens sont crucifiés suivant le goût sadomasochiste. Puis la sorcière danse, ou

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Jacques Pauvert, *Le Vrai problème de la censure* (Paris : Jean-Jacques Pauvert Éditeur, 1971).

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Philippe-Meden, « Le Strip-tease français du cabaret au théâtre expérimental (1950-1970) », 6-20.

plutôt tente d'exprimer par son corps l'essentiel de la pièce : « l'impossibilité de donner forme vivante à une insurrection de l'être de femme. »<sup>15</sup> Mais ne parvenant pas à créer d'échange avec les spectateurs, majoritairement masculins, elle les pétrifie du regard.



**Figure 5.** Rita Renoir dans *Le Diable* (6 décembre 1972), la première partie : *Et moi qui dirai tout !* Photographie de presse. Collection privée.

Le contre-spectacle commence. La sorcière s'approche d'eux. Elle les questionne sur ce qu'ils espéraient voir en achetant leur place, sur l'absence de leur femme au spectacle, sur le rôle de mère attribué traditionnellement à leur femme, sur la liberté sexuelle et s'ils aimeraient faire l'amour avec elle. L'intérêt du courant psychanalytique reichien pour *Le Diable* s'incarne probablement là, dans la critique par la sorcière des rapports bourgeois, du couple, de la famille, de l'homophobie et de l'aliénation de la femme. Les rapports de pouvoir sont inversés.

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<sup>15</sup> Jean Duvignaud, « Lettre inédite. "Tout d'abord, il faut retrouver tout cela dans une interrogation commune – heureusement informulée en concepts – sur le corps – le sien, celui de l'autre" », *Érotisme et sexualité sans les arts du spectacle*, éd. Pierre Philippe-Meden (Lavérune : L'Entretemps, 2015), 231.



La sorcière regarde les hommes qui au début du spectacle dévoraient de l'œil, sans retenue, son corps à demi-nu. Les spectateurs deviennent bredouillants, hésitants. Ils détournent les yeux lorsqu'elle enjambe leurs fauteuils pour leur minauder des questions indiscretes. Puis, à la manière d'un psychodrame,<sup>16</sup> elle invite les spectateurs à monter avec elle sur scène pour qu'ils miment un rêve irréalisé et obsédant ou pour s'aimer entre eux. Beaucoup d'hommes quittent la salle dans une attitude offensée, entre indulgence et mépris. Or, un soir :

[d]eux hommes [...] attirés par le seul nom de Rita Renoir et le mythe qu'elle véhicule, par la violence de son corps, voulurent passer aux actes. Si certains viennent pour retrouver les fantômes d'Artaud et de Bataille, eux étaient venus là comme à Pigalle. Ils montèrent sur la scène, l'attrapèrent, tentèrent de la dénuder et de montrer son sexe au public. Ils voulaient la violer sur la scène afin de voir si elle était partisane de la liberté sexuelle. Eux, en tous cas, comme ils l'affirmaient, n'en étaient pas partisans. [...] Rita Renoir, d'abord décontenancée, réagit admirablement : avec une ironie et une insolence étonnantes, elle leur fit remarquer qu'ils seraient bien en peine de la violer, n'ayant de rigide que leur imbécilité [...].<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 6.** Rita Renoir dans *Le Diable* (6 décembre 1972), la première partie : *Et moi qui dirai tout !* Photographie de presse. Collection privée.

<sup>16</sup> Didier Anzieu, *Le psychodrame analytique chez l'enfant et l'adolescent* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Michel Palmier, « Les Voyeurs attrapés par la queue, » *Politique Hebdo*, 30 novembre, 1972, 23.

À l'entracte, les spectateurs se rencontrent, se parlent, commentent le spectacle ; ce qu'il évoque en chacun, avec le sentiment partagé qu'il se passe là une remise en question de leur conception de la vie. Durant ces années de liberté, d'égalité et de sexualité, « se déshabiller face à des hommes n'est pas un acte de soumission. Bien au contraire, se mettre nue devient l'instrument d'une conquête et l'exercice d'un pouvoir. »<sup>18</sup>

Pour la critique théâtrale Colette Godard, dans ce spectacle pornographique, la sorcière s'adresse directement aux hommes dans l'espoir de jeter les bases d'une nouvelle morale sexuelle :

Elle fait éclater les « codes civils » de la communication, en racontant, en invitant les hommes à expliquer en quoi ils sont fiers d'être ce qu'ils sont. Elle dit : « ce n'est pas une dénonciation, mais une libération. La sexualité, on n'en parle jamais avec naturel. On ne se connaît pas, on n'ose pas se connaître, on n'ose pas être curieux. On n'ose pas savoir d'où naît le désir. C'est pourtant essentiel. On est frustré, on n'ose pas savoir pourquoi.<sup>19</sup>

Mais, à la fin, « reste un être désespérément seul », détruisant ainsi le mythe de « la sexualité joyeuse et libératrice » : « le retour à la réalité est amer : une femme et, en face, les autres, coupables de ne savoir être que des étrangers. »<sup>20</sup> Rita Renoir inaugure ainsi l'esprit contre-culturel « punk » qui s'apprête à animer la France des années 1969-1989.<sup>21</sup>

### *Le Diable*

La seconde partie est autrement plus radicale. Obscurité, une musique sacrée perce des ténèbres de la scène : sorte de sanctus religieux, la sorcière émerge alors de la pénombre, vêtue d'une cape noire à l'image d'une sorcière

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<sup>18</sup> Marc Lemonier, *Liberté, Égalité, Sexualité. Révolutions sexuelles en France 1954-1986* (Paris : La Musardine, 2016), 31.

<sup>19</sup> Colette Godard, « Les diables de Rita Renoir, » *Le Monde*, 09 septembre, 1973 [Archives en ligne].

<sup>20</sup> Colette Godard, « Rita Renoir et ses démons », *Le Monde*, 14 février, 1972 [Archives en ligne].

<sup>21</sup> Guillaume Désanges et François Piron (éd.), *Contre-cultures 1969-1989. L'Esprit français* (Paris : La Maison rouge / La Découverte, 2017).

du Moyen-Âge. Ni texte, ni parole, la sorcière rejette sa cape laissant ainsi apparaître son corps nu. Cris, ricanements, sanglots, râles, soupirs, yeux exorbités, effrayés, séducteurs, contorsions, lutte contre des démons invisibles qui la violent puis qu'elle repousse violemment, mais appelle encore les jambes écartées face à un public pétrifié, saisi par l'émotion, dont le sentiment est d'assister à une cérémonie porno-sataniste.

Les mouvements de son corps, ses gestes et ses cris emplissent l'espace vide de la scène de visions hallucinées, mais aucune impression d'hystérie, tout est parfaitement maîtrisé, fluide : « [O]n songe à Grotowski, par la maîtrise du corps, à une perfection unique atteinte par le mouvement, le rêve, la violence qui émanent d'elle et qui transfigurent ce qui l'entoure. »<sup>22</sup> Outre la pauvreté des éléments scéniques, laissant sa place au jaillissement de la vie du performeur, la référence à Jerzy Grotowski ou plutôt à son acteur fétiche : Ryszard Cieślak, s'arrête évidemment à la maîtrise du corps, tant la recherche érotique est absente des travaux de Grotowski.<sup>23</sup>

Enfin, lorsque l'obscurité envahit de nouveau la scène, les spectateurs aperçoivent une dernière fois la sorcière. La sorcière se fond dans le néant. Elle crache. Elle hurle. Elle suffoque. Un dernier regard, elle s'échappe, effrayée, serrant la cape noire contre son corps nu, laissant au spectateur un sens ouvert, imprévu, mais éclatant « les images sociales de la femme, de la sexualité, de la famille bourgeoise. »<sup>24</sup>

La presse féministe plébiscite Rita Renoir : « [c]'est la diablesse qui exorcise les "chauvinistes mâles" réduits à sa merci. La sorcière qui hurle le droit de vivre ses pulsions et ses impulsions en dehors de tout contrôle des "phalocrates". Grimaçante, la bave aux lèvres, elle pulvérise l'image esthétique traditionnelle de la femme, cette eunuque – vierge ou mère – fabriquée par la religion ou la publicité. »<sup>25</sup> Provocatrice, arrogante, ironique, outrageante, fille de Satan et du *Woman's Lib*, Rita Renoir « arrache le spectateur à sa situation de voyeur solitaire. »<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jean-Michel Palmier, « Les Voyeurs attrapés par la queue », 24.

<sup>23</sup> Georges Banu, *Ryszard Cieślak, acteur-emblème des années soixante* (Paris : Actes sud, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Michel Palmier, « Les Voyeurs attrapés par la queue », 24.

<sup>25</sup> Mariella Righini, « Qui a peur de Rita Renoir ? Rita Renoir regarde, déshabille et châtre : "À nous deux, les bonshommes !" », *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 30 décembre, 1972, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Mariella Righini, « Qui a peur de Rita Renoir ? », 42.

## L'érotisme sauvera-t-il le monde de la barbarie ?

Du point de vue esthétique, d'après la poétesse surréaliste Annie Le Brun : la force de la sorcière, véritablement, serait de connaître en elle « le vertige du vide et d'avoir constamment à défier cet abîme intérieur. »<sup>27</sup> Vide lié à l'aliénation, vide à partir duquel il faut s'échafauder une existence. « De cette étrange intimité avec le néant, [...] sous le brouillard des apparences », Rita Renoir tirerait une « énergie de dissolution et de coagulation, d'absorption et de dépense, d'attraction et de répulsion » qui conduirait à une « conscience vibrante de l'inachèvement » ; ce serait à laisser voir cette « mouvance du vide » au cœur d'elle-même qu'elle devrait sa beauté bouleversante, convulsive, surréaliste, effaçant les frontières de la féminité ordinaire et dévoilant que rien n'appartient à la sorcière, qu'elle-même ne s'appartient pas, mais que sa grandeur est de « dériver entre le rien du dehors et le rien du dedans. »<sup>28</sup>

Annie Le Brun rend ainsi hommage au *Diable* de Rita Renoir, contre les réactions violentes qu'elle a pu recevoir de certaines femmes : « L'intolérance quasi générale des femmes à toute représentation pornographique ne tiendrait-elle pas, plus qu'à l'orientation phallocratique de tel ou tel spectacle, à l'incapacité d'être confrontée brutalement, crûment ou trivialement même, au rien sur lequel elles tissent leur mystère ? Les femmes auraient-elle donc si peur de se pencher sur ce vide constitutif d'elles-mêmes ? »<sup>29</sup> La mise à nu de la sorcière par elle-même serait-elle la mise à nu du « simulacre d'une productivité générique » qui remplacerait le désir par la jouissance ?

Du sentiment de vide naît le désir ou la nécessité d'ouvrir le monde et la possibilité de le transformer : « [L]e désir naît toujours d'une impossibilité de vivre, la poésie, c'est pareil » ; or, le désir suspend le sexe : « à partir du moment où il se passe quelque chose entre deux personnes, donc où le désir est là, est-ce qu'on sait vraiment qui est qui ? Qui est l'homme et qui est la femme ? C'est effectivement une autre réalité qui surgit. »<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Vagit-prop, Lâchez-tout et autres textes* (Paris : Ramsey-J.-J. Pauvert, 2000, 1977), 195.

<sup>28</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Vagit-prop, Lâchez-tout et autres textes*, 195-200.

<sup>29</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Vagit-prop, Lâchez-tout et autres textes*, 200-201.

<sup>30</sup> Annie Le Brun, « Le désir c'est la non-innocence, » *Sexpol. Sexualité politique*, 25 octobre 1978, 33.

C'est l'expression d'une nouvelle sexualité. En effet, d'après Rita Renoir, « [d]ans *Le Diable*, il y a une part de défi, une immense part de désespoir et une progression vers le négatif auquel pousse la société actuelle. Chacun est seul et on ne communique pas et le regard posé sur l'autre est toujours l'appropriation de sa propre image » ; l'érotisme du *Diable* serait une ultime tentative d'établir la relation amoureuse : « [q]uand on fait l'amour, quand on peut vraiment bien faire l'amour, il y a des moments où on ne sait plus qui est qui. »<sup>31</sup>

Pour le poète argentin Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), *Le Diable* de Rita Renoir « dénonce un érotisme incapable de s'intégrer à l'existence :

Ce que Rita Renoir montre lorsque chaque pore de son corps sexuellement supplicié et comblé s'offre à la libidosité du mal, c'est une pureté qui aurait pu nous sauver d'une humanité chaque jour moins humaine, non pas la pureté innocente de la jument qui s'ouvre à l'étalement sous le regard du passant, mais la pureté consciemment définie et désirée par ce qui peut rester de l'obscurité mémoire du jardin d'Éden, la nostalgie ancestrale ; une pureté que tout révolutionnaire devrait intégrer au catalogue de la libération humaine [...] . Rita Renoir ne propose pas son corps crucifié et empalé comme une évasion culturelle vers un Éden pour bon sauvage [...] ; le message [...], c'est qu' [...] il ne reste qu'une chose à faire si nous avons compris, [...] apprendre à aimer et à repartir à zéro, d'une autre libido [...] . Je n'aime pas le mot catharsis et pourtant je l'écris ici sans autre contexte car il me semble évident.<sup>32</sup>

L'érotisme sauverait-il le monde de la barbarie ?

En avril 1973, à l'occasion de la 300<sup>ème</sup>, le magazine masculin *Lui* obtient une interview auprès de Rita Renoir. Jouant à jauge pleine : 100 spectateurs, depuis la première, ce sont près de 30.000 spectateurs et spectatrices, mais essentiellement des hommes, qui ont été touchés par la sorcière. En dehors de toute interprétation poétique voire métaphysique, Rita Renoir éclaire d'une part son processus, d'autre part son enjeu. Par le corps, l'imprécation, le geste, *Le Diable* est une « auto-possession » par laquelle la sorcière advient pour bousculer tous les stéréotypes des rapports hommes-femmes et démonter les mécanismes sociaux du tabou sexuel :

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<sup>31</sup> Rita Renoir, « Le pénis ne guérit pas tout, » *Sexpol. Sexualité politique*, 15 décembre, 1978, 12-13.

<sup>32</sup> Julio Cortázar, « Hommage à une jeune sorcière, » *Tango*, 1984, 22.

C'est une auto-possession, c'est voulu. Pour bien jouer le spectacle, il faut le ressentir physiquement, disons jusqu'à 60%. 30% de l'argument est conscient et dans le reste il faut laisser surgir les choses de l'inconscient. Elles doivent habiter le geste. C'est très difficile d'expliquer pourquoi à tel moment un peintre voit une tête dans une tâche bleue ; il la voit, elle s'intègre à lui. C'est un peu comme ça *Le Diable*. [...] la sorcière demande à exister en tant que femme, et que le principe féminin soit l'équivalent du principe masculin. À partir de ce moment, il y a renversement ; moi aussi je deviens diable, mais je suis ce que sont tous les diables. Je suis persécutée par moi-même, maudite. C'est la névrose pure, ça atteint presque la folie.<sup>33</sup>

Rita Renoir envisageait son prochain spectacle sur le fantasme et l'angoisse du rapport sexuel. Cependant, sur le plan physique et mental, cette auto-possession est très exigeante. À la 500<sup>ème</sup> représentation, Rita Renoir « craque » ! Savait-elle que *Le Diable* serait le dernier spectacle de sa carrière ? Pas un spectacle ordinaire, ni une simple représentation : une action longuement mûrie, d'où le public se retire sans émotions tièdes.

Pendant 20 ans, la pratique du strip-tease l'a rompue à toutes les ficelles de son métier, mais surtout lui avait permis par son corps, déchiré, dévoré, exhibé, livré à une souffrance intérieure, destructrice de son intériorité, de venir à la rencontre de sa propre histoire. Ainsi *Le Diable* de Rita Renoir est-il une expérience intérieure du corps à l'image de celles vécues par les martyrs :

[...] elle avait intitulé son spectacle *Le Diable* car parmi tous les mots dont elle disposait pour personnifier son destin, elle n'en voyait pas de plus juste – et celui-ci la rattachait, par-delà ce qui lui restait de conscience coupable, à la longue tradition des sorcières, des possédées, des visionnaires infernales et des sectatrices d'idoles obscènes à laquelle elle appartenait depuis la nuit de l'humanité. Et c'était donc à la toute-puissance du Mal qu'elle avait à rendre compte de sa douleur comme de sa féminité, et de son existence.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> « Jusqu'au bout avec Rita Renoir, » *Lui*, avril, 1973, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Claude Louis-Combet, *Transfigurations* (Paris : José Corti 2002), 9-10.

Suivant l'écrivain Claude Louis-Combet, le mariage spirituel de Satan et de Rita Renoir en ravageant en elle toutes les convenances avait frayé dans son corps, à travers ses membres et son visage, une voie royale pour transformer la scène de théâtre en espace à la fois sacrificiel et source d'enfance et de jeunesse, de mémoire cosmique et archaïque, d'incitations radicales à l'amour, à la douleur et à la création.<sup>35</sup>

## L'Ange

Si Rita Renoir ne monte plus de spectacle, elle participe néanmoins à d'autres créations. Elle joue dans la fiction politique *Le Futur aux troussees* de la cinéaste Dolorès Grassian en 1974. Elle contribue à la chorégraphie de *Lux in tenebris* de Bertolt Brecht par Pierre-Étienne Heymann en 1977.



**Figure 7.** Rita Renoir dans *L'Ange* (1984). Collection privée.

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<sup>35</sup> Claude Louis-Combet, *Transfigurations*, 17.

Sa dernière apparition est dans le film expérimental *L'Ange* de Patrick Bokanowski (1984). Elle y incarne le double-personnage de La Femme et de L'Ange. Dans ce film qui traite de la recherche du dépassement de la perception et de soi-même, le personnage de Rita Renoir est celle d'une ascension spirituelle qui obéit à sa propre logique.

La trajectoire de Rita Renoir à travers *Le Diable* échappe aux discours théoriques, refuse les concepts et repose sur une esthétique du vide peut-être plus proche de philosophies orientales que de la nôtre. C'est celle d'un féminisme individualiste qui obéit au désir, refuse la jouissance mais tend irrésistiblement vers la relation amoureuse, l'érotisme et la suspension des sexes.

Au point de vue technique du corps, son érotisme procède d'une *via negativa* dans le sens grotowskien de l'expression.<sup>36</sup> L'élimination de tout obstacle physique et psychique, psycho-physique, pour atteindre par la mémoire, un souvenir d'enfance pur..., mais où Rita Renoir ne trouverait au fond de son organicité que le vide, mouvant, émouvant du désir...

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<sup>36</sup> Pierre Philippe-Meden, « Training pour une prière charnelle chez Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999), » *Arts du cirque et spectacle vivant. Vol 1 : les Formations en arts du cirque et en activités physiques artistiques*, éd. Tony Froissart et Cyril Thomas (Reims : Éditions et Presses Universitaires de Reims, 2019), 113-124.



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*Witch(craft) Subversion in Live Events  
(Performance Art) in Croatia:  
From Art to Everyday Praxis*

SUZANA MARJANIĆ\*

**Abstract:** This paper<sup>1</sup> offers an interpretative review of artists on the Croatian scene who use in their actions and performances the strategy of ‘witchcraft performance’ as matrix of subversion of the existing model of ‘desirable appearance’, as performative deviation from the desirable image of womanhood, but also as a kind of decision to express protest and subversion. Some women artists, like Neda Šimić-Božinović and Xena L. Županić, alongside the performance of witchcraft subversion, are also united by the voco-performance with which they approximate animal vocalisation as the source of logos.

**Keywords:** witch(craft) subversion, cat-iconogram, live events, performance art, Croatia.

There is a strong connection between witchcraft and art-craft/artmaking, as stated by artist Kristen Dodge. Being an artist, Dodge said, is “an act of rebellion fueled by a will to take risks (subtle or grand) both in their practice and in the cultures at large. Witches are subversive. They don’t subscribe to popular modes of behavior and belief systems,” and have been seen as societal threats. Artists and witches have always been perceived as dangerous and

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strange outsiders.<sup>2</sup> In this representation of witchcraft, Jesse Jones's *Tremble, Tremble* (Venice Biennale, 2017) "approached the witch as a proto-feminist archetype – a figure feared and condemned by the patriarchy for her suggestion of recalcitrant power."<sup>3</sup>

As regards the Croatian performance art scene, the witches' subversive role has been thematised by Sanja Iveković (b. 1949) with her performance *Upalim motor i nisam više na zemlji. Možda odem u raj, ali idem paklenski brzo* (*I Turn on the Engine and Leave the World Behind. I May Reach Heaven, but I'll Get There Fast as Hell*). She performed this piece in 2015 as part of the project *Drugarice vještice* (*Comrade Witches*) – artistic research thematising the concept of *the witch* that is still filled with numerous negative meanings, which reflects the strong resistance of the patriarchal mindset to accept the image of a strong woman who creates on equal footing and acts according to her own free will. The aforementioned performance was re-enacted by artist Nina Kamenjarin (Almissa Open Festival, Omiš, 2019). The idea of the author's work, the 'fitness' performance, is the continuous spinning on an exercise bicycle accompanied by the song *Harley Davidson* by Brigitte Bardot and a slideshow of recognisable photographs of artists known for their anthological performances – Hannah Hoch, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mandieta, Carolee Schneeman, Linda Benglis, Valie Export... Nina Kamenjarin, a young-generation artist (b. 1991), sees the reason for the reinterpretation of Sanja Iveković's aforementioned work in the need to underline, confirm or shout aloud that, to quote the artist herself,

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<sup>2</sup> Alina Cohen, "Why Artists Have Been Enchanted by Witchcraft for Centuries," 2019, accessed December 19, 2019, <https://www.artsy.net/article/alina-cohen-artists-enchanted-witchcraft-centuries>

<sup>3</sup> Hettie Judah, "How Witchcraft Continues to Cast its Spell on Artists's Magical Thinking," 2018, accessed December 19, 2019, <https://frieze.com/article/how-witchcraft-continues-cast-its-spell-artists-magical-thinking>

The figure of the witch is also used for touristic and promotional purposes in Croatia; for example, the International Fairy Tale Festival is held annually in the town of Ogulin, known for its numerous oral stories/legends on witches, such as the one according to which the witches, fairies and elves from all over the world gather on Klek mountain during stormy nights. Furthermore, it is estimated that there are about 100 followers of Wicca in Croatia, who advocate the recognition of this pagan belief as a religion.

See also Ivana Kalogjera, "Poznati Hrvati dio su grupe hrvatskih vještica," 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.express.hr/life/poznati-hrvati-dio-su-grupe-hrvatskih-vjestica-7802>

today we, the self-confident, strong and brave women, will not let repression and various political right-wing and religious mechanisms tear down and trample on our rights that have long ago been hard-won, but for which we are still fighting. Hence, on the day of the performance, when I sat on that bike, I felt a kind of shift, as if I was propelled by the strength of all of those women (Hannah Hoch, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mandieta, Carolee Schneeman, Linda Benglis, Valie Export) who appear one-by-one on the screen behind me and that I, in turn, re-propel them and do not let them be forgotten. After roughly two hours of continuous spinning on the exercise bike and having finished the performance, I took off the leather jacket (guided by the moment, intent, or perhaps adrenaline) and headed to a nearby restaurant to change clothes. What is specific about Brigitte Bardot's video, about her appearance, contradiction and somewhat ironised, even sarcastic song lyrics (as I perceive them) – despite the fact that her feminine and seductive movements can be viewed as exploitation of feminine sexuality, especially in 1967 when the video was released – is that now I see it as strength, since female sexuality indeed equals strength...<sup>4</sup>

Or, as Brigitte Bardot sings in the aforementioned song, wherein the astral vehicle i.e. broom has been replaced by a new kind of vehicle<sup>5</sup> –

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<sup>4</sup> Nina Kamenjarin, "Biti s jedne i s druge strane," 2019, *Plesna scena*, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.plesnascena.hr/index.php?p=article&id=2368>

<sup>5</sup> Within the framework of astral riding of animal vehicles, the witches' psychonavigational broom – chosen by witches as an astral and psychic vehicle primarily in the implementation of the technique of ecstasy – can be viewed as an isomorphism of the shamanic horse-headed stick, with the handle shaped as a horse's head and used by the Buryat shamans in their ecstatic dances. The latter is also called the horse and is not unlike the handle of the witch's broom; it figures as a kind of hobby-horse which the shaman *rides* to the *other* world or, as defined by Eliade – the symbolic 'riding' conveyed the leaving of the body, the shaman's "mystic death". See Suzana Marjanić, "Witches' Zoopsychonavigations and the Astral Broom in the Worlds of Croatian Legends as (Possible) Aspects of Shamanistic Techniques of Ecstasy (and Trance)," *Studia Mythologica Slavica* no. 9: (2006) 169-202, and Suzana Marjanić, "The Mythic Cyborgs of Croatian Oral Legends and the Fantasy Genre," *Studia Mythologica Slavica* no. 14 (2011): 87-106.

However, the facts on this visual history of witchcraft (the broom head positioned behind or in front of the flyer in the aerodynamic form) do not coincide – the key encyclopaedia of witchcraft notes that the "Hollywood-type" of riding (the broom head behind the flyer) is the earliest preserved portrayal of witches' astral flight as depicted in the Parisian manuscript poem *Le Champion des Dames (The Defender of Ladies, 1440-1442)* by Martin Le Franc, one of

“I don’t need anybody/ When I’m on my Harley Davidson!/ I don’t care about anyone/ When I’m on my Harley Davidson!/ I turn on the engine/ And leave the world behind/ I may reach heaven/ But I’ll get there fast as hell.”<sup>6</sup>

The artistic research by Sanja Iveković *Comrade Witches* deals with the case of the “Witches from Rio”, i.e. media ostracism of Jelena Lovrić, Rada Iveković, Slavenka Drakulić, Vesna Kesić and Dubravka Ugrešić, which was one of the greatest media scandals of the early 1990s in Croatia during the nationalist era of Franjo Tuđman, the first president of Croatia. “As feminists, they were accused of allegedly spreading lies to Croatian people and being anti-nationalist. [...] It all started in 1992, with the article entitled ‘Croatian Feminists Rape Croatia’, published in the Croatian weekly magazine *Globus*.”<sup>7</sup>

Here I would like to mention Sanja Iveković’s installation *Isn’t She Too Old for That? – On Witches* (2013), on the occasion of which the artist highlighted the following: “Many women who were persecuted as witches were indeed members of older age groups and, above all, belonged to the poorest strata of society. According to Silvia Federici, ‘older women were those who offered greatest resistance within the community to the destruction of communal connections in the face of expansion of capitalist relationships. They were a live treasury of knowledge and memory of the community’.”<sup>8</sup>

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the earliest works that took a stand in the favour of the accused and processed witches. This part of the poem features two illustrations of the witches’ flight: one rides an ordinary stick, and the other a broom, a “Hollywood-like” type of flight.

See Charles Zika, “Sticks,” in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. The Western Tradition 4*, ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 1087.

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I am referring to Nina Kamenjarin’s re-enactment of the aforementioned performance since I personally attended it.

<sup>7</sup> “Witches of Rio,” accessed December 19, 2019, <http://slavenkadrakulic.com/women-memory-on-the-witches-from-rio/>

<sup>8</sup> Sanja Iveković, “Isn’t She Too Old for That? – On Witches,” accessed December 19, 2019, <https://www.kontejner.org/en/projekti/ekstravagantna-tijela/ekstravagantna-tijela-ekstravagantne-godine-2/izlozba-8/nije-li-ona-prestara-za-to-o-vjesticama>

Sanja Iveković, “Drugarice vještice,” accessed December 1, 2019, <http://www.eurokaz.hr/v3/projects/drugarice-vjestice>

### The Rat Singers + *Cat Witch Sonatina for Voice and Theremin*

In this central part of the paper, I will thematise the biographic meeting (already mentioned in the summary) between Neda Šimić-Božinović (1929-2015), multimedia artist from Rijeka, and Xena L. Županić, multimedia artist from Labin who is far better known on Milan's countercultural scene. This meeting was actualised in their performative engagement both as actresses and as performance artists – i.e. sound performance, voco-performance – as our only women representatives of sound performance, initiated in former Yugoslavia by Katalin Ladik, an extraordinary Serbo-Hungarian poet and performance artist. Alongside the figure of the witch, their multimedia performative practices also suppose voco-performances, very interesting from an anthropological point of view.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from acting, Neda Šimić-Božinović was engaged in painting, sculpture and anti-fashion performance. She also worked with metal and manufactured authorial jewellery and miniatures. In the last ten years of her life (in the context of MMC Palach) she had also become an accomplished performance artist. Alongside Krešo Kovačiček and Vladimir Wöfl, she was member of the post-avantgarde musical and stage project The Rat Singers. Furthermore, she published a collection of one hundred poems *Vitezica lutilica (She-Knight the Wanderer)*.<sup>10</sup> Neda Šimić-Božinović was also a well-known “cat artist” who produced a number of drawings and portraits of cats, as well as the poem *Cat Witch Sonatina for Voice and Theremin*, modelled along the lines of the onomatopoeic neo-Dadaist poem by Cathy Berberian

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<sup>9</sup> Gabriella Schuller, “O performansima Katalina Ladik,” in *Moć Žene: Katalin Ladik, Retrospektiva 1962–2010 (The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik, Retrospective 1962–2010)*, ed. Miško Šuvaković, Dragomir Ugren and Gabriella Schuller (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2010), 252-61.

Suzana Marjanić, “Vokoperformansi – Neda Šimić-Božinović i Xena L. (Loredana) Županić: glumice i umjetnice performansa,” in *Krležini dani u Osijeku 201. Redatelji i glumci hrvatskoga kazališta. Prvi dio*, ed. Martina Petranović, Boris Senker, Anamarija Žugić, Anamarija (Zagreb, Osijek: Zavod za povijest hrvatske književnosti, kazališta i glazbe HAZU, Odsjek za povijest hrvatskog kazališta, Zagreb, Hrvatsko narodno kazalište u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet, Osijek, 2018), 201-12.

<sup>10</sup> Nela Valerjev Ogurlić, “Neda Šimić Božinović – cvijet riječkog performansa. In memoriam,” 2015, *Novi list*, <http://www.novolist.hr/Kultura/Neda-Simic-Bozinovic-cvijet-rijeckog-performansa>



*Stripsody* from 1966, in which she used the vocal technique of *sounds* of graphic novels. Within the framework of her performances (e.g. *Church in the Witch and Vampire in the Government*, Zagreb, 2011), she often performatively incorporated the subversive figure of the witch.<sup>11</sup>

As member of The Rat Singers, Neda Šimić-Božinović presented well-noted performances influenced by exceptional women artists i.e. vocal performers, e.g. Cathy Berberian, Laurie Anderson, Diamanda Galás, Björk, Beth Gibbons, for whom she often stated the following: “They are not only exceptional vocalists, but also authorial figures, performers who have access to the intuitive space, vocal invention, deep strata of Being. These are the voices that I seek to hear and listen to.”<sup>12</sup>

Upon her death under unfortunate circumstances, Neda was attributed as the *flower of Rijeka’s performance art scene* by multimedia artist Damir Stojnić, Professor at the Academy of Applied Arts in Rijeka.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, according to the accounts of her friends, the fire in the flat of Neda Šimić-Božinović broke out as the artist melted plastic to make a mask for her upcoming performance, which speaks volumes about the status of existential vulnerability of numerous non-institutional artists in our society.

As regards her voco-performances, they began with her participation in two larger collective performances: *Reddies/ Skinscraper*, performed at MMSU (Rijeka) and the Museum of Modern Art Dubrovnik in 2005, and *An(im)omalia* by Damir Stojnić, presented at Marganovo hall in Hartera on the occasion of FONa (New Arts Festival) in the same year. Furthermore,

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<sup>11</sup> She participated in the exhibition dedicated to feminist gerontology entitled *Ekstravaganтна tijela: Ekstravaganтne godine (Extravagant Bodies: Extravagant Age*, curatorial team: Kontejner, 2013) with her performance *Countess Zrinski-Nugent-Laval*, and in the programme *MMC – poduzeće u kulturi (1998.-2011.): riječka akcionistička i performerska scena (Culture Enterprise MMC Ltd., 1998-2011: Rijeka’s Actionist and Performance Scene)* with the performance *Crkva u Vješnici i Vampir u Vladi (Church in the Witch and Vampire in the Government)*, with which she registered the theory and practice of the turbulent new actionist and performance scene of Rijeka, once centred around MMC and O. K. Gallery at Palach Club (Tvornica Jedinство, Zagreb, 2011, organised by Damir Čargonja, Marijana Stanić and Suzana Marjanić). See Suzana Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa: od Travelera do danas* (Zagreb: Udruga Bijeli val, Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Školska knjiga, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Šimić-Božinović, qtd. in Suzana Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa*, 1399-1408.

<sup>13</sup> Nela Valerjev Ogurlić, “Neda Šimić Božinović – cvijet riječkog performansa. In memoriam.”

as regards the already-cult performance *Reddies/ Skinscraper*, Neda's role consisted of the vocal interpretation of the text *Red* by Burroughs. To quote the artist herself: "It is the first unpublished Croatian translation from 1987 by Sonja Sunde, who lives in Bergen. The text enables a wide interpretative range. Several voices of different character, several different moods and emotions, gestures and attitudes are used. Because the integral text was projected in the background as captions, I had the freedom to select parts I was interested in interpretation-wise. There were screams and shrieks of indignation, deep tones of sensual whispering, the wallowing of the dark matter of menace, the barking of dogs that revolted against any regulation, the wailing of dying beasts with limbs wounded and torn apart..."<sup>14</sup>

And finally, as regards this exceptional artist, I would like to recommend the listening to a fragment of her poem *Cat Witch Sonatina for Voice and Theremin*<sup>15</sup> in which she uses the vocal technique of the *sounds* of comic books (onomatopoeia).<sup>16</sup>

### **Xena L. (Loredana) Županić and witchcraft voco-performance**

As regards the biographic context of Xena L. Županić – actress, director, writer, set designer, model, performance artist – I will present in more detail her voco-performances in the context of her recently-published fourth book

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<sup>14</sup> Stojnić, qtd. in Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa*, 1402.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmRbKZVVfX4>

<sup>16</sup> "Neda's life was related to art almost in its entirety. I say 'almost' as I would also like to mention two of her other great passions – her cats, which she also used to portray quite often; I would like to mention here the interesting portraits of cat-women, for which I hope they will be preserved. Neda had always kept a lot of cats and talked about them often. When she died, she only had two; one of them is cared for by her neighbours, and for the other one they say that it probably ran away due to shock, but if it returns, the same neighbours will tend to it. I know that Neda would be really happy and grateful for this."

See Čekada, Tajči, "In memoriam. Umjetnica anti modnoga i glazbenog performansa," *Zarez*, 22 February 2016, <http://www.zarez.hr/clanci/in-memoriam-umjetnica-anti-modnoga-i-glazbenog-performansa>

*Yztok Zapada (East of West)*.<sup>17</sup> Multimedia artist Xena L. (Loredana) Županić is far better known on the counterculture scene of Milan; in her voco-performances, she also frequently incorporates the androgynous visual of the subversive witch.

In the context of her voco-performances at *divine frequencies*, on this occasion I would like to note that she graduated in Philosophy and Art History from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zadar, in Acting and Set Design from Scuola di Recitazione Quelli di Grock in Milan, and in Acting from Accademia d'Arte Drammatica di Milano.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, she was engaged in fashion (she had her own fashion brand, *Hermetika*) and took part in fashion shows of the most renowned world designers; she also acts in theatre (whereby she particularly highlights the collaboration with actor Carmelo Bene), feature films (Gabriele Salvatores), radio and TV dramas, music videos; she recorded four albums for EMI Italiana, and two with Metal Guru; in 2002 she founded and managed Ludiialydis Club in Milan; she worked in Italian television ("*Markette*", P. Chiambretti, *la 7*, Mediaset, *Rai Uno*, etc.), exhibited at solo and group exhibitions (Biennale di Venezia; Tanzquartier Wien; collaboration with curator Harald Szeemann at the exhibition *Blood and Honey: Future's in the Balkans*, 2003). In 2002, she became member of Labin Art Express and Metal Guru.<sup>19</sup> Today, she works as multimedia artist, presents her own performances and actions, and directs theatre shows.<sup>20</sup> Also, using her appearance, she performs anti-fashion presentations that are always close to system-subverting witchcraft imaginarium.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Xena L. (Loredana) Županić, *Yztok Zapada* (Labin: Own Edition, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> In her biographies, she always emphasises that she is also a model, and the only Croatian woman photographed by Helmut Newton, a luminary of erotic photography (Xena thereby frequently stresses his feminine nature in his work with women models). See Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa*, 1197-1206.

<sup>19</sup> In 1994, together with Massimo Savić and Krešimir Farkaš, Dean Zahtila founded the multimedia group Metal Guru, one of the fractions of Labin Art Express. He is the initiator and manager of L.A.E.'s fundamental project *Underground City XXI Labin*.

<sup>20</sup> Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa*, 1215.

<sup>21</sup> In folklore imaginarium of witches, alongside physical characteristics (e.g. a haggard old woman with a humped nose and a wart, which is more likely to have come from the so-called high culture, inquisitorial questionings, during which they looked for marks on the

Among other things, the artist founded Ludiialydis Fashion Company in Milan, meaning “actors/actresses who come from the land of Lydia”. In ancient Rome, actors came from Lydia, Asia Minor: as Županić often highlighted the theatre matrix of fashion, this name seems very adequate. Specifically, together with Mario Canali, multimedia artist from Milan and one of the pioneers of electronic and digital art, she founded the aforementioned cultural centre, i.e. experiment centre as she often defined it, or poetically – *experimentation and production of theatre and video works, of interactive virtual installations*, as Italy’s first psycho-bar. The artist herself states the following: “*Psycho-bar* [...] in the sense of active interaction with virtual machines, with live performances, thoughtfully selected on the basis of transgressive elements in their work. Their end-goal consisted of sophisticated bombardment of conscience: to reexplain everything old and introduce the new.”

As regards her voco-performances, the artist herself states that they are guided by *phoné*, the voice that is profoundly connected to the sound and vocal expression of being. Thereby she puts special emphasis on the role of artist Carmelo Bene, representative of Italian neo-avantgarde theatre and film, whom she considers the embodiment of conscious and deeply deliberated concept of human voice – pitch, intensity, and tone. Briefly put, as the artist herself points out, “this is an abundance of tones of voice, even though tone remains the same and tonality varies. Such disciplined voice acquires orchestral capacity at full swing.”

In the conceived multimedia performance *Carska Rez-ba (Caesarean Sect(ion))*, the artist therefore indicates the mystery of the corporeal and spiritual transformation of the female body. Gradual encirclement, spheroidisation of female abdomen indicates the *Urform*, the primordial sphere out of which everything originates and is born. Within the framework of her voco-performances, the artist accompanies by sound the scream of birth as the eternal trauma of being born, as she conceived it within her video-

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bodies of alleged witches), what is more notable is the belief in zoo-psychonavigations. For example, in the area of the Balkans, there is a widespread belief that a butterfly flying around the house in the evening is a witch, as recorded by Tihomir R. Đorđević in the first monograph on South Slavic witches.

performances presented at the exhibition on reproductive rights at Vladimir Bužančić Gallery in 2017, which is also the first exhibition on pregnancy within the local scene.<sup>22</sup>

In the aforementioned context, I would like to recommend joint listening, watching of fragments of the video performance *Živo-tinja (Ani-Mal)*,<sup>23</sup> wherein the artist uses vocal manifestations to eco-feministically establish in correlation the lives of women and animals, almost resembling the ancient Witch, the sorceress.

Alongside her living (human) sculpture Beatrix, which is based on the imaginarium of *Maleficent* (as embodied on the film screen in 2014 by Angelina Jolie, dir. Robert Stromberg),<sup>24</sup> the artist states the following:

The 'witches' transformation is a revolutionary, subversive act if it indicates symbolically or spiritually, as a kind of 'code', the existence of another 'parallel reality', of another path leading straight to the heart of its covert centre. If so, it is the 'principle of hope' that opens a new, unexpected horizon or, better put, a possibility of different lifestyle. My own achieved level of reality is manifested on my mask, my human sculpture that is numb one moment, and primordially furious and mimetic the next.

Facial expressions and the primordial scream crumbled in thousands of blows of vocal cords.

Human sculpture formed by the covert, unknown, Ur-(innate) energy that possesses me. As such, it becomes the Icon of the unknown Origin.

Mask – Image – Icon, as an abruptly-found signpost for others. For the closest ones, for the farthest ones, in annulled space and time of their and my own presence.

This human sculpture, Mask – Image – Icon, originates according to the principle 'discard, tear off from yourself everything (superfluous)'. This is Vaztrg (*ecstasis*) which discards the residuum so as to reach the necessary,

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<sup>22</sup> Exhibition *Žena – trudnica – majka: zelene sfere i nekropolitike (Woman – Pregnant Woman – Mother: Green Spheres and Necropolitics)*, Zagreb, Vladimir Bužančić Gallery, curator: Anita Zlomisljić, text in the catalogue: Suzana Marjanić.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPTpLIFyh30>

<sup>24</sup> See "A few things you need to know about *Maleficent*," accessed December 19, 2019, <https://starcasm.net/what-is-maleficent/>

the essential. The necessary, the elemental is the 'numinous', 'sacred', 'Maleficent', 'Magical' image (icon). It is 'neutral' in the sense of strength, which in turn is constantly growing. The entire process is non-conscious, albeit deeply rooted in this world, by which we are called to embark on the final revelation.

That which is discarded in Vaztrg is the 'imposed', 'learned' image of woman and femininity, of its paradigm and eternally renewable, perpetual processes. Settled 'forms' are demolished; once exposed, they disappear by blending into a new Mask – Image – Icon of powerful, primordial femininity. The unknown, 'neutral' force is recognised as 'sinister', maleficent – causal-effectual energy that is dreaded by the rest of the world. Actually, all of this remains a mystification, the inability to recognise the primordial.<sup>25</sup>

### **Appendix: Katalin Ladik – the first voco-performance artist of former Yugoslavia**

As I have introductorily mentioned Katalin Ladik, the first representative of sound performance art in the former country whose line is represented today on the Croatian scene only by the two already-mentioned multimedia artists (unfortunately, Neda Šimić-Božinović has recently passed away), in this appendix I would like to contextualise the genre of voco-performance, i.e. sound and poetic performance. Specifically, I use the term voco-performance on the basis of the term *vocovisual* as the movement of art neo-avantgarde/post-avantgarde that was initiated and described in the eponymous book by Vladan Radovanović. In the context of the aforementioned, I would like to point out that Katalin Ladik is close to Artaud's concept from his book *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938); when she visited Marseille in the spring of 1996, on the occasion of 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Artaud's birth she presented the performance *L'agneau de dieu et le double* in his hometown. Thereby the title was the only thing that was associated with Artaud, the great negator of logocentrism. It is also important to note that she is the first woman

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<sup>25</sup> Excerpt from an e-mail interview with the artist.

performance artist in Yugoslavia, who entered the field of performance art in the revolutionary year of 1968.<sup>26</sup>

As a sorceress, colloquially a witch, and in her struggle against socialist patriarchy, the artist conceived her own rendition of performance art in the context of sound poetry in the 1960s and 1970s, when she started her subversive life activity as a woman, i.e. as single mother and artist in a patriarchal society. She additionally enhanced the subversion in her sound poetry performances with props related to the context of sewing or “semiotics of the kitchen” as termed by Martha Rosler, who likewise promoted the kitchen as the place of performative resistance in the 1970s. The subversive phonetic-poetic strategy of Katalin Ladik was also the transgression of poetry into communication. Hence she interpreted ‘collages’ from *Burda* magazine (sewing and needlepoint schemes) as sheet music; she decided to sing them. That night, the re-enactment was exceptional: one of such collages was projected on the video-wall (a needlepoint scheme from *Burda*), while Katalin Ladik was standing next to it and ‘singing’ the aforementioned scheme which she, as an artist, read as sheet music. As regards her extensive biography, I would like to note that she has been named the first woman performance artist of former Yugoslavia in her monograph *Moć žene: Katalin Ladik, Retrospektiva 1962–2010* (*The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik, Retrospective 1962-2010*). And finally, it is important to mention that Yoko Ono also gave the award *The LennonOno Grant for Peace* to Katalin Ladik in 2016.

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<sup>26</sup> On Katalin Ladik, her work with ‘sexuality discourses’ and how she – in the context of the liberal society of the post-1968 socialist society – offered the nude female body as a spectacle, as a sight to behold. Furthermore, Dubravka Đurić also highlights the specific use of folklore in Katalin Ladik’s voco-performances, which the artist used while exploring female sexuality. Specifically, folklore was used by artists in the period of socialist modernism from the late 1950s onwards in the construction of universal meanings within the framework of humanist socialist self-managing culture. See Dubravka Đurić, *Politika poezije. Tranzicija i pesnički eksperiment* (Beograd: AŽIN, 2010), 20-21.

### **In conclusion, or once more on the subversive performance of witchcraft**

And finally, I would like to repeat that, as regards sound performances, our domestic scene had/ has only two women artists – Neda Šimić-Božinović and Xena L. Županić; thereby all of the sound performative matrices of voco-performance, with which they approximate animal vocalisation as the source of logos, are archetypal. Unfortunately, Neda has recently passed away in tragic circumstances, while Xena – with her strong, acrid, rough, androgynous voice – is more present on the Italian scene. Still, she remains insufficiently recognised ‘at home’ as regards the mainstream.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, Xena refers to futurism, primarily *The Art of Noises* (1913) by Luigi Russolo,<sup>28</sup> and Neda Šimić-Božinović to neo-avantgarde and post-avantgarde vocal experiments, namely the already-mentioned Cathy Berberian and her cult feline *Stripsody*.<sup>29</sup>

Lastly, I would like to return to the introductory part of the text, in which I have stressed that the performance of witchcraft is subversive and, along these lines, I would like to note another performative example – artist Ksenija Kordić who, at the beginning of her activity, promoted the gothic-witch appearance in her first performance *Self-Combustion* (2003), in which she ritually burned (three) holy books. Specifically, she presented the performance on 14 January 2003 at Močvara Club in Zagreb, as part of which she ritually burned the *Bible*, *Quran* and *Bhagavad Gita*, and mixed their ashes with clay to form a phallic symbol. As the artist frequently stresses, on the occasion of this performance she experienced three instances of censorship – institutional, media, and coming from some of her colleagues. Furthermore, at the exhibition *Avatar*, which she chose to present at Pigalle, an *eros shop* in Zagreb, she placed herself in the role of a digital witch who, naturally, does not tell fortune,

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<sup>27</sup> Among the artist's more recent guest performances, I would like to note the performance at FIUK – Festival of Performing Arts and Theatre in Koprivnica (upon invitation by Bojan Koštic) in 2015, at which she presented the performance *Halt* (together with collaborators Krešo Kovačiček and Neda Šimić-Božinović) and also promoted her book *East of West* (Labin, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla, *Futurism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 111.

<sup>29</sup> Naturally, all of them perform along the lines of Dadaist verses without words, i.e. the vocal phonetic poetry of Hugo Ball, who invented a new kind of voice/phonetic poems (made-up words that toy with elementary fragments of language). Just as Hugo Ball marked his Dada-performances with costumes, these three voco-performance artists also do the same.



but rather – in a quite similar manner, as a witch i.e. her ‘human’ image, as summarised by art historian Olga Majcen Linn<sup>30</sup> – ‘reads’ the visitors’ thoughts and answers them in an attempt to hold meaningful conversation. On this interactive software, the artist states the following:

I intended to present the exhibition in a private porn booth that can be found in some of Zagreb’s sex shops. However, the owner was not interested in collaboration, so I had to abandon this idea and improvise a similar situation in an eros shop.

The work itself was inspired by TV-referendums at which even the most complex social questions are answered with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’, which forces one to opt for one of the extreme options, which I find utterly absurd. I have also noticed myself falling into the trap of the referendum question and often do not even deliberate the subject in an adequate manner, as the aim is to decide as quickly as possible in order to, supposedly, eliminate and discredit the opposing side. *Avatar* poses some of these ‘delicate’ questions, while a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ leads to a change of its mood and a new question. This continues until it suggests the ‘examinee’ to destroy it, to kill it. Since the work itself cannot be seen in its entirety if all of the questions are not answered with both ‘yes’ and ‘no’, the examinee is also forced in a certain manner to provide a dishonest answer. Thereby I seek to ironise the relationship towards the authority of media, to illustrate the manner in which they manipulate us.

While the figure of the witch appears subversive and revolutionary in the art practice, as I have stated in the introduction, there are around one hundred followers of contemporary witchcraft in Croatia. Some of them are well-known public personas; however, as stated by ethnologist Sonja Miličević Vukelić, who defended her final thesis on the subject of Wicca at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, it is unlikely to expect that any of them – followers of the world’s oldest religion – would come forward and publicly declare: “I am a witch!”<sup>31</sup>

Translated by Mirta Jurilj

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<sup>30</sup> Olga Majcen, “Ksenija Kordić, Avatar,” 2007, accessed July 8, 2019, <http://www.kgz.hr/hr/dogadjanja/ksenija-kordic-avatar/18409>

<sup>31</sup> See Ivana Kalogjera, “Poznati Hrvati dio su grupe hrvatskih vještica,” 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.express.hr/life/poznati-hrvati-dio-su-grupe-hrvatskih-vjestica-7802>

### Photo contributions



**Photo 1:** Nina Kamenjarin: *I Turn on the Engine and Leave the World Behind. I May Reach Heaven, but I'll Get There Fast as Hell*, re-enactment of Sanja Iveković's performance (2019).



**Photo 2:** Neda Šimić-Božinović, The Rat Singers – *Requiescat in Pacem* (2015).



Photo 3: Xena L. Županić, "BeatriX".



**Photo 4:** Ksenija Kordić: *Self-Combustion* (2003).

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*Artistes visuelles et sorcellerie :  
de la magie comme instrument créatif de lutte politique*

OPHÉLIE NAESSENS\*

**Abstract: Visual Artists and Witchcraft: Magic as a Creative Tool for Political Struggle.** Many contemporary artists call upon the iconography of witchcraft, rewriting its past stories, exploring current ones, or actualizing practices and gestures (Camille Ducellier, Tatiana Karl Pez, Myriam Mihindou). Beyond folklore and esotericism, the witch is for these artists a figure of female emancipation with powerful subversive potential. Since the creation of the W.I.T.C.H. and the birth of anti-nuclear movements in the United States in the 1970s, women have emerged as producers of rituals capable of generating collective power from different perspectives of struggle (feminist, ecologist, anti-capitalist). This militant projection is now resurfacing with force, particularly through the first gatherings of Witch Bloc Paris. Artists are also reviving the tradition of ritual, designing actions whose objective is to bring politics and magic together. In this paper, we will question how artists reinvest ritual practices associated with the imagination of witchcraft, while proposing new forms of creative resistance.

**Keywords:** visual arts, witchcraft, politics, ritual, struggle, magic, protestation.

**Des artistes et des sorcières : réappropriation(s) d'une figure d'émancipation**

Nombreuses sont les artistes contemporaines qui convoquent l'iconographie de la sorcellerie. Certaines s'emploient à réécrire ses histoires passées, tandis que d'autres explorent ses histoires actuelles. C'est le cas par

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exemple de Camille Ducellier dans son film *Sorcières, mes sœurs* (2010), dont le synopsis précise : « Sorcières, hameçons du diable, tisons d'enfer... Quelles sont ces femmes qui incarnent le danger des époques ? Féministes pour sûr, souterraines parfois et singulières dans leur démarche, voilà quelques sorcières d'aujourd'hui, qui ont croisé mon regard ».<sup>1</sup> D'autres réactivent la figure de la sorcière, telle Tatiana Karl Pez en maîtresse de cérémonie officiant au clair de Lune dans la performance *Circle Danse La Luna*<sup>2</sup> (2018). D'autres encore actualisent des pratiques et des gestes, présentant des rituels – ancestraux ou inédits, telle la plasticienne franco-gabonaise Myriam Mihindou qui réalise des performances pensées comme des rituels à l'ambition curative, des transes reliant l'être au monde qui l'entoure, dans une tentative de réparation et de transcendance de la blessure (*No Sensibility*, 2013). Ces artistes puisent ainsi dans les imaginaires des mondes invisibles, des métamorphoses, du mystère, de la mystique et de la magie.

Au-delà du folklore et de l'ésotérisme, la sorcière est pour ces plasticiennes l'incarnation d'une émancipation féminine au potentiel subversif ; le symbole d'une femme forte et puissante. La sorcière personnifie la révolte, s'élevant contre les accusations d'irrationalité, les discours de haine, la violence physique, autant de situations auxquelles les femmes font actuellement face, à l'instar de leurs prédécesseuses pourchassées dans une Europe marquée par le flamboiement sinistre des bûchers à l'aube de la Renaissance. En effet, selon nombres de théoriciennes, écrivaines et historiennes, telles que Françoise d'Eaubonne,<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Federici,<sup>4</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich,<sup>5</sup> la qualification de sorcière renvoyait généralement à « toute tête féminine qui dépassait »<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Camille Ducellier, *Sorcières, mes sœurs*, <https://www.camilleducellier.com/portfolio/sorcières-mes-soeurs-dvd/>

<sup>2</sup> Des images sont visibles ici : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aUd-e\\_nozc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aUd-e_nozc)

<sup>3</sup> Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le sexocide des sorcières* (Paris : L'Esprit frappeur, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Sylvia Federici, *Caliban et la sorcière. Femmes, corps et accumulation primitive*, trad. collectif Senonevero (Paris : Éditions Entremondes, [2004] 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich et Deirdre English, *Sorcières, sages-femmes & infirmières. Une histoire des femmes soignantes*, trad. L. Lame (Paris : Camourakis, [1973] 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Mona Cholet, *Sorcières. La puissance invaincue des femmes* (Paris : Éditions La Découverte, 2018), 17.

et, ainsi, dérangeait. La journaliste Mona Chollet, dans l'ouvrage *Sorcières. La puissance invaincue des femmes*, précise que « dans une logique familière aux femmes de toutes les époques, chaque comportement et son contraire [peut] se retourner contre vous ».<sup>7</sup> Du côté des artistes, Camille Ducellier écrit quant à elle en 2011 dans son introduction au *Manifeste du féminisme divinatoire* que « toute personne ayant l'intime conviction de s'écarter, d'une manière ou d'une autre, de la "bonne femme contemporaine", descendante directe de la prénommée Ève, est invitée à se reconnaître disciple de Lilith ».<sup>8</sup> C'est en substance ce que proclamaient cinquante ans plus tôt les membres de la W.I.T.C.H. (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) dans leur manifeste : « Inutile d'adhérer à WITCH. Si vous êtes une femme et que vous osez regarder à l'intérieur de vous-même, alors vous êtes une sorcière ».<sup>9</sup>

### Femmes, sorcières et politique

Depuis la naissance des mouvements féministes aux États-Unis à la fin des années 1960, des femmes se sont manifestées comme productrices de rituels magiques. En 1968 à Halloween, le groupe W.I.T.C.H. fait sa première apparition dans les rues de Wall Street, maudissant avec force et fracas les rois de la finance new-yorkaise. Au-delà du nom choisi, ces femmes endossent les attributs vestimentaires et les accessoires culturellement associés aux sorcières : toutes de noir vêtues, encapées, défilant la tête coiffée de chapeaux, brandissant leurs balais. Et qui plus est, les membres de la WITCH revendiquent l'usage de rituels à vocation politique. Plus précisément ici, celui-ci consistait en un sortilège à l'adresse du centre financier prenant la forme d'un chant sacré berbère. Robin Morgan, l'une des *witches*, raconte : « Les yeux fermés, la tête baissée, les femmes entonnèrent un chant berbère (sacré aux yeux des sorcières algériennes) et proclamèrent l'effondrement

<sup>7</sup> Chollet, *Sorcières. La puissance invaincue des femmes*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Camille Ducellier, *Le guide du féminisme divinatoire* (Paris : Cambourakis, [2011] 2018), 22.

<sup>9</sup> Manifeste de WITCH NY, 1968. « There is no joining W.I.T.C.H. If you are a woman and dare to look within yourself, you are a witch. » Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and Other Pagans in America* (London : Penguin [1979] 2006), 208.

imminent de diverses actions. Quelques heures plus tard, le marché clôtura en baisse d'un point et demi, et le lendemain, il chuta de cinq points ».<sup>10</sup> Néanmoins, cette dernière n'hésite pas à avouer une méconnaissance de l'histoire des sorcières partagée avec ses acolytes : « À la Bourse, nous avons demandé une entrevue avec Satan, notre supérieur – un faux pas qui, avec le recul, me consterne : c'est l'Église catholique qui a inventé Satan et qui a ensuite accusé les sorcières d'être satanistes. Nous avons mordu à l'hameçon patriarcal sur ce sujet, et sur tant d'autres. Nous étions complètement stupides. Mais nous étions stupides avec du style ».<sup>11</sup> Par ailleurs, notons que si certaines des membres de WITCH ont cherché à étudier plus sérieusement la sorcellerie, pour la plupart d'entre elles, celle-ci ne relève pas d'une pratique avérée, mais bien d'un emprunt essentiellement iconographique. La forme de cette première apparition publique s'inspire explicitement du vocabulaire formel et gestuel de la manifestation politique : des femmes défilent dans la rue en procession, brandissant des slogans évocateurs. En manifestant dans le cœur financier des États-Unis, elles affirment un engagement anticapitaliste, associé à un engagement anti-patriarcal. En effet, associée aux revendications à destination des acteurs du marché boursier, les WITCH mènent une campagne antisexiste, visant, entre autres, les concours de beauté, le Playboy Club et l'institution du mariage. Les manifestantes cumulent ainsi une double revendication politique : anticapitaliste et anti-patriarcale. Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas un hasard puisque certaines des membres étaient parallèlement reconnues comme activistes féministes, telle Heather Booth. Cette dernière était en effet engagée dans les mouvements des droits civiques (*Civil Right Movements*), le mouvement de libération des femmes à Chicago (*Chicago Women's Liberation Union*), et fut à l'origine du *Jane Collective*, une organisation clandestine de conseil et d'accompagnement à l'avortement. WITCH propose ainsi de combiner l'iconographie de la sorcière avec les revendications – radicales à l'époque – du mouvement de libération des femmes dans une visée à la fois divertissante, déroutante et politique.

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<sup>10</sup> Robin Morgan, « WITCH hexes Wall Street, » in *Going Too Far. The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York : Random House/Vintage Paperbacks, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> Robin Morgan, « Three articles on WITCH, » in *Going Too Far. The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York : Random House/Vintage Paperbacks, 1977).

Dans cette perspective anti-patriarcale et anticapitaliste, comme, un peu plus tard, dans celle écoféministe menée par la figure incontournable de Starhawk, des femmes engagées s'attachent à penser et mettre en œuvre des rituels susceptibles de produire une puissance collective en réaction à des situations qu'elles considèrent comme inacceptables (menace nucléaire, patriarcat, capitalisme, etc.). Dans l'introduction de l'ouvrage *Reclaim. Recueil de textes éco-féministes*, Émilie Hache explique l'ancrage et la fabrication de cette pensée mêlant enjeux féministes et écologiques au cœur des mobilisations : « - à travers la redécouverte de l'histoire de la destruction croisée, au cours de la modernité, des femmes et de la nature ; à travers la reconnaissance de points de passage entre la peur d'anéantissement devant l'utilisation du nucléaire et la peur quotidienne des femmes d'être insultées, agressées, violées ; à travers encore la prise de conscience de l'importance de fabriquer de la confiance et de l'estime de soi pour espérer répondre à cette situation d'une manière sensible ». <sup>12</sup> Les manifestations écoféministes recourant au vocabulaire iconographique sorcier sont aussi nombreuses, notamment dans le contexte des luttes anti-nucléaires des années 1980 aux USA, dont la plus connue est sans doute la Women Pentagon Action. <sup>13</sup> Cette dernière est considérée comme l'une des premières actions manifestant une tentative d'articuler féminisme, politique écologique et politique de paix. Cette initiative d'un groupe de militantes féministes également impliquées dans le mouvement anti-nucléaire découlait à la fois d'un événement particulier : une défaillance technique ayant entraîné la fonte d'une partie d'un réacteur nucléaire en Pennsylvanie, mais aussi, plus largement, de l'accélération de l'armement du pays et de la multiplication des catastrophes écologiques à travers le monde. Durant cette action, deux mille femmes convergent vers le Pentagone, déguisées et armées de marionnettes. La procession se déroulait selon plusieurs étapes : le deuil, la colère, l'*empowerment* et le défi ; les femmes avançant en tambourinant, chantant et tressant des « rubans de vie ». Elles se regroupaient finalement pour la lecture d'une déclaration commune dont voici un extrait :

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<sup>12</sup> Émilie Hache, « Introduction. Reclaim Ecofeminism ! » in *Reclaim. Recueil de textes éco-féministes*, éd. Émilie Hache (Paris : Cambourakis, 2016), 15-16.

<sup>13</sup> Pour davantage d'informations sur cette action et son contexte d'émergence, le-a lecteur-trice peut se référer à l'article de Ynestra King, « Si je ne peux pas danser, je ne veux pas prendre part à votre révolution, » in *Reclaim. Recueil de textes éco-féministes*, éd. Émilie Hache (Paris : Cambourakis, 2016), 105-126.

Nous nous réunissons au Pentagone, le 16 novembre parce que nous avons peur pour nos vies. Peur pour la vie de cette planète, notre Terre, et pour la vie de nos enfants qui sont le futur de notre humanité [...] Nous voulons mettre un terme à la course aux armements. Plus de bombes. Plus d'effarantes inventions de mort. [...] Nous savons qu'il existe une manière aimante, sensée et saine de vivre et nous avons l'intention de vivre de cette manière dans nos quartiers et dans nos exploitations agricoles de ces États-Unis, et parmi nos sœurs et frères de tous les pays du monde.<sup>14</sup>

Dans sa préface à l'édition française de *Dreaming the Dark* de Starhawk, la philosophe belge Isabelle Stengers, à propos de la fête de Brigid organisée suite à l'élection de Reagan en 1981, parle du « premier rite collectif fabriqué délibérément pour faire converger politique et magie ».<sup>15</sup> Parler de magie ici ne renvoie évidemment pas à l'idée de l'« intervention d'un pouvoir mystérieux et fascinant, surnaturel », mais « oser dire “magie”, c'est célébrer l'événement en tant que tel, c'est-à-dire le surgissement d'un possible, la sensation qu'a été défait quelque chose qui “liait” la pensée et la vouait donc à l'impuissance. [...] Il n'y a aucune garantie ici [...], mais ce qu'on pourrait appeler une *mise en indétermination*, la création d'une inconnue qui fait bégayer les “nous savons bien”, qui ouvre les interstices par où se fait sentir la possibilité d'une autre histoire, même si cela reste une histoire improbable ».<sup>16</sup> Aussi, comme le soulignait Émilie Hache dans une intervention intitulée « Starhawk, le rituel et la politique », à l'occasion du cinquième Congrès Marx International à l'Université Paris-Sorbonne en 2007, associer l'action politique au rituel, considéré comme « un mouvement d'énergie organisé pour accomplir un but »,<sup>17</sup> permet d'envisager la politique comme une action susceptible de transformer les personnes qui y sont investies, et, davantage, le monde qui les entoure, une action politique qui « nous [change] profondément [...] parce que notre transformation est intégrée à la transformation de la réalité ».<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ynestra King « Si je ne peux pas danser, je ne veux pas prendre part à votre révolution, » 115.

<sup>15</sup> Isabelle Stengers « Postface. Un autre visage de l'Amérique ? » in Starhawk, *Rêver l'obscur. Femmes, magie et politique* (Paris : Cambourakis, 2015), 362.

<sup>16</sup> Stengers « Postface. Un autre visage de l'Amérique ? », 362-363.

<sup>17</sup> Starhawk, *Rêver l'obscur. Femmes, magie et politique*, 234.

<sup>18</sup> Starhawk, *Rêver l'obscur. Femmes, magie et politique*, 244.

## « Witch blocks » aujourd'hui

Dans les sociétés contemporaines, des activistes – associé-e-s ou non à des artistes – participent à la résurgence de la perspective militante du rituel. Aux États-Unis par exemple, des sorcières participent au mouvement *Black Lives Matter*, protestant contre l'épidémie de meurtres racistes perpétrés par la police dans bon nombre d'états. Aussi, depuis 2017, des sorcières et sorciers du monde entier jettent un sortilège destiné à envoûter le président Donald Trump, répétant le sort collectif à chaque lune descendante. En France également, sorcières et sorciers viennent grossir les rangs des manifestations (le Labofii – The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, le Stras – Syndicat du Travail Sexuel, les Witch Blocs, la Cellule d'Action Rituelle à la Z.A.D. de Notre Dame des Landes, etc.). À travers cette résurgence, l'imaginaire de la sorcière est plus que jamais ravivé, et nous assistons aujourd'hui à ce que certaines considèrent comme une deuxième vague WITCH.<sup>19</sup> En septembre 2017 en France, pendant le large mouvement de contestation des nouvelles réformes du code du travail<sup>20</sup>, le Witch Bloc Paname<sup>21</sup> fait son entrée en scène, au rythme des « Macron au chaudron ! », « Macron au bûcher ! », « Conservatisme, du balai ! »<sup>22</sup> À nouveau, des manifestantes grimées envahissent les rues. Outre le fait que la figure de la sorcière soit devenue un emblème féministe depuis la fin des années 1960, les membres du Witch Bloc Paname expliquent leur choix de cette réappropriation : « En tant qu'archétype, elle symbolise des siècles d'histoire patriarcale, puisqu'à travers les âges, les femmes qui étaient savantes, notamment en médecine naturelle, ou simplement indépendantes des hommes étaient qualifiées de "sorcières" et chassées, torturées, tuées. Nous réclamons donc ce titre pour montrer l'existence de nos luttes et notre détermination à les mener ».<sup>23</sup> Le

<sup>19</sup> Heather Booth, « Wicked W.I.T.C.H.:The 60s Feminist Protestors Who Hexed Patriarchy, » *Vice*, 2016, consulté le 23 novembre 2019, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/43gd8p/wicked-witch-60s-feminist-protestors-hexed-patriarchy](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/43gd8p/wicked-witch-60s-feminist-protestors-hexed-patriarchy)

<sup>20</sup> Cette réforme consistait entre autres en un affaiblissement du pouvoir des salariés, en une facilitation des conditions de licenciement, une augmentation des contributions sociales ainsi qu'une baisse de l'aide au logement.

<sup>21</sup> Expression argotique pour désigner Paris.

<sup>22</sup> Des images visibles ici : <https://manifesto-21.com/feminisme-sorcellerie-luttes-rencontre-witch-bloc-de-paris/>

<sup>23</sup> Witch Bloc Paname, « Féminisme, sorcellerie et luttes. Rencontre avec le witch bloc de Paris, » interview par Laure Bousat, *Manifesto XXI*, février 2018, <https://manifesto-21.com/feminisme-sorcellerie-luttes-rencontre-witch-bloc-de-paris>.



collectif se revendique comme groupe anonyme, féministe, radical, antiraciste et non-mixte. À l’instar de leurs précurseuses, nous retrouvons chez les parisiennes la reconquête des codes de l’oppression ainsi qu’un désir de concevoir la lutte contre toutes les formes de domination par le biais de l’action collective. À ces principes, elles ajoutent celui de l’intersectionnalité, associée à une réaction contre « les pratiques virilistes présentes dans les cortèges du black bloc » se traduisant par la création d’un cortège non-mixte, « un espace pour militer collectivement entre féministes radicales, et ce sans présence d’hommes cisgenres, non-concernés par les oppressions du patriarcat ».<sup>24</sup>

Comme les membres de la WITCH des années 1960, si de véritables praticiennes de sciences occultes se comptent dans les franges de ce « bloc »,<sup>25</sup> toutes ne se retrouvent pas dans l’exercice magique. Ces nouveaux *witch blocs* essaient aujourd’hui dans toute la France, et leurs revendications politiques épousent les thèmes d’actualité : droit à l’avortement, Procréation Médicalement Assistée, violences faites aux femmes, urgence climatique, entremêlant revendications féministes et écologistes. La recrudescence actuelle d’une lutte active contre les violences faites aux femmes s’est logiquement pris pour étendard la sorcière, laquelle est devenue depuis les relectures féministes de l’histoire médiévale,<sup>26</sup> une victime emblématique des violences faites aux femmes – violence physique, psychologique, sociale. Outre les traditionnels *dress code* noir et chapeaux pointus, ces manifestations publiques reprennent également des formes et des images issues des savoirs et pratiques sorciers. La principale d’entre elles repose sur la constitution d’un cercle magique, « apparai[ssant] comme un moyen intense de lutter contre une douleur, une peur, une injustice, un fantôme ».<sup>27</sup> Déjà en 1982 dans *Dreaming The Dark*, Starhawk explicitait le rôle et l’intérêt du cercle dans les rituels :

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<sup>24</sup> Witch Bloc Paname, « Féminisme, sorcellerie et luttes. Rencontre avec le witch bloc de Paris ».

<sup>25</sup> Dans une interview avec Céline du Chéné, la représentante du Witch Bloc Marseille déclare que, selon elle, « être sorcière signifie pratiquer la magie », et revendique ainsi « un affranchissement à l’égard de la société, des sciences et de la religion judéo-chrétienne ». Céline du Chéné, *Les sorcières. Une histoire de femmes* (Paris: France Culture, 2019), 161.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich et Deirdre English, *Sorcières, sages-femmes & infirmières. Une historE des femmes soignantes*.

<sup>27</sup> Julie Crenn, « White Blood, Blue Night : Les sorcières s’invitent au CAC La Traverse, » *Friction magazine*, consulté le 23 novembre 2019, <https://friction-magazine.fr/white-blood-blue-night-sorcieres-sinvitent-cac-traverse>

Les structures de l'immanence sont circulaires : clans, tribus, *convents*, collectifs, groupes de soutien, groupes d'affinités, groupes de prise de conscience sont des cercles. Dans un cercle, le visage de chaque personne peut être vu, la voix de chaque personne peut être entendue et appréciée. Tous les points du cercle sont équidistants de son centre ; c'est sa définition et sa fonction : distribuer l'énergie de manière égale.<sup>28</sup>

Ces femmes militantes conçoivent à destination de l'espace public des exemples de résistance créative inspirés de pratiques rituelles plus anciennes et de l'iconographie sorcière, et ce dans différentes perspectives de combat (féministe, écologiste, altermondialiste, etc.). En cela, ces initiatives rejoignent en partie les ambitions des partisans de l'art-activisme pour lesquels les actions menées doivent associer caractéristiques esthétiques et politiques. Esthétique, puisque celles-ci sont pensées dans une attention à la forme de la résistance, et politique, puisqu'il s'agit bien d'agir sur une réalité identifiée comme problématique. À travers l'action esthétique, il s'agit pour les art-activistes de donner envie d'agir, de rendre la lutte désirable, parce que plus libre et créative. En cela, les membres des *witch blocs* participent à transformer la politique en matière artistique, au sens où l'entend Isabelle Frémeaux, cofondatrice du Laboratoire d'Imagination Insurrectionnelle : « les actions politiques deviennent des actions poétiques, esthétiques, qui touchent le sensible, des questions de beauté, les mouvements sociaux en sont les matériaux ».<sup>29</sup>

### **Artistes et sorcières : de la possibilité de nouveaux récits**

Dans le champ des arts visuels, les années 1970 sont également marquées par un (ré-) investissement et un renouvellement des pratiques rituelles accompagnés d'une réappropriation de l'iconographie des sorcières. En 1977, tandis qu'est découvert un nouveau corps de victime des « Hillside Stranglers », un duo de serial killers ayant violé et tué dix femmes entre 1977 et 1979, les

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<sup>28</sup> Starhawk, *Rêver l'obscur. Femmes, magie et politique*, 182.

<sup>29</sup> Isabelle Frémeaux, « Art-activisme », France Culture, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/terre-terre/l-art-activisme>.



Pour la performance *In Mourning and in Rage*, dix femmes se sont réunies sur le parvis de la mairie de Los Angeles, revêtues de toges dissimulant leur visage. Une par une, chaque femme déclarant « Je suis ici pour les dix femmes qui ont été violées et étranglées entre le 18 octobre et le 19 novembre ». *In Mourning and in Rage* visait en outre à relier le cas singulier de ces féminicides californiens à une image plus large de la violence à l'égard des femmes à l'échelle nationale, tout en invitant celles-ci à une action collective transformatrice « IN MEMORY OF our sisters, we fight back ! ». <sup>30</sup>

L'intérêt pour l'imaginaire de la sorcellerie n'a pas disparu chez les artistes contemporaines, et revêt des formes diverses allant de la revendication spectaculaire à la convocation de dispositifs et d'images. Gangs of Witches, par exemple, se présente comme un collectif d'artistes (art gang) « féministe, intersectionnel, écologiste », réunissant arts plastiques, musique et arts vivants, et dont le fait d'armes le plus représentatif est le festival « Patriarchy is burning », qui s'est tenu en juin 2019 dans le musée d'art contemporain du Palais de Tokyo à Paris. Accompagné d'un livre et d'un album éponymes, le festival se présentait comme suit : « Gang Of Witches réunit une quinzaine d'artistes, peintres, sculpteur.rice.s, écrivain.e.s, photographes, vidéastes, musicien.ne.s, danseur.se.s et performeur.se.s, et s'appête à envoyer le patriarcat au bûcher ». <sup>31</sup> Les membres du Gang expliquent leur choix de la figure de la sorcière, renvoyant explicitement à la WITCH des années 1960 : « L'image de la sorcière, savante, indépendante et puissante, souvent crainte, parfois moquée, toujours auréolée de mystère et maîtresse de son identité, est un marqueur de la place des femmes dans la société et des enjeux de chaque époque. Elle est, depuis les années 1960, une icône féministe, écologiste, anticapitaliste, et le symbole idéal pour le gang ». <sup>32</sup> Au premier

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<sup>30</sup> Malheureusement, l'action des artistes n'a pas échappé à une interprétation médiatique erronée, des journalistes les qualifiant de « femmes terrorisées », dont « les silhouettes voilées de noir rappellent le rituel angoissant du Ku-Klux-Klan ». Cf. Figures 1 et 2. Suzanne Lacy et Leslie Labowitz, *In Mourning and in Rage*, 1977. Photographies prises par l'auteure à l'occasion de l'exposition *Feminisms !*, Centre de Cultura Contemporania de Barcelona, juillet 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Gang of witches, « Patriarchy is burning » consulté le 13 octobre 2019, <https://www.gangofwitches.com/what-we-do/patriarchy-is-burning/>

<sup>32</sup> Gang of witches, « Who we are », consulté le 13 octobre 2019, <https://www.gangofwitches.com/who-we-are/>

regard, la convocation de la sorcière semble ici gouverner des choix stylistiques, tant en matière de communication visuelle que d'apparence vestimentaire.<sup>33</sup> Néanmoins, au-delà de la simple apparence des performeur·e·s et autres artistes présents, la sémiotique de l'événement fait aussi la part belle à son imaginaire, les thématiques des œuvres abordent par exemple l'entrée du monde dans un nouvel âge sombre, lequel renverrait à celui du *sexocide* des sorcières (Mina Mond, *Les nouveaux Cavaliers de l'Apocalypse*), le bûcher (Aron Demetz Burning, *Burning Man*), le rapport à la terre mère, convoquant ainsi les perspectives écoféministes (Marcin Nagraba, *Dear Mother-The moon*).<sup>34</sup> Si c'est bien l'art qui préside à l'action du gang, ses membres revendiquent aussi un engagement, « au service d'une légitime soif de justice », et précisent que les « œuvres font écho aux foyers de résistance qui s'organisent contre la fascisation du monde »,<sup>35</sup> invitant ainsi à la révolte. Aussi, le gang revendique une approche intersectionnelle de la lutte, en abordant « les thèmes des violences faites aux femmes, de la masculinité libérée des injonctions patriarcales, et interroge les codes du genre pour une prise de conscience globale vers plus d'égalité et de diversité ».<sup>36</sup>

Si la démonstration d'une affiliation à la figure tutélaire de la sorcière confine parfois à un aspect communicationnel spectaculaire, voire, à un effet de mode, pour d'autres artistes, l'iconographie de la sorcellerie se manifeste davantage sous forme d'images mentales, d'une poétique de l'incantation. L'artiste pluridisciplinaire Myriam Mihindou présente régulièrement des performances, souvent troublantes pour leur public, qu'elle nomme « transperformances », n'hésitant pas à qualifier son travail d'artiste de chamanique. Ses pièces sont conçues comme des rituels à visée cathartique, des « moments de mise à l'épreuve de son corps pour transcender un trauma, une violence, une blessure ».<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gang of witches, « Patriarchy is burning ».

<sup>34</sup> Gang of witches, « Communiqué de presse, » consulté le 13 octobre 2019, [https://www.gangofwitches.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/05\\_19\\_communique\\_de\\_presse\\_GOW\\_PIB\\_HD\\_FR.pdf](https://www.gangofwitches.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/05_19_communique_de_presse_GOW_PIB_HD_FR.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Gang of witches, « Communiqué de presse ».

<sup>36</sup> Gang of witches, « Communiqué de presse ».

<sup>37</sup> Julie Crenn, « Myriam Mihindou », *Aware*, consulté le 20 novembre 2019, <https://awarewomenartists.com/artiste/myriam-mihindou/>



**Figure 3.** Myriam Mihindou, *Galop*, 2019.<sup>38</sup>

En février 2019, dans le contexte d'une exposition consacrée à Damien Deroubaix, l'artiste présente au Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain de Saint Étienne la performance *Galop*, accompagnée à la voix par Mariette Auvray. Dans cette pièce qui, selon son auteure, parle d'« énergies, d'indocilité, d'oracle, de mythe »,<sup>39</sup> et de réparation d'un traumatisme féminin, le travail de la performeuse consiste ici à incorporer le chant pour animer son corps de femme, lequel devient progressivement celui d'un équidé, ainsi qu'à « puiser une énergie mystique mais profonde de manière à ce que l'oracle puisse s'annoncer ». <sup>40</sup> Dans une interview accordée à la revue *Mouvements*, Myriam

<sup>38</sup> Capture d'écran, reportage en ligne : <https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/085905-006-A/myriam-mihindou/>

<sup>39</sup> Myriam Mihindou, *L'Atelier A*, Arte TV, consulté le 20 novembre 2019, <https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/085905-006-A/myriam-mihindou/>

<sup>40</sup> Myriam Mihindou, *L'Atelier A*, Arte TV.

Mihindou explique qu' « [elle] tien[t] à produire des œuvres qui mènent à des perspectives intérieures pour entrer en connexion avec les espaces des vivants et des morts. [Elle] rêve *littéralement* ». <sup>41</sup> L'artiste cherche ainsi dans ses performances à produire des œuvres méditatives, des trances susceptibles d'ouvrir à l'écoute de soi-même et du monde qui nous entoure. Néanmoins, ces sorties corporelles ne relèvent pas ici d'une finalité, mais, davantage, elles visent à permettre l'incarnation des maux et des blessures, tels que l'oppression, la violence, les luttes de pouvoir, que l'artiste se donne pour ambition d'apaiser. En se plaçant ainsi en posture de celle qui est susceptible de réparer les mauvais sorts, nous suggérons que la pratique de Myriam Mihindou pourrait se penser à travers le prisme d'une pensée du *care*. Dans son ouvrage *Moral Boundaries : A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, la philosophe canadienne Joan Tronto définit ainsi le *care* :

En règle générale, on peut dire que le *care* est une activité propre à notre espèce qui regroupe toutes les actions destinées à entretenir, réparer et faire perdurer notre « monde » afin d'y vivre dans les meilleures conditions possibles. Ce monde comprend notre corps, notre soi et notre environnement, trois éléments que nous tentons d'entremêler en une toile complexe et vitale. <sup>42</sup>

Nous suggérons par conséquent ici que certains rituels sorciers s'apparentent à des rituels de « réparation », et que les pratiques magiques articulent toujours corps physique, soi et Nature. Aussi, contrairement à la perspective prônée par la sorcellerie néopaïenne, le terme de sorcellerie employé par les féministes renvoie à une identification aux femmes persécutées, et est ainsi associé à un processus de guérison.

À l'occasion de *White Blood, Blue Night* (CAC La Traverse, 2017), Myriam Mihindou rejoint le groupe de « sorcières » convoquées par Julie Crenn,

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<sup>41</sup> Myriam Mihindou, interview par Sylvie Arnaud, revue *Mouvements*, 3 avril 2018, en ligne : <http://www.mouvement.net/teteatete/entretiens/myriam-mihindou>

<sup>42</sup> Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries : A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York : Routledge, 1993), 103.

commissaire de l'exposition. Si les sorcières furent et sont toujours exclues de la société, en marge, c'est avant tout à travers leur potentiel à remettre en cause l'ordre établi. Selon Julie Crenn, « depuis l'Antiquité, les sorcier-e-s sont littéralement des "diseur-se-s de sorts". Leur existence et leur représentation cristallisent une peur collective intrinsèquement liée à celle d'une perte de pouvoir, à la possibilité d'une déstabilisation du groupe dominant ». <sup>43</sup> Chez Myriam Mihindou, le « souci des autres » est intrinsèquement lié à une dimension politique dans la mesure où l'artiste construit des espaces de résilience qui sont tout autant des espaces de résistance, vis-à-vis des formes d'oppression et des violences subies par les femmes et les personnes racisées.

Nous poursuivons ici par un second exemple de pratique artistique contemporaine que nous avons eu l'occasion d'accueillir à la Galerie 0.15//Essais Dynamiques – Espace d'art et de création de l'Université de Lorraine, sur le site de l'île du Saulcy à Metz. En novembre 2018, nous y présentions le travail de Tatiana Karl Pez, artiste protéiforme – performeuse, poétesse, sculptrice, chanteuse, vidéaste, etc. Dans le cadre du programme curatorial R.A.A.C. (Retour de l'Affect dans l'Art Contemporain), elle proposait une exposition nommée *Tu brûles. Paradigma > Pleistocen > Paradismised*, inaugurée par la performance *Danse de la main négative*. La performance se déroulait dans un espace plongé dans la pénombre. Pour nous spectateurs, il semblait que nous y pénétrions après-coup, plausiblement à la suite d'une catastrophe naturelle. Incendie ? Sécheresse ? Passage d'un être humain ? Non-humain ? De ce temps pré-apocalyptique, un « alter » nous adressait un message, constitué de sons, de gestes, d'images et d'émotions dont l'artiste se faisait la médiatrice. Cette singulière correspondance nous était transmise au prisme d'un habile et poétique jeu de réflexion de lumières naturelles et artificielles, lequel esquissait les contours d'une scène imaginaire, telle le souvenir d'un rituel immémorial, d'une nuit lointaine.

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<sup>43</sup> Julie Crenn « White Blood, Blue Night, » *Friction Magazine*.





**Figure 4.** Tatiana Karl Pez, *Danse de la main négative*, 2019. (Performance)

Le titre de l'exposition renvoyait explicitement au Pléistocène, première époque géologique du Quaternaire marquée par d'intenses périodes de glaciation de la Terre. Actuellement, le permafrost ne cesse de se réduire, dévoilant minéraux, fossiles, plantes et corps autrefois enfouis. À l'image de la situation géologique contemporaine, dans l'installation, avec le dégel, les fleurs (re-)surgissaient. Le travail de Tatiana Karl Pez relève d'une attention précise et incarnée à la nature, nourrie par une connaissance des plantes et de la terre, laquelle participe à une remise en cause des différentes formes d'exploitation du vivant ainsi que des ressources naturelles. Au cours de la performance, l'artiste devenait maîtresse de cérémonie, ses sabots en bois claquaient sur le sol et son chant s'élevait dans le crépuscule ; un chant

faisant écho tant aux ritournelles médiévales qu'aux mélodies mystérieuses fredonnées par nos grand-mères. Ici, le rituel tribal célébrait le surgissement d'un possible. L'installation de Tatiana Karl Pez, sans éléments factuels pour concevoir notre « Paradis perdu » (*Paradismised*), nous invitait à ressentir la possibilité d'une autre histoire pour notre planète, à nous souvenir d'un temps oublié, ou, à défaut, à l'imaginer. Dans un geste collectif de résistance, Tatiana Karl Pez nous enjoignait à venir fleurir les terres brûlées.

Si les savoirs et les pratiques sorciers induisent des pouvoirs tels que celui de guérir (Myriam Mihindou) ou de deviner (Tatiana Karl Pez), les gestes et rituels mis en place par ces deux artistes, à travers une multiplicité d'énergies que leurs performances propagent, dessinent des postures de résistance traversant à la fois les perspectives féministes, écologiques que curatives. En racontant de nouvelles histoires et en libérant les imaginaires, les artistes convoquées ouvrent des possibilités de déstabilisation des groupes et des modèles discursifs dominants, en proposant des récits potentiels pensés comme outils d'émancipation. En cela, elles se révèlent « diseuses de sorts », participant à l'élaboration d'un imaginaire qui se dresse contre les diverses formes de domination ou de violence, la magie devenant alors un instrument créatif de lutte. Pour conclure, nous retiendrons ici les mots écrits en 1982 par Starhawk :

La magie a souvent été pensée comme l'art de faire devenir vrais les rêves : l'art de réaliser des visions. Mais avant de rendre réelle une vision, *nous devons la voir*. Nous devons donc avoir de nouvelles images à l'esprit, nous aventurer dans un paysage transformé, raconter de nouvelles histoires.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Starhawk, *Rêver l'obscur*, 129.

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## « *Les sorcières de Smyrne* » sur la scène contemporaine

KONSTANTZA GEORGAKAKI\*

**Abstract:** “*The witches of Smyrna*” on the contemporary stage. The novel *The Witches of Smyrna* by Mara Meimaridi (2001) is adapted for the stage and directed by Stamatis Fassoulis in 2018. The play transports spectators back to Smyrna, its clubs and celebrated *fin-de-siècle* cafés, for a story of magic, spells and cosmetics. The historical context remembers to the audience the lost homelands. Magical knowledge and practice were not widely accepted among individuals and communities in Minor Asia. But Katina, a smart young woman with magical abilities, ignore the reactions and impose herself across Smyrna’s society. The Greek witch at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century is a woman next door, modern and independent, without Halloween’s witch hat or other accessories.

**Keywords:** witch, novel, adaptation, Minor Asia, Greek community.

Aphrodite, la fille de Zeus, au chant 14 de *l’Iliade*, intitulé « Dios apatè », détache de son sein « le ruban brodé, aux dessins variés, où résident tous les charmes »<sup>1</sup> (218-220) et le dépose dans les mains de Héré qui l’a demandé pour tromper son vieux époux et le détourner de venir en aide aux Troyens. À la chair satinée d’une huile parfumée, Héré réussit à le séduire et à réaliser ses plans. Le cycle épique comprend, souvent, des références aux déesses qui entraînent, avec leurs parfums voluptueux, les dieux d’Olympe

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<sup>1</sup> Homère, *Iliade*, Tome III (chants XIII-XVIII), Texte établi et traduit par Paul Mazon, Pierre Chantraine, Paul Collart, René Langumier (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 1961).

dans des jeux malicieux. Dans ce même esprit, des femmes douées de pouvoirs surnaturels comme Circé et Calypso, à l'aide de leurs filtres magiques, magnétisent les simples mortels. D'ailleurs, selon M. Martin « affirmer que le personnage de la magicienne, et plus encore celui de la sorcière, est né en Grèce, avant de prendre sa pleine dimension à Rome pourrait paraître, au premier abord excessif. C'est pourtant, bien là, en ces lieux [...] que pour la première fois les termes prennent un sens qui ne se démentira pas ».<sup>2</sup> Dès lors, le peuple grec semble être familiarisé avec les actions occultes de ces créations métaphysiques.

### Le roman

C'est un univers pareil, curieux et inexplicable, situé dans l'Asie Mineure au tournant du vingtième siècle, que déploie le roman de Mara Meïmaridi *Les sorcières de Smyrne*,<sup>3</sup> issu d'une histoire de son passé familial et édité en 2001 (Figure 1). L'écrivaine, fascinée par la figure de sa tante, la sorcière Katina, qui échappe à son entourage et devient le symbole de la révolte contre les exigences sociales, exprime une optique quasi féministe mais elle ne veut pas rappeler les héroïnes durassiennes et mettre l'accent sur l'esprit subversif d'une femme.<sup>4</sup> Elle s'intéresse surtout au sujet de l'appropriation de l'irrationnel dans un contexte urbain et une société bourgeoise qui conteste la culture populaire. Certes, Smyrne, ville asiatique et européenne, « multiethnique et multiconfessionnelle »<sup>5</sup> avec des populations

<sup>2</sup> Michaël Martin, *Sorcières et magiciennes dans le monde gréco-romain* (Paris : Le manuscrit, 2004), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Mara Meïmaridi, *Les sorcières de Smyrne* (Athènes : Kastaniotis, 2001). Le livre a été traduit en plusieurs langues. Entre autres éditions : *Izmir Büyücülere* (Istanbul : Literatür Yayıncılık, 2004), *Las brujas de Esmirna* (Cordoba : Editorial Berenice, 2008), *Die Hexen von Smyrna* (Berlin : Insel Verlag, 2011), *Le streghe di Smirne* (Roma : E/O, 2004), *De heksen van Smyrna* (Amsterdam : Wereldbibliotheek, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Rodgers, « Lectures de la sorcière, ensorcellement de l'écriture », in *Marguerite Duras : Lectures plurielles*, éd. Catherine Rodgers, Raynalle Udris (Amsterdam-Atlanta : Rodopi B.V., 1998), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis, *Une société hors de soi : identités et relations sociales à Smyrne au XVIIIe et XIXe siècles* (Paris : Peeters, 2005), 30.

musulmanes et des communautés chrétiennes, joint des coutumes et des croyances diverses : parmi d'autres, le mauvais œil, les amulettes, les herbes protectrices, le marc de café, les maléfices. Ce n'est donc pas bizarre que la sorcellerie fasse partie de la vie quotidienne. Katina, grâce à son don magique, s'impose dans la communauté smyrniote et réussit à dépasser la tyrannie de ses normes.

Il est prudent de vérifier le sens du mot « sorcière » car il varie d'une langue à l'autre. En grec moderne magicienne<sup>6</sup> et sorcière sont tout à fait synonymes. Tous les deux désignent les personnes qui sont en relation avec des puissances occultes, produisent des effets inexplicables, agissent par le lancement des sortilèges ou pratiquent une magie pour envoûter. La devineresse Pythie, l'enchanteresse Circé, la prophétesse Cassandre ou les « xotica » des contes des fées<sup>7</sup> suivent des voies croisées.



Figure 1. La couverture du roman.

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<sup>6</sup> En Grèce ancienne, « le terme “mageia” est rattachée à la parole trompeuse et aux pratiques illusionnistes des sophistes », Marcello Carastro, « La fabrique de la notion moderne de magie : pratiques du comparatisme chez Frazer, Hubert et Mauss », *Revista de História*, édition spéciale (2010), 235.

<sup>7</sup> Sabina Magliocco, « Witchcraft, healing and vernacular magic in Italy », in *Witchcraft continued. Popular magic in modern Europe*, ed. Owen Davies, Willem de Blécourt (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 168, 171. Le mot en grec est « xotica ». La définition « Exotica (“those from outside”) » est juste mais elle n'a aucun rapport avec le terme *xotica* des contes des fées.



## L'adaptation pour la télé

Quatre ans après sa parution, le roman a été adaptée pour une série télévisée en 30 épisodes de 45 minutes et diffusée pendant la période 2005-2006 sur une chaîne privée.<sup>8</sup> Les séries grecques qui présentent un monde surnaturel sont très rares et l'initiative du metteur en scène Kostas Koutsomitis s'avère très réussie. Le scénariste réécrit le texte dans le langage télévisuel et prend des libertés avec l'intrigue mais il reste fidèle à la succession du présent grec et du passé smyrniote. Ainsi, il permet au public d'accomplir le trajet entre le début du vingtième siècle en Turquie et sa fin en Grèce, suivant l'itinéraire et les aventures de Katina. Un incendie, à la scène finale, détruit tous les documents de la magie. Ainsi, son futur paraît incertain.

La musique de Dimitris Papadimitriou est très réussie, grâce au mixage des sons différents, censés répondre aux exigences du temps et des lieux. L'esthétique de la couverture du CD qui contient la bande originale de la série essaie de mettre en avant deux styles différents de la sorcellerie.<sup>9</sup> Au premier plan, la chanteuse Fotini Darra (Figure 2) qui rappelle les figures de Bernadette Peters jouant Circé dans la mini-série américaine *Odyssée* d'Andreï Kontchalovski et de Susan Sarandon dans *Les Sorcières d'Eastwick* de George Miller. De l'autre côté, se trouve l'actrice Maria Tsobanaki-Katina : c'est le portrait d'une femme aux cheveux noirs, vêtue en robe de soirée noire, un collier de perles au cou. Coiffée et habillée comme la femme de la couverture du roman, elle est une image-type facilement reconnaissable. Cette relation étroite entre les deux couvertures est, probablement, une stratégie de marketing pour assurer le succès d'un produit qui dérive d'un best-seller.

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<sup>8</sup> Tous les épisodes de la série sur <https://www.dailymotion.com/search/Μάγισσες%20της%20Σμύρνης> (page consultée le 15 décembre 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Le clip vidéo officiel garde la même esthétique, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7thFBpo9DhU> (page consultée le 15 décembre 2019).



Figure 2. La couverture du CD avec la bande originale de la série.

### L'adaptation pour la scène

Le roman, après son succès éditorial et télévisuel, a été adaptée pour la scène en 2018. Le titre qui « est déjà une clef interprétative »,<sup>10</sup> renvoie, malheureusement, au titre de la pièce d'Arthur Miller, *Les sorcières de Salem*, et il pourrait orienter le spectateur vers une chasse aux sorcières qui se passerait en Orient et dans une autre situation historique. Afin d'éviter tout malentendu et, surtout, pour ne pas saper l'accueil de la version scénique d'un livre à succès, l'adaptateur et metteur en scène Stamatis Fassoulis a ajouté le nom de l'auteure au titre de la pièce, *Les sorcières de Smyrne de Mara Meïmaridi*, sachant bien que « chaque élément d'un titre produit du sens et que chaque transformation a des conséquences ».<sup>11</sup> Cette démarche commerciale permet de conserver la valeur financière de l'œuvre, élément important pour un théâtre à grand public. Le même modèle, le rapport étroit entre le roman et le spectacle, s'applique à la publicité aussi. Le tableau connu de la couverture

<sup>10</sup> Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula. Le rôle du lecteur ou la coopération interprétative dans les textes narratifs* (Paris : Grasset, 1985), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Max Roy, « Du titre littéraire et de ses effets de lecture », *Protée* 36, no 3 (2008-2009), 51.

du roman, avec le portrait d'une femme élégante, laisse sa place à une photo de la protagoniste, qui peut être identifiée facilement avec la première, en raison de ses habits et coiffure.

L'adaptateur maintient l'intrigue du texte d'origine et l'ordre de ses chapitres, mais il reconstruit son récit théâtral en tableaux dans une atmosphère plus légère et drôle. Il ne voulait pas reconstituer l'atmosphère mélancolique et le climat triste et pessimiste des pièces de théâtre qui se déroulent à Smyrne en 1922 et se réfèrent à la destruction de la ville. Il mêle aussi des procédés cinématographiques : courtes séquences, flash-back, montage. En plus, il ne reproduit pas tout à fait les dialogues gréco-turcs car, sur scène, le glossaire du livre n'existe pas. La pièce, comme le roman, se construit dans l'alternance des plusieurs lieux : l'île d'Égine, sur laquelle débute et s'achève l'histoire vers la fin de la décennie de 1980, et Smyrne, avec les épisodes liés à la vie de Katina, à travers 35 années, de la fin du dix-neuvième au début du vingtième siècle. Parallèlement, on trouve sur scène des lieux emblématiques de Smyrne comme le Quai, le Sporting-Club, le Cercle de Smyrne, le Café de Paris.

Comme la frontière entre le textuel et le visuel est nette, la scénographie est aussi une composante importante de cette transposition. Athanassia Smaragdi, qui a signé le décor des *Sorcières*, explique qu'elle a conçu deux niveaux d'un dispositif scénique poétique, en associant Grèce et Smyrne dans un voyage où le public se transpose de la mer à la terre et aux quartiers de cette ville cosmopolite, qui est pleine de vie. La scène tournante permet de rapides changements d'espace et les variantes proposées ont aidé le jeu des acteurs et ont permis à la mémoire collective du public de créer ses propres images et de sentir une vibration nostalgique pour ces lieux perdus de l'Asie Mineure.

Roland Barthes, lisant Michelet, estime que *la Sorcière* est à la fois Histoire et Roman. Elle « fait apparaître une nouvelle découpe du réel, fonde ce que l'on pourrait appeler une ethnologie ou une mythologie Historique ». <sup>12</sup> L'adaptateur, influencé par cette problématique, a décidé de mettre sur les planches une fiction basée sur des événements réels et des pratiques

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<sup>12</sup> Roland Barthes, « La Sorcière » [1959], *Essais critiques* (Paris : Seuil, 1964), 116.

énigmatiques dans un contexte historique très connu. Il ne voulait pas théâtraliser l'histoire ni historiciser la scène. Le résultat scénique semble justifier son choix.



Figure 3. L'affiche.



Figure 4. La couverture du programme.

### Le spectacle<sup>13</sup>

Le spectateur, au lever du rideau, se transporte dans une maison de campagne, dans l'île d'Égine, le 14 septembre 1988, le jour de la Fête de la Croix. Une jeune fille, Maria, la narratrice dans la pièce, vient de trouver, dans un débarras, une malle avec des cahiers de sa tante Katina qu'elle devait lire 23 ans après sa mort, à la même date. Après la lecture d'un court passage, elle découvre dans ses pages les souvenirs de sa tante, des recettes culinaires, des instructions pour la fabrication des pommades à base d'extraits naturels et des potions aux qualités magiques qui réduisent la capacité d'action des

<sup>13</sup> Des photos du spectacle et le trailer dans [http://www.theatrikesskines.gr/portfolio\\_page/the-witches-of-smyrna/](http://www.theatrikesskines.gr/portfolio_page/the-witches-of-smyrna/) (page consultée le 15 décembre 2019).

hommes ou augmentent leur désir. Son errance dans l'univers mystérieux commence dès la première scène. Bien que « la distinction magie/religion est un des plus vieux topoï des sciences des religions, par où elle est bel et bien enracinée dans l'héritage de la civilisation occidentale, si ce n'est de la chasse aux sorcières », <sup>14</sup> sur les planches religion et sorcellerie coexistent en bonne entente sans le moindre conflit, sans une conception manichéenne du bien et du mal.

Une succession des scènes entre, d'une part, l'époque contemporaine en Grèce et Maria avec ses cahiers au premier plan et, d'autre part, les empreintes du passé de la famille de sa tante au début du vingtième siècle sur les côtes turques permet à la salle de se déplacer dans le temps. Un flash-back met en évidence l'audio-visualisation des souvenirs de Katina transmis par son propre discours. Elle, une petite fille de 9 ans, et sa mère Efthalia, épuisées de fatigue, entrent sur scène. Après la mort du père de famille, elles ont quitté Cappadoce, au centre de l'Anatolie, et arrivent, à pied et à charrette, à Smyrne, une cité prospère, carrefour des civilisations en 1887. Elles éprouvent, très vite, le besoin de changer leurs coutumes et leur mode de vie pour dépasser la distance sociale qui les sépare de la bourgeoisie. Efthalia, très compétente, à l'aide de sa cousine Foula, semble s'intégrer facilement aux normes du bon goût quand elle trouve un travail dans un magasin de cosmétique féminine et attire la clientèle grâce à sa manière de vendre les produits de beauté.

La connaissance d'une sorcière turque, Attarti, va changer définitivement la vie des deux femmes. Attarti est une figuration figée de la sorcière : femme voilée, âgée et célibataire, rejetée, donc, socialement du féminin, aux vêtements exagérés et bijoux étranges, une personnalité forte mais effrayante, méprisée par la société. D'ailleurs, il faut remarquer que plusieurs victimes de la chasse aux sorcières se trouvaient parmi les vieilles femmes, les veuves et les célibataires, instituant un stéréotype culturel persistant. Le personnage dramatique suit les clichés du modèle dominant : un regard mystérieux, intense, excessif, des habits en noir avec des bandes rouges, des colliers

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<sup>14</sup> Camille Tarot, *Le symbolique et le sacré. Théories de la religion* (Paris : Éditions La Découverte, 2008), 683.

curieux, un logement aux éléments orientaux, assez sombre, avec des symboles magiques. Une telle femme solitaire, dont le nom se retrouve au centre des rumeurs de meurtres d'enfants, d'activités diaboliques et de magie noire, doit rester marginale et ne pas s'immiscer dans la vie des autres.

La petite laideronne Katina, avec une curiosité irrésistible, s'approche de la maison et fait la connaissance de la sorcière. Assoiffée de savoir, elle ignore les rumeurs et apprend peu à peu les procédés magiques. Deux femmes donc, qui appartiennent à des groupes d'âge différents et à différentes ethnies, conçoivent de la même façon le monde invisible des esprits. L'intrigue adopte la démarche de plusieurs films modernes et séries télévisées, qui présentent, selon K. Beeler,<sup>15</sup> la sorcellerie sans limite d'âge et hors des frontières nationales. Il faut remarquer qu'il n'y a pas de distinction à opérer entre les notions de Magie et de Sorcellerie à la manière de Jean Palou. D'après lui « le Magicien est un initié aux grands mystères ; le Sorcier ne connaît que les petits mystères ».<sup>16</sup> Bien qu'Attarti, la magicienne turque, semble appartenir à la première catégorie, les smyrniotes utilisent les deux mots sans aucune différence.

Quand Katina devient majeure, elle ressemble à la figure archétypique de la jeune sorcière de la tradition culturelle occidentale. Pas loin du visage juvénile de *Circé offrant la coupe à Ulysse* de William Waterhouse (tandis que le livre décrit une femme plutôt laide), elle rappelle Médée de J. Michelet avec « un torrent de noirs, d'indomptables cheveux ».<sup>17</sup> Elle se présente vêtue en robe blanche, une couleur associée à la pureté, avec une ceinture, élément spécifique des sorcières. L'innocence fait contraste avec ses pratiques sombres et surtout avec le pot qu'elle tient à la main, où elle mélange ses philtres pour séduire les hommes et anéantir leur résistance.

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<sup>15</sup> Karin Beeler, *Seers, Witches and Psychics on Screen: An Analysis of Women Visionary Characters in Recent Television and Film* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2008), 180.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Palou, « Naissance de la Sorcellerie », in *La sorcellerie* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 6.

<sup>17</sup> Jules Michelet, *La sorcière* (Paris : E. Dentu, 1862), 149.

Pour les représentations de la sorcière dans la peinture voir, parmi d'autres : Ioan Pop-Curșeu, « Corps de sorcières, entre horreur et beauté. De la peinture au cinéma, avatars d'une tradition iconographique », *Studia UBB Dramatica*, LX, 1 (2015), 119-130.

En ce temps-là, Efthalia acquiert sa propre parfumerie, portant en exergue la phrase : « on ne met jamais sur le visage ce qu'on ne mange pas ». Son plan d'action est très réussi et gagne en popularité. Katina, très douée, essaie de remplacer sa laideur par son charme personnel et l'aide des crèmes et huiles magiques qu'elle prépare. Meïmaridi estime que « trois règles s'appliquent à la sorcellerie : vouloir, falloir, pouvoir. Si je désire ardemment quelque chose, je dois me sentir obligée de l'acquérir et mon projet devra être réalisable, c'est-à-dire si je veux devenir président des États-Unis, je ne peux pas le réussir puisque la loi présuppose d'être né là ».<sup>18</sup> La jeune fille désire s'intégrer à la vie sociale de Smyrne et ne cesse pas de travailler sur ce projet.

Katina ne veut pas reproduire le schéma de son enfance malheureuse et intègre la dimension érotique de la sorcière à ses choix conjugaux. Sans dot pour son futur époux, elle fait 4 mariages avec des hommes jeunes, beaux et riches à l'aide de ses huiles et pommades efficaces aux ingrédients variés, aux herbes et plantes qu'elle met sur elle avant la première rencontre. Après l'assassinat imprévu de son premier mari et contre la loi non écrite smyrniote, selon laquelle une veuve doit épouser un veuf, elle jette son dévolu sur le fils d'une famille de haut rang social. Elle réussit à le manipuler utilisant comme instruments les conseils d'Attarti et les crèmes de sa mère. Un facteur important aussi, c'est sa danse du ventre sensuelle, dans un lieu de divertissement. L'alliance de son tempérament érotique et de l'odeur sensuelle « magique » de son corps stimule le désir de son futur mari et influence sa décision de l'épouser. Le modèle homérique, divin, s'applique sur terre avec le même succès.

Cependant, les philtres ne peuvent pas lui apprendre les bonnes manières et les règles du savoir-vivre qui sont obligatoires pour s'intégrer aux cercles de la haute bourgeoisie de Smyrne, peu ouverte aux « étrangers ». La contribution d'Antoinette, la femme d'un fonctionnaire du consulat français, est déterminante et – en échange – Katina lui promet de guérir son fils de la schizophrénie, avec ses potions. La deuxième dimension de la sorcellerie est sa qualité pharmaceutique. L'ambassadrice, comme l'appelle Katina, dépasse le cadre du rationalisme, elle sait bien que son fils ne pourra pas être guéri mais elle se laisse entraîner par des pratiques indéfinies, obscures, et elle recourt à

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<sup>18</sup> Interview de Mara Meïmaridi [https://www.lifo.gr/articles/theater\\_articles/207086/i-mara-meimaridi-einai-to-akrivos-antitheto-toy-feminismoy-kai-tis-logotexnias](https://www.lifo.gr/articles/theater_articles/207086/i-mara-meimaridi-einai-to-akrivos-antitheto-toy-feminismoy-kai-tis-logotexnias) (page consultée le 12 décembre 2019).

l'art magique pour essayer quand même de le sauver. En revanche, la jeune femme, Katina, pour ne pas devenir le bouc émissaire de la société, construit son image systématiquement, abusant de son don.

Après la mort imprévue de son deuxième mari – une crise cardiaque quand il voit la relation sexuelle entre son frère et sa femme –, Katina est stigmatisée et sa sorcellerie ne bénéficie plus d'estime. Sa diabolisation ne l'empêche pas de continuer les affaires commerciales et de montrer son aspect féministe, contre les règles qui lui ont été socialement imposées. Dans sa manière d'agir, il y a une idée d'émancipation, ou plutôt une osmose entre la femme moderne qui ne reste pas chez elle, qui fait des affaires, et de la femme traditionnelle qui veut attirer son amoureux en utilisant ses sorts magiques. Son beau-frère devient son troisième mari. Ainsi reste-t-elle à la villa de la famille, malgré les commentaires mordants du cercle mondain de son époux. En même temps, Attarti la prévient de la catastrophe de la ville et Katina déménage à Athènes quelque mois avant les événements.

Un jour avant son départ, elle trouve sur son lit son troisième mari avec son amante. Katina, victime de son énorme certitude, n'utilise pas sa force magique comme moyen de nuire à autrui. Elle-même, désolée, n'est plus un personnage tout-puissant, et – ne croyant plus aux forces occultes – pour se venger de la trahison, les tue tous les deux avec une arme. L'assassinat coïncide avec la catastrophe et elle quitte la ville avant la découverte du crime. La scène finale revient à l'époque contemporaine et l'actrice qui jouait Maria a été remplacée par la comédienne qui jouait Katina. Le discours sorcier contemporain garde une dynamique qui court-circuite les époques : il arrive du passé et reste éternel.

### **Les sorcières de la pièce**

Remy Gallart, se référant à la série américaine *Ma sorcière bien-aimée*, estime qu'on retrouve là le thème classique des sorcières qui veulent s'intégrer dans le monde contemporain et se marier avec un être humain très beau et très élégant.<sup>19</sup> Katina, sorcière de premier type, selon Guy Bechtel, celle « du

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<sup>19</sup> Gallart, Rémy, « Postface », in *Ma femme est une sorcière* de Torne Smith (Dinan : Terre de Brume, 2005), 244.



simple maléfice, qui se passe du Diable ou n'a avec lui que des rapports lointains et impérieux, celle qui utilise des sorts, du sortilège des envoûtements, des incantations, des ligatures, des filtres », <sup>20</sup> a le même objectif à atteindre. Elle veut se marier avec un homme beau et riche pour s'associer à la communauté bourgeoise smyrniote. Elle le réussit avec ses mariages, fait deux enfants mais devient une femme fatale pour ses maris. Katina rappelle les deux premiers stades de la sorcière de J. Michelet : la petite fille mince et fragile avec une aptitude surnaturelle devient une femme sûre de sa connaissance métaphysique. Femme revendicatrice et surdouée, la sorcière arrive à dépasser les obstacles de sa classe sociale et reste un élément subversif de la société smyrniote de l'époque.

Efthalia, sa mère, se limite à la fabrication des pommades qui attirent les hommes avec leurs qualités magiques. Très active, malgré les difficultés de l'intégration dans une autre société, elle réussit à se débrouiller et à soutenir sa fille dans toutes ses décisions intimes. Toutes les deux sont des femmes sexuelles, fertiles et actives professionnellement, qui survivent dans un entourage presque hostile. Cependant, l'indomptable Attarti, vieille et sans enfants, reste un paria menaçant qui hante l'imaginaire de la classe bourgeoise. Les croyances fabuleuses sur les pratiques suspectes de la magie éloignent la grande majorité des membres de la bonne société de sa maison. Bien qu'elle soit pourchassée, elle ne perd pas sa sensibilité envers les personnes qui ont le même don qu'elle. Les sorcières de la pièce se limitent à prédire l'avenir, lever ou jeter des sorts et concocter des philtres pour séduire l'autre sexe mais elles ne se mêlent pas aux sabbats ni à la croyance en Satan.

## Conclusions

Les exigences communicatives de la scène ajoutent une autre grille de lecture, plus actuelle. Efthalia soulignant que « nous ne sommes pas de sorcières, nous sommes des femmes chassées », met l'accent sur l'image de l'altérité et sur la discrimination à l'égard de certaines communautés. L'adaptateur

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<sup>20</sup> Guy Bechtel, *La Sorcière et l'Occident. La destruction de la sorcellerie en Europe des origines aux grands bûchers* (Paris : Plon, [1997], 2000), 62.

voulait sensibiliser les spectateurs envers la diversité culturelle, linguistique et religieuse et favoriser le fondement d'un mode de cohabitation. Ces messages de défense des minorités jugées dangereuses et des réfugiés qui se trouvent sur leur territoire, bien qu'ils conduisent éventuellement à des représentations simplifiées, pourraient, à long terme, renforcer l'esprit de tolérance et de solidarité et mener à l'assimilation progressive de ces groupes.

Dans une société occidentale contemporaine les phénomènes irrationnels ne sont pas rares. Mona Cholet affirme qu'« un tournant notable s'est produit ces dernières années dans la façon dont les féministes françaises appréhendent la figure de la sorcière » et plusieurs groupes sociaux revendiquent le recours à la magie.<sup>21</sup> Le sujet, donc, d'une pièce qui traite ces phénomènes reste assez populaire et très convenable pour le grand public. Les sorcières ne sont plus une curiosité exotique ni une image presque folklorique. Elles sont les femmes d'à côté qui développent d'étranges capacités sans tenir des balais ou porter les chapeaux pointus des héroïnes de Disney ou d'Halloween. C'est le modèle que transposent sur scène *Les sorcières de Smyrne* de Mara Meïmaridi.

La pièce est une fiction suivant le fil du temps historique, qui croise des images de la sorcellerie avec des mémoires, des parfums et des saveurs de l'Asie Mineure. Ce n'est donc pas étrange que ce spectacle soit devenu très vite une réussite commerciale. D'après les bordereaux, 140.000 spectateurs l'ont applaudi et, selon l'éditeur, plusieurs d'entre eux sont revenus sur le livre pour avoir une vision plus détaillée de cet univers surnaturel.<sup>22</sup>

*Fiche du spectacle*

Création le 11 octobre 2018 : Théâtre Pallas

Mise en scène : Stamatis Fassoulis

Musique originale : Thodoris Oikonomou

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<sup>21</sup> Mona Chollet, *Sorcières. La puissance invaincue des femmes* (Paris : La Découverte, 2018), 28.

<sup>22</sup> Le petit magasin de l'écrivaine à Athènes avec des plantes et des pierres magiques, des amulettes et des parfums garde le même titre (<https://www.marameimaridi.gr/>, page consultée le 20 décembre 2019) et attire plusieurs milliers de clients.

Scénographie : Athanassia Smaragdi

Costumes : Denny Vachlioti

Chorégraphie : Dimitris Papazoglou

Lumières : Lefteris Pavlopoulos

Smaragda Karydi (Katina), Mirka Papaconstantinou (Attarti), Maria Kavogianni (Efthalia), Memos Begnis (Konstantinos Karamanos), Meletis Ilias (Seirios Karamanos), Nikoletta Vlavianou (Foula), Danai Barka (Maria)

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**CINEMA, TELEVISION,  
VISUAL ARTS**



*Screenwritten Spells:  
Portrayals of the Witch in Early Cinema*

**DELIA ENYEDI\***

**Abstract:** The reassessment of early films outside a teleological perspective on the evolution of cinema disclosed them as representing a form of late nineteenth century stage entertainment. Although defined by non-narrativity, catalogues of the era included a significant number of titles seemingly indicating literary adaptations. Exploring the screenwriting practices of early cinema reveal them as making only limited references to famous literary works known to the audiences, by re-enacting key moments or famous scenes. The paper selects early films revolving around witchcraft in order to discuss the intertextual narrative construction of the witch archetype within the context of this cinema of reference.

**Keywords:** early cinema, witch, witchcraft, screenwriting, cinema of reference, monstration, narration, adaptation.

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In relation to cinema as the sociocultural phenomenon that shaped the twentieth century, early cinema can rightfully be considered “a fairly long period of trial and error.”<sup>1</sup> Relentless efforts were put into perfecting various devices of recording and rendering images in motion, resulting in numerous technicians and artists claiming to have invented cinema. But as André Gaudreault asserted, what each of them developed was the needed technology before the cultural paradigm institutional cinema came into being. Thus, we should consider most of the views realized or signed by the Lumière brothers as belonging to the cultural series photography, while Edison’s filmed stage performances belonged to the cultural series vaudeville, to name only two among other forms of signification, all integrated into the cultural paradigm late nineteenth century stage entertainment.<sup>2</sup>

In consequence, understanding the status of narration in early films implies an evaluation of the role performed by the so-called cinematographer. Views that implied almost no involvement from his part other than the supervision of an optimal recording of images indicate a mode of capturing and restoring. Reduced interventions by means of developing cinematic devices and techniques implied that cinema started to put “its singular ability to tell a story to the test”<sup>3</sup> by means of monstration. To speak of narration becomes consistent only when identifying a coherent connection between filmed fragments, enabled by certain procedures, mainly editing.<sup>4</sup>

In film history, these three consecutive stages of development extended early cinema up to the outbreak of World War I, when film was integrated into war propaganda. But even more significantly, it was also about that time that narrative features such as *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915) contributed to the development of codified film aesthetics. A fixed timeframe is difficult to establish as, for example, Heather Greene listed twenty-eight early silent films constructed around the figure of the witch produced in Hollywood

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<sup>1</sup> André Gaudreault, “The Culture Broth and the Froth of Cultures,” in *A Companion to Early Cinema*, eds. André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hidalgo (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 16.

<sup>2</sup> André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction. From Kinematography to Cinema*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 64-65.

<sup>3</sup> André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 58.

<sup>4</sup> André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 52-58.

between 1908 and 1917. As an argument, Greene cited William K. Everson who had claimed that it was the year 1919 when the American filmmaking business transformed into a giant industry.<sup>5</sup> While equally valid, shifting reference points determine a working method favouring individual case studies as relevant in the quest to identify the delicate balance between the attraction, monstration and narration delineating early cinema.

### The Witch as Attractional Character

The three-paradigm model discussed above, that of capturing and restoring, that of monstration and that of narration, refine the dual model of the system of monstrative attraction and the subsequent system of narrative integration<sup>6</sup> proposed earlier by Tom Gunning. In this opposing terminology lies the understanding of the latter as a first stage in cinema's process of narrativization, while the former relied primarily on the inborn narrativity of the cinematic image. In other words, in the beginning the attractional elements of early films were comprised on a profilmic level, as the demonstration of the recording technology was sufficient in order to elicit amazement from the audience. Monstration signalled a conscious intervention on the part of the cinematographer on the profilmic, by the presence of constructed *mise-en-scène*, or on the filmographic, by applying the stop-camera technique or by the development of various framings and camera movements. But these instruments of cinematic composition did not yet assume the role of conducting the narrative. Instead, they underlined the attractional core of the films that could be identified on multiple levels, from attractional elements embedded into the visual composition to the choice of the subject and the subsequent themes it involved.

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<sup>5</sup> Heather Greene, *Bell, Book and Camera: A Critical History of Witches in American Film and Television* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2018), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Gunning, "Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 373.

Monstrative attractions dominated early cinema up until about 1908,<sup>7</sup> the same year when the Vitagraph production company promoted *The Witch*, directed by Van Dyke Brooke, as the first Hollywood film to contain a witch character or the theme of witchcraft. As this title is lost, a review published in *The New York Dramatic Mirror* reveals significant aspects regarding the synopsis treatment of its narrative. The plot was summarized as “young hero fights with the templar Brian du Bois Guilbert (sic!) to prove by trial of combat that Rebecca, the Jewess, is not a witch.”<sup>8</sup> The name of the characters together with the plot indicate Sir Walter Scott’s widely popular historical novel *Ivanhoe* as the literary source material. Set in twelfth century England, it follows the story of Sir Wilfred of Ivanhoe, a Saxon among a nobility overwhelmingly Norman, on the background of the clash between Christians and Jews. In the novel, the trial for witchcraft of Rebecca, daughter of money lender Isaac of York, takes the form of trial by combat at the secret request of the templar Brian de Bois-Guilbert. Despite wishing to defend her personally, the Grand Master orders him to fight against Rebecca’s champion, chosen to be Ivanhoe. Despite appearing to have advantage, Bois-Guilbert dies of natural causes during the combat.

The reference to the protagonist of the literary work simply as a “young hero” indicates a reconfiguring of Bois Guilbert and Rebecca ceasing to function in the unit of central characters of the novel and becoming protagonists of an autonomous scene extracted from it, re-enacted in the new medium of film. The story developing on screen seems to have consisted in a dynamic display of male physical force and combat strategy. Human movement completed by that of the horses gained the role of central attraction, in an indication of the dominance of monstration, a cinematic act of showing, supported by minimal narration. However, illustrating a dynamic confrontation between two knights in the form of an early film would have not needed a literary source of inspiration, except for the case in which additional references would have accentuated its attractional dimension.

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<sup>7</sup> André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 53.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Heather Greene, *Bell, Book and Camera*, 15.

To speak of film adaptations during the first decade of the twentieth century is an overstatement. Instead, placing early filmmaking among other alternatives of entertainment of the time reveal vaudeville as a model of content structuring with its “‘peak moment’ approach, excerpting a famous action from already well-known works.”<sup>9</sup> As a sample of this cinema of reference,<sup>10</sup> *The Witch* enhanced the atmosphere deriving from the Middle Ages unfolding on the Old Continent with the mystique of a divisive female figure. The inciting incident, the trial of witchcraft, had been built by Walter Scott on the innocence of the accused woman, as both contenders were convinced of it. Keeping the same names doesn’t necessarily support a similar stance of the two male characters as the short length of the film would have eliminated sub-plots from the novel. Regardless of its extent, the reference to a literary work in early cinema was supported by what Charles Musser defined as “audience foreknowledge.”<sup>11</sup> This concept captured the complicity between the filmmakers and the audiences in regard to the plot and characters of a certain widely known narrative. But as reality had demonstrated, the number of novels or plays familiar to most Americans was in fact limited. In the best case, the disparity between what the filmmaker assumed to be known and what the spectators actually knew was often resolved by the exhibitor in the form of hiring a lecturer narratively guiding the spectators as the projection unfolded. As Tom Gunning also noted “the film industry in 1908 wanted to make films that would recall the tradition of the bourgeois drama, but found this difficult without exterior aid.”<sup>12</sup>

The alternative option of simply leaving the public in confusion was rare and the prestige and financial resources of the Vitagraph production company ensured wide distribution of its films, so one can assume that *The Witch* benefited from the narrative support of accompanying lectures, all

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<sup>9</sup> Tom Gunning, “The Intertextuality of Early Cinema. A Prologue to *Fantômas*,” in *A Companion in Literature and Film*, eds. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 127-29.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Gunning, “The Intertextuality of Early Cinema,” 129.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Musser, “The Nickelodeon Era Begins: Establishing the Framework for Hollywood’s Mode of Representation,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 22-23 (1983): 7.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 92.

the more so as the practice was receiving renewed interest at the time of the film's premiere. Whether already known to the spectators or narrated by a lecturer, the fate of Rebecca revolved around her innocence for which at least her champion, if not both contenders as in the novel, was willing to risk his life. Set off as central element of the filmic narration from the title, the figure of the witch added depth to the attractional dominant of the film by triggering the preconception associated with witchcraft. The fear of the unknown, the temptation of the supernatural and ultimately the wrongful condemnation of women came together in a character empowered in its literary version. The synopsis of *The Witch* did not mention her marriage to the unnamed winner of the combat, on the model of the novel in which Ivanhoe strategically marries Saxon Rowena. Thus, the original literary subplot fitted a cinematic storyline comprising monstrative attractions to visually conduct the dynamic plot, on the basis of an inciting incident referencing the attractional collective imaginary related to the figure of the witch.

### **The Witch as Attractional Narrative Agent**

The European early cinema explorations of the witch date back to 1903 with George Méliès's short trick films *Beelzebub's Daughters*, *The Enchanted Well*, *The Witch's Revenge*, while *The Merry Frolics of Satan* and *The Witch* followed three years later. As technical aspects of film production such as the increasing length of the film stock supported more complex narratives, the presence of monstrative attractions was still being demonstrated by 1913 in titles such as *Christmas Eve/ The Night Before Christmas*. It would become the first film in a series of adaptations of Nikolai Gogol's short story *The Night of Christmas Eve*, one of the most appreciated writings belonging to the Russian writer. Set in a Ukrainian village, it tells the story of the blacksmith Vakula who tries to win the heart of Oksana by accomplishing her wish to own the Tsarina's shoes. The picaresque story is populated by a witch, a sorcerer and a demon causing mischief before contributing to a happy ending.

Praised to have been faithful to the letter, and even more importantly, to the spirit of the highly popular text, *Christmas Eve* was addressed primarily to Russian audiences. As the notion of film adaptation was undergoing a

process of defining due to lawsuits related to copyright issues of American film productions based on literary sources, this film was considered a visual illustration of Gogol's short story. The title card indicates Vladislav Starevich as art and camera director, as well as author of the script. Indeed, almost all narrative details were translated into images, from the characters and the plot, to specific supernatural scenes. The film opens with a devil and the witch Solokha flying on a broomstick before stealing the moon from the sky. The devil will later prove his supernatural ability to fly Vakula to the palace of Prince Potemkin in St. Petersburg and back to the village. These scenes of flights are emphasized by their duration, even though they appear static and rather unskillfully managed. They are overshadowed by that of the demon shrinking in size and hiding in Vakula's pocket, a visual effect obtained by stop motion animation. Subordinated to the film's system of narrative integration, the attractional role of such scenes was to support the genre of the film, constantly reminding the spectator of the fantasy coordinates in the story unfolding.

The chain reaction of strange events revolves around the secondary character of the witch, Solokha, integrated into the community of the village as a single woman, mother to Vakula. One intertitle reads "Solokha had no husband, but she had many visitors," and on the holy night of Christmas eve one of them was a devil. Her screen presence revolves around the promiscuous physical relation she develops with men. During the flight and in the intimacy of her household, she accepts and encourages an erotic exchange of gestures with the devil. Some inebriated Cossacks who can't find their way home stop by her house, ending up hidden in sacks so that none of them see the other one entering. Finally, she engages in a kiss with the one she can't further hide because of the arrival of his son in the house. In this way, she unintentionally facilitates Vakula's confrontation with the devil, leading to the resolution of her son's romantic tribulation.

As *Christmas Eve* faithfully develops on screen the same building of characters as in Gogol's short story, the characterization of the witch extracts elements from Slavic folklore dominated by the mother and witch figure of Baba Yaga. Etymological analyses reveal a wide and rich circulation of this figure in Central and Eastern European countries. Brian Cooper suggested

that she was originally “a personification of the Russian winter,”<sup>13</sup> a plausible explanation for Gogol’s choice of a winter religious celebration as background of the events which include a snowstorm started by the devil Solokha hosts. However, she departs from the grotesque appearance and menacing presence hidden deep in the forest that characterize this folk figure. Instead, she constantly exerts her seductive power to subordinate not only the male villagers, but also the devil, reflecting late nineteenth and early twentieth century Russian folklore that “underscored the sexual prowess and unnatural sexual propensities”<sup>14</sup> of witches. Starevich’s film portrays the witch by repetitive scenes depicting her as an object of desire. On the level of composition, the focus on her is obtained by placing her in front of the devil and the men hovering around her figure. Instead of representing the traditional role of passive receptor reserved to women, she embodies a sexual aggressor capable of luring and holding captive several men and a devil. Her open display of sexuality functions as an attractional element actively shaping the development of the narratively constructed screenplay.

### **Cinematic Witches from Oppression to Empowerment**

Various studies concerning the narratives associated with the female witch, whether in history in general or in film in particular, have corrected a significant misconception. Diane Purkiss argued for the witches to be considered outside patriarchal dominance as “women also invested heavily in the figure as a fantasy which allowed them to express and manage otherwise unspeakable fears and desires.”<sup>15</sup> Tanya Krzywinska further emphasized this dual perspective as studies in horror films have envisioned the witch

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Andreas Johns, *Baba Yaga: The Ambiguous Mother and Witch of the Russian Folktale* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Christine D. Worobec, “Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Pre-revolutionary Russian and Ukrainian Villages,” in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology*, volume 6: *Witchcraft in the Modern World*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York/ London: Routledge, 2001), 58.

<sup>15</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

“as a product of male fantasies about the otherness of women’s bodies” while “the cinematic witch is likely to appeal to a different set of fantasies specific to women.”<sup>16</sup> In the words of Heather Greene, “the witch archetype exists in two modes: one of oppression and one of empowerment,”<sup>17</sup> as also demonstrated by *The Witch* and *Christmas Eve*.

In the specific case of early cinema, this dual interpretation depended on several interconnected aspects. During the first two decades of motion pictures recording experiments and filmmaking, the screenwriting process was reduced to composing a synopsis which would be featured in catalogues, for the use of the exhibitor. The defined role of a screenwriter did not exist. In order to give meaning to what was otherwise a bulk of short recordings, exhibitors employed film lecturers who would either expand the received synopsis into a film commentary during its projection or would take the freedom to improvise in the sense of emphasizing the astonishing experience of viewing at the expense of narrative content. As the American system of film production established the norms of the screenwriting process, the role of the film lecturer shifted to that of an external agent in charge with controlling the conveyance of a coherent complex narrative. This task turned out to be all the more difficult in the case of the cinema of reference, as the spectators often found early films echoing literary works as incomprehensible. The later resilience of the system of monstrative attractions in the paradigm of narration might partially be explained by an active role assumed by attractions to deliver to the audiences instances of visual gratification carved in the overall narrative. It was the case of *Christmas Eve*, breaking the narrative plot with genre attractional scenes, such as the one of the devil playing with the burning moon he had stolen from the sky.

Both cinematic portrayals, that of Rebecca and that of Solokha, depended on an intertextual reading on the part of the spectator, who was expected to be familiarized with the source materials and to simultaneously grasp particular feminist narrative nuances in the two characters. For the spectators uninitiated in the literary works of Sir Walter Scott or Nikolai

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<sup>16</sup> Tanya Krzywinska, *A Skin for Dancing In: Possession, Witchcraft and Voodoo in Film* (Wiltshire, UK: Flicks Books, 2000), 122.

<sup>17</sup> Heather Greene, *Bell, Book and Camera*, 2.



Gogol, either of the two films would have brought to the screen a female figure already invested with certain features in tales and myths. The witches would have had to be powerful, dangerous, vengeful or deceitful. These attributes were contradicted by the wrongfully accused Rebecca and by the ludic Solokha. For the spectators even vaguely instructed with the referenced literary works, the two witches held the surprising ability of overthrowing gender prejudices as they influenced the destiny of the male characters from a position of power. Attraction and monstration completed the task of the lecturer in constructing two atypical witch characters, Rebecca as the socially rehabilitated innocent not marrying her defender and Solokha as the erotically reconverted positive force, within the cinema of reference or echoing it in the system of narrative integration.

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## *Mainstream Satanic Cinema in the Seventies: A Generational Crisis of Assimilation*

**DAVID MELBYE\***

**Abstract:** A particularly fertile period for satanic presence can be found in mainstream Hollywood during the early to mid 1970s. Encouraged by the success of *Rosemary's Baby*, major studios produced *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* series, not to mention a flurry of independent productions across the decade. Neither before nor since this decade has satanic content in cinema achieved such widespread popularity, and so this particular moment ought to warrant deeper consideration. In general, these narratives appealed to countercultural notions of conspiracy, especially with respect to authority figures and/or the government. But at an even more subconscious level, these satanic films spoke to a pervading fear, at this particular time, of relinquishing a former sense of control over one's destiny. This article explores and elucidates the cultural conditions attributable for the emergence and popular embrace of these films in this particularly modernist cultural moment.

**Keywords:** Satan, satanic, witchcraft, witches, Hollywood, conspiracy, counterculture, countercultural, modernist, modernism.

In 2004, when Kelly J. Wyman published her article "The Devil We Already Know: Medieval Representations of a Powerless Satan in Modern American Cinema," she declared a review of literature on her topic as "nearly impossible," due to "little scholarly investigation into the subject of Satan in film."<sup>1</sup> She considers two then-recent monographs on the topic, Nikolas

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly J. Wyman, "The Devil We Already Know: Medieval Representations of a Powerless Satan in Modern American Cinema," *Journal of Religion & Film* 8, no. 3, October (2004): 1.

Schreck's *The Satanic Screen: An Illustrated Guide to the Devil in Cinema*<sup>2</sup> and Charles P. Mitchell's *The Devil on Screen: Feature Films Worldwide, 1913 through 2000*.<sup>3</sup> Although the latter of these certainly behaves more as a fan-oriented reference guide, akin to Marc Scott Zicree's *The Twilight Zone Companion*<sup>4</sup>, her dismissal of the first book, at least, is hasty. According to Wyman, Schreck "does not attempt to make any connections between the films, nor does he discuss the philosophical or religious nature of the representations of Satan."<sup>5</sup> Such a claim is inaccurate. In fact, Schreck injects both reasonable insight and historical context into his attempted cultural trajectory of Satanic cinema from its inception among French silent films by Georges Méliès to its would-be culmination in Roman Polanski's 1999 film *The Ninth Gate*. For example, Schreck provides relevant examination of British occultist Aleister Crowley's infamy and how his legend is narrativized through so many male Satanic cult antagonists on screen through the decades. And Schreck notices important shifts in popular perceptions of Satan, for example, as "a cultured being who offered his adherents infinite knowledge" degenerating into "a one-dimensional cartoon representing adolescent nihilism."<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Schreck's colorful lineage of the "Satanic screen" is palpably biased against some of its most powerful exercises through his own dedication to the Luciferian "left hand path," a black magical tradition he admits is "almost entirely obscured beneath the detritus of popular notions of Satanism."<sup>7</sup> In other words, the question of however 'inauthentically' Satanism, per se, is depicted in these films may not be the most productive lens through which to evaluate them as a collective cultural phenomenon. Rather, as Schreck himself affirms, Satan has personified "whatever force was perceived by consensus consciousness as cosmic maleficence at the time."<sup>8</sup> That is, a more appropriate survey of

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<sup>2</sup> Nikolas Schreck, *The Satanic Screen: An Illustrated Guide to the Devil in Cinema* (Creation Books, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Charles P. Mitchell, *The Devil on Screen: Feature Films Worldwide, 1913 through 2000* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Marc Scott Zicree, *The Twilight Zone Companion*, 2nd Edition (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Kelly J. Wyman, "The Devil We Already Know," 2.

<sup>6</sup> Nikolas, Schreck, *The Satanic Screen*, 217.

<sup>7</sup> Nikolas, Schreck, *The Satanic Screen*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Nikolas, Schreck, *The Satanic Screen*, 6.

visual narrative invoking ‘Satan,’ ‘the devil,’ etc. as either a physical or metaphysical entity should refrain from questions of ideological authenticity, especially since such a designation has proven to be so chimerical in occidental culture.

Embarking from Schreck’s acceptable delineation of Satanic cultural trajectory in cinema, I am particularly interested in the so-called “consensus consciousness” of the 1970s, although I prefer not to deem any cultural perception of “maleficence” in this span of years as necessarily “cosmic.” Of course, unless one genuinely believes in the birth of Christ, decades, so designated, are arbitrary. Cultural events have, nevertheless, served to affirm a semblance of their integrity, and so we continue to subscribe to this pattern of historicization. Schreck, as well as more rigorously academic scholars publishing after him, have already reinforced the notion of ‘the Seventies’ as the apex of Satanic cinema, at least in terms of mainstream feature film production and including content produced even for television consumption. It might be more accurate to trace an equivalent period spanning from the release of *Rosemary’s Baby* in 1968 to that of *Halloween* in 1978, when the serial killer replaced Satanic forces to some extent (or they merged). But placing a definitive end to this ‘decade’ of films with any one particular film is certainly not as plausible as commencing it with *Rosemary’s Baby*, a film so obviously pivotal in establishing a demonic paradigm for subsequent releases. Rather, and this is one of my crucial purposes here, it may be more effective to consider narrative trends *beyond* the ‘Satanic’ context. I prefer to associate this categorical proliferation, along with its own range of subcategories, all (or mostly) within *modernist* tendencies of motion picture production serving more effectively to characterize ‘the 1970s’ as a cultural construct. Already since the dearth of academic attention Wyman noticed in 2004, Brad L. Duren has contextualized one of the major Hollywood Satanic entries, *The Omen* (1976), within “1970s America,” so characterized by “national identity crisis”<sup>9</sup> accumulating through major cultural upheavals like the Vietnam War and President Nixon’s Watergate scandal. While doing so facilitates a deeper understanding of this film, and

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<sup>9</sup> Brad L. Duren, “Reckoning the Number of the Beast: Premillennial Dispensationalism, *The Omen* and 1970s America,” in *Divine Horror*, eds. Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2017), 64.

Duren contributes more specifically in the religious context here, I believe it is critical to explore larger modernist trajectories from the 1960s and even extended into a larger postwar context of cinema culture beyond 'Satanic,' 'horror,' or other genre distinctions.

First, it is helpful to locate characteristically 'modernist' transformations in global cinema culture of the post-WWII era toward a re-evaluative and even pessimistic stance toward technologization, industrialization, corporatization, urbanization, and other manifestations of an overdeveloped, space-age society. Of course, cinematic harbingers of dystopian critique, as such, are easily located in German silent and eventually Expressionist cinema in pre- and post-WWI years, wherein legendary Faustian narratives explored in *The Student of Prague* (1913/26), *The Golem* (1915), and *Faust* (1926) correlate to and even anticipate the futuristic context of *Metropolis* (1926). This body of films collectively indicates a flawed and opportunistic human nature and the larger society implicitly emanating from empowered individuals. A 'contract with the devil,' wherever it may appear in these early films, is less a cautionary motif against black magic or occult metaphysical dealings, per se, than a handy and well-established allegorical device. That is, these films share a stake in social critique, mobilized by a larger cultural climate of concern and doubt, especially in the German aftermath of the First World War. Another aspect to these films' larger agenda, pronounced more readily through *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), is a symptomatic degree of psychological trauma, even to the degree of an entire society 'going insane.' In this film, the protagonist Francis (Friedrich Feher) recounts his experience with a malicious carnival showman Caligari (Werner Krauss) and his murderous sleepwalker Cesare (Conrad Veidt) deployed eventually to kill his friend Alan (Hans Heinrich von Twardowski) and make off with his love interest Jane (Lil Dagover). But such an account, affirmed through a maze of trapezoidal corridors, proves unreliable, since this character and his would-be fiancé turn out to be inmates of an asylum. This film's portrayal of an 'unreliable' society, wherein hidden, conspiratorial forces are at work against the common citizen should be understood as a key progenitor of the *paranoid* narrative mode in cinema. And when these conspiratorial forces are associated with occult practice, this is merely an aesthetic option among other options within this mode.

A metaphysical dimension is typically conferred upon these forces in the 'Satanic' case, although this approach is not at all essential to mobilizing the same critique suggested through paranoid films like *Caligari* wherein no such "cosmic" forces are at work. Regardless, these narratives portray sympathetic protagonists becoming victims of social forces beyond their control. And, accordingly, these characters' communities prove analogous to a collective mind disintegrating from within.



**Figure 1.** *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari's* use of angular settings to imply its subjective, unreliable narrative anticipates the inclusion of dream sequences in subsequent paranoid films.



If the concerns implied through German Expressionism, as an artistic movement, seem merely local to 'German' or 'European' sociopolitical circumstances at the time, scholars of Satanic cinema can and should consider the immediate aftermath of the next world war, for it is here that conspiratorial narratives really pick up momentum, and well beyond occult contexts. If a larger societal decadence can be perceived as emanating from empowered characters like Faust, Dr. Caligari, or Fredersen (Alfred Abel) in *Metropolis*, the 'next phase' of this dystopian critique can be understood as such individuals accumulating followers in order to reinforce and maintain this power over others. Considered in a vacuum, American films involving Satanic covens could be traced from *The Black Cat* (1934), with Boris Karloff presiding over an intended human sacrifice in a remote Hungarian mansion, to *The Seventh Victim* (1943), with an underworld cult absorbing new members into its Manhattan ranks, and eventually to *Rosemary's Baby*. Although women are victims in each of these films, they are nonetheless very different releases in terms of their cults' allegorical function. On the surface, the 1930s film appears to be commenting directly on the evils of the previous world war. And yet personifications of opposing 'Russian' and 'Austro-Hungarian' factions pit Karloff against Bela Lugosi, or essentially 'Frankenstein's monster' against 'Count Dracula,' with two American honeymooners (David Manners and Julie Bishop) caught in between. The Satanic cult, appearing only briefly in the dramatic climax, is merely an accessory to further demonize not only Karloff's character but the entire 'European theater' here. And so this film would moreover suggest an American *isolationist* theme within the immediate climate of Nazi Germany's increasing ominousness. According to the recent Hollywood horror-castle hits it references, although modernized through its incorporation of Art Deco architecture, *The Black Cat* admonishes American audiences to 'keep out' of Europe. (Only a few years later, *Casablanca* would express an opposite theme through the following character dialogue: "My dear Rick, when will you realize that in the world today, isolationism is no longer a practical policy?")



**Figure 2.** Although retaining Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi in sinister roles, *The Black Cat* replaces the gothic horror-castle with more contemporary Art Deco architecture.

Although it is straightforward enough to align Satanic ritual with the atrocities of violent international conflict in the earlier film, *The Seventh Victim* incorporates its own Satanic cult for less accessible implications. Somewhat vaguely, psychological trauma, in the character of the protagonist's missing sister (Jean Brooks), is associated with 'evil,' in the form of a secret society of devil-worshippers. However, the film becomes relatively obscure precisely through a contradiction of portraying these folks as committed to "non-violence," on the one hand, while dedicated to 'evil over good' on the other. Thus, it is never clarified just what 'evil' is in such a context, save, perhaps, for their absolute insistence on maintaining their secrecy to the point of murdering those who would compromise it. And the fact that they attract a suicidal woman into their fold is not enough to imply they should all be deemed 'mad' necessarily, but only 'misguided' somehow—and away from ostensibly Christian values. But even aligning this film with tendencies of contemporary American *noir*, that is, films pursuing crime narratives within nocturnal urban settings to reflect the trauma of returning GI's, is not as accessible here, since the suicidal 'victim' is atypically female. Recent considerations of this quirky film like to find a theme of repressed lesbianism,

which is certainly available in the hairdresser character's implied attraction to the female protagonist (Kim Hunter), as well as her compromising loyalty to the protagonist's sister, who the rest of the cult insists must die. What must otherwise be interpreted as mere kindness and goodwill on her part is totally incompatible with her Satanic cohorts' stated dedication to 'evil.' In a very classical Hollywood turn, the film also eventually couples the protagonist with an 'appropriate' mate—her sister's former husband (Hugh Beaumont). And so, indeed, it would seem the film's larger interest is in portraying a female form of social aberration, or, rather, various 'manifestations' of women struggling to comply with the standards of 1940s American society. Besides the protagonist, her sister, and the Satanists, another implied social aberration in this narrative is the male "poet" character (Erford Gage), who by overcoming his lapse in productivity saves himself from association with the other deviants. Even the Satanic sister's ultimate suicide is condoned in this film in order to reinforce its conformist agenda. Men must produce, and women must become their steadfast wives, even if it means forfeiting a higher education, as the protagonist does ultimately. And Christian values may serve moreover to frame this societal configuration. Such a theme does not really adhere to postwar modernist critique, of course, and so, really, a wider net must be cast in order to understand the proliferation of Satanic content in the 1970s.

As I have suggested, an available 'through-line' between these two films, if they are to be treated as harbingers of the Satanic cinema to come, is their shared implication of 'conspiratorial' evil, per se. Even if 'evil' remains sufficiently abstract to be infinitely adaptable across so many manifestations of popular fear in mainstream cinema, the notion here that 'evil' individuals may congregate followers can be understood as paradigmatic. But such a means to allegorize what amounts to any form of collective paranoia in a culture extends well beyond imagining occult societies. Rather than proceeding from *The Seventh Victim*, for example, to the 'next' available Hollywood entry incorporating a Satanic cult, I would correlate this film moreover to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and other Cold War alien invasion films. Its portrayal of a typical American community as 'infiltrated' by alien entities whose influence transforms citizens into a mindless conformity of zombies ostensibly explores 1950s America's rampant fear of communist ideology, especially as demonized by Senator McCarthy. But it is moreover the protagonist's

experience of everyday, law-abiding citizens steadily ganging up on him that can and should be correlated to past and concurrent films incorporating Satanic cults. In other words, 'Satanic' congregation is really only one of many imagined forms of societal malignancy that, if taken to nightmarish extremes, become paranoid narratives of helplessness and the inability to resist the social force of accumulated influence, no matter from where or from whom that influence may have spawned. It is worthwhile to point out, in this cultural moment, that the optimistic ending with the escaping protagonist (Kevin McCarthy) finally able to convince outside authorities to prevent further spread of the invasion was tacked on at the insistence of studio producers, who felt the original ending was too bleak for American audiences. Eventually, however, such endings would become characteristic of modernist cynicism and critique in film, as in its 1978 remake, wherein the protagonist (Donald Sutherland) is himself eventually absorbed by apathetic masses. In the 1960s, the rising tendency toward social critique was even turned against Cold War paranoia, for example, in *The Twilight Zone* television episode "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street" (1960), wherein suburban neighbors wax hostile toward each other in order to secure themselves from an impending alien attack never ultimately occurring. And, in certain cases, no premise of alien invasion was even necessary to target societal paranoia for its own sake, as in *The Chase* (1966), where an innocent man (Robert Redford) is persecuted and killed by a small town's unruly mob. By the time Hollywood cinema reaches the late 1960s, however, modernist critique of Cold War paranoia returned to the mode of paranoid narrative—coinciding with the rise of the American counterculture and its disillusion with the establishment of their parents' generation.

Beyond the sporadic harbingers of Satanic content in earlier decades, the 1960s should be understood as the most significant period of narrative influence from overseas, particularly in terms of British cinema and its own cultural legacy of occult folklore. But even the British emergence of these narratives in the Sixties should be understood more widely within postwar cultural fears of "maleficent" infiltration, from outside *and* within, such as in *Village of the Damned* (1960), wherein children possessed by strange powers begin appearing all over the globe. Among the Satanic cult entries, in particular, I notice a pattern of establishing a country/city dichotomy, wherein occult

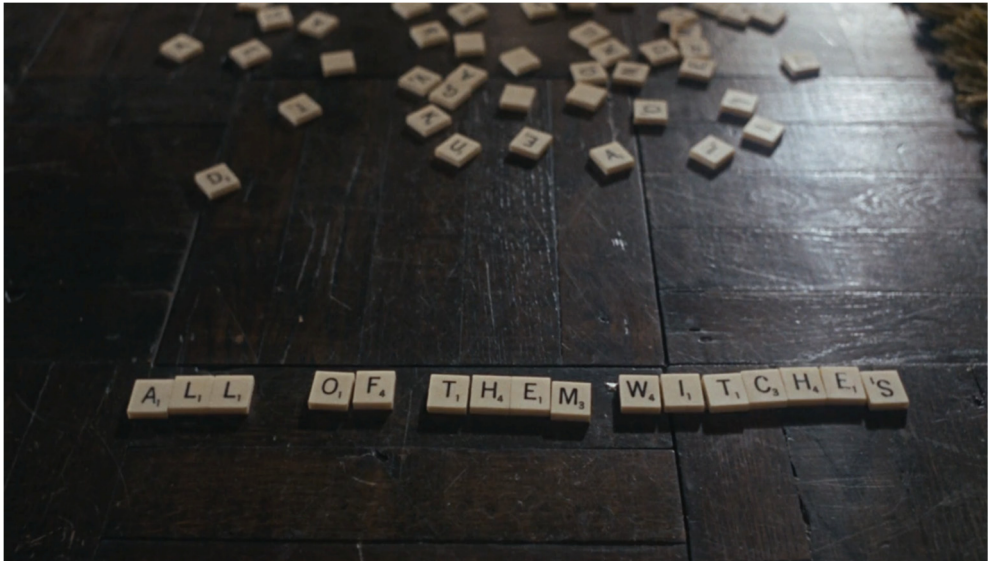
practices appear to be construed as a 'legacy' of pagan ritual among medieval countryfolk. But, in a modern context, these pre-Christian beliefs persist among the landed gentry or residual British aristocracy, who can afford to maintain inherited estates in provincial hamlets, far from middle-class urban centers like London. Here, there is at least an implicit 'gothic' association between domestic affluence and pagan/Satanic ritual—with the countryside as their mutually indigenous habitat. A characteristic cultural progression of these British (or British-American) films could include, for example: *Night of the Demon* (1957), *Night of the Eagle* (1962), *Devils of Darkness* (1965), *Eye of the Devil* (1966), *The Devil Rides Out* (1968), *Curse of the Crimson Altar* (1968), *Blood on Satan's Claws* (1971), *Psychomania* (1973), and reach its apex with *The Wicker Man* (1973), wherein a pagan Scottish lord (Christopher Lee) rules over an entire island of nubile fertility ritualists. More importantly, these films often attempt to establish a conspiratorial link between a pagan/Satanic gentry and the youth generation. In other words, these films employ the gothic trappings of classical Hollywood horror in order to exploit middle-class fears of a sexually charged, recalcitrant youth culture, which had already been the focus of Kitchen Sink films across the 1950s. At the same time, it is arguable the British youth culture could identify with these films *themselves*, even if their portrayed peers were being absorbed into Satanic cults. But it should be understood that these 'mod-horror' films, as such, would never have appeared without the success of two pivotal Hammer Studio films, *The Blood of Dracula* (1957) and *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1958), together reviving the gothic narrative paradigm (with actor Christopher Lee at the helm) for new generations of movie-goers, and especially in America. It is really not so different from understanding 1934's *The Black Cat* as an attempt to cash in on the marriage of Poe's legacy to an implicit 'Count Dracula vs. Frankenstein's monster' configuration. This time, the English (or neighboring French) countryside could be exoticized as the 'Transylvania' for new American audiences, while also appealing to British popular audiences younger and older alike. Britain's own heritage of a 'pagan' countryside, where old estates and stone circles coexist, made the gothic trappings of more remote contexts in the previous century more immediate and palpable, akin to *The Black Cat's* Art Deco 'castle' or *The Seventh Victim's* Satanic society in New York.



**Figure 3.** The implied view from a window inside the Lord of Summerisle’s grand manor in *The Wicker Man*, one of many films exploiting Britain’s pagan heritage within a paranoid narrative.

In terms of anticipating *Rosemary’s Baby* specifically, one should not fail to notice the British MGM film *Eye of the Devil*, appearing only two years previously and overlooked in America. It isn’t as relevant to prove director Roman Polanski watched this film in preparation for adapting Ira Levin’s novel for the screen. However, its producer Martin Ransohoff also produced Polanski’s next film *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967). And on the set of this film, he met his future wife Sharon Tate, who had just had a prominent role in the previous film. Similar to the 1965 film *Devils of Darkness*, *Eye of the Devil* actually roots its occult conspiracy in the French countryside, where gothic chateaux are more readily to be found. This film’s chateau, with its many hidden corridors, becomes the gothic Dakota building in the Upper Westside of Manhattan, straddling Central Park, as the ‘epicenter’ of Satanic conspiracy in *Rosemary’s Baby*. Such a transference

also removes the traditional horror castle from the countryside and *urbanizes* it, closer to *The Seventh Victim*, at least in this respect, although subsequent American Satanic entries did not necessarily follow suit here. The narrative nevertheless concerns a Parisian woman (Deborah Kerr) whose husband (David Niven) must return to his family estate in Brittany to attend to the failing vineyards there. Despite his admonitions against it, she insists on arriving with their two small children, and then attempts to uncover the occult relationship between her husband and the rest of the village community. As a mode of modernist critique, the paranoid narrative should be understood as gratifying the experience of paranoia, or in other words, *negating* paranoia as such. In *Eye of the Devil*, the well-intending wife/mother protagonist unwittingly intrudes upon an occult-based society, in which the landowning family must periodically offer up its members for human sacrifice. Ultimately, she cannot prevent her husband from (willfully) being killed, and then her son (Robert Duncan), unbeknownst to her, is positioned as the next in line. This is very close to the narrative of *Rosemary's Baby* where the female protagonist's husband (John Cassavetes) is absorbed into a Satanic society, and her offspring is committed to their cause in turn. More specifically, both films narrate a similar process of investigation leading to an "all of them witches" discovery. The trusted local physician in both films also turns out to be complicit, although only the first film includes even a gendarme (Colin McKenzie). Both protagonists even experience a similarly surreal nightmare as a montage sequence of encroaching threat, whose inclusion introduces some degree of ambiguity in the narrative as potentially unreliable. Nevertheless, in the end, both films' Satanic covens appear to triumph in their agendas, with their protagonists merely capitulating to their inescapable dominance.



**Figure 4.** Ratiocination becomes indistinguishable from paranoia in *Rosemary's Baby* when the protagonist must 'decode' a book's title as an anagram for the leader of the Satanic coven.

In the ways *Eye of the Devil* would appear to export the British gothic narrative of Satanic conspiracy to America via *Rosemary's Baby*, it is through the latter film's key divergences that a larger modernist context for the spree of subsequent Hollywood films in the 1970s can be understood. For one, the New York *urbanization* of the gothic epicenter for Satanic ritual normalizes conspiratorial presence in everyday American life, rather than allowing it to remain exoticized within the 'pagan' British countryside or more distant European locales. In this adjusted configuration, by implication, the next-door neighbors themselves could be and are among the conspirators. Also, the British film comingles two sibling ambassadors (Sharon Tate and David Hemmings) of the ambivalently 'beautiful' or 'sinister' postwar generation with the older villagers together as coconspirators. On the other hand, *Rosemary's Baby* decidedly associates conspiratorial 'evil' with older generations. At one point in the film, Rosemary (Mia Farrow) even insists



on throwing a party whose guests should be “young,” echoing the American counterculture’s celebrated distrust of their parents’ generation. The husband’s Faustian pact in this film is also more palpable than a wealthy landowner sacrificing his life to restore the vineyards and the villagers’ livelihood thereby. Instead, Rosemary’s husband compromises his own wife in order to succeed as a Hollywood actor. This is also a metaphysical bargain, although the protagonist’s delusional experience of fornicating with a humanoid Satan, or Goat of Mendes, encourages a more figurative interpretation of the larger conspiratorial agenda here. In other words, Baby Boomer audiences did not have to come away with any impressions of actual occult activity in their midst as much as a firm warning not to trust older Americans. And yet another form of modernist critique in this film, as a digression from previous British films, targets American postwar suburbia and matrimony’s potential to maintain patterns of female domesticity and dependence. Accordingly, Rosemary’s husband, who assumes responsibility for the scratch marks on her back, has simply personified ‘Satan’ for prioritizing his career and impregnating her in the same ‘Satanic’ gesture. And, by the same token, their newborn also becomes something hideous and alien to her—and so will perpetually remind her of her domestic predicament. Regardless, the paranoid narrative would persist as such in the wake of this film, with or without Satanic rituals.

Demonized children, although appearing in films as far back as *The Bad Seed* (1956), would become a cliché in 1970s cinema thanks to the impact of *Rosemary’s Baby*, as in, for example, *The Nightcomers* (1971) and *The Other* (1972), both sans any Satanic reference. Specifically, the narrative climax of a demonic birth was even reconfigured as a critique of technologization in the 1977 modernist film *Demon Seed*. But, of course, the release of *The Exorcist* in 1973, despite the film’s eschewal of conspiratorial forces, would reinforce this tendency beyond estimation. Where this subsequent film may appear merely to exploit a reliable premise of metaphysical “maleficence” at work in American society, it actually behaves moreover as social satire—ruthlessly targeting the decade’s characteristic social malaise. America’s capital is transformed into an urban wasteland of divorcees, alcoholic priests, incompetent physicians, and student protestors coopted by Hollywood productions. More specifically, the film portrays its female protagonist (Ellen Burstyn) as a high-strung single mother struggling to raise an adolescent

daughter (Linda Blair) and maintain her acting career at the same time. At the same time, the film traces a disillusioned Catholic priest's path toward resignation, for whom the mother's maniacally possessed innocent becomes the catalyst in correlating him to the protagonist as the 'male' counterpart of a spiritual dearth less specifically 'Christian' and more symptomatic of the time. The ambiguating device of the dream sequence appears again in this film, although it is the guilt-ridden priest (Jason Miller) whose psychological health is called into question. Eventually juxtaposed with the demon-child, the nondiegetic insert of a demonic visage in the dream montage suggests the 'evil' in this film has already taken root in the adults, or, rather, is a projection of their own troubled psyches. Essentially, then, the film may not demonize adolescence for an audience of struggling divorcee parents as much as it demonizes the influence of these parents on their children, just as the demon's abject swearing satirizes parental influence. In particular, a scene where daughter Regan 'witnesses' from around a corner her mother's neuroses on the telephone sets up this notion, well before the girl exhibits any demonic possession on her own. And, later, when the dualistic protagonists finally meet face-to-face, the traumatized mother bumps a cigarette from the priest, and so this exchange becomes the film's most satirical moment of modernist irony. In terms of vulnerable female characters under Satanic influence, varied derivatives of this film and/or its predecessor *Rosemary's Baby* would appear in each's wake, such as *The Dunwich Horror* (1970), *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971), Mario Bava's reedited *Lisa and The Devil* (1973), the ABC television film *The Devil's Daughter* (1973), and the British-German coproduction *To the Devil, A Daughter* (1976). But in their somewhat obvious pursuit of Satanic narrative formulae for their own sake, these films were relatively impotent as modernist critique. Stripped of its demonic allegorical hyperbole, *The Exorcist* would find its modernist corollary moreover in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974), again starring Ellen Burstyn as a single mother struggling to support herself and her adolescent son (Alfred Lutter). In both films, the female protagonist ultimately survives the storm, as it were, and presses on toward an uncertain future. In this sense, at least, there is no 'final' capitulation to a conspiratorial force, as in *Rosemary's Baby*, although these films certainly retain the probability for more stormy weather ahead.



**Figure 5.** ‘Demonic’ influence is implied in *The Exorcist* through a long take, wherein the camera pushes out from the mother swearing down the phone, and eventually frames her eavesdropping daughter in the foreground.

*Rosemary’s Baby*, positioned as a paranoid narrative rather than as merely an ‘Americanization’ of any given British Satanic cult film or films, can also be correlated to forthcoming modernist entries ostensibly targeting corporate and government institutions. These mostly post-Watergate films can be understood as the ‘masculinized’ paradigm of the female protagonist steadily uncovering a network of conspiratorial force, and yet, in this case, so intrinsically established as to seem institutionalized. Such a pattern of films would certainly include *The Conversation* (1974), *The Parallax View* (1974), *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), *Marathon Man* (1976), and *Capricorn One* (1978), but could commence even earlier with the film *Executive Action* (1973), portraying John F. Kennedy’s assassination as conspiratorial. If there is any additional cultural trajectory detectable within this range of films, it is a progression from absolute defeatism to one of relative optimism. *The Conversation*, on the darker end, portrays a surveillance professional (Gene Hackman) embroiling himself too deeply in one of his assignments only to find he has been positioned as an accessory to murder. His clients represent an unnamed “company” marred by internal politics

whose power to tap into his own personal life are beyond even his expertise—the ultimate conspiratorial irony of the film. As in both *Eye of the Devil* and *Rosemary's Baby*, this film includes a surreal dream sequence wherein this male protagonist also struggles toward an evasive and horrible truth. Harkening all the way back to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, these intrusions of subjective content within an otherwise ratiocinative progression through these films serve to undermine any potential finality. We are left suspended between impressions of palpable conspiracy and paranoid delusion. By the time *Capricorn One* arrives, on the other hand, American moviegoers have already embraced a return to an optimistic finale, thanks to the blockbuster release of *Jaws* (1975), *Star Wars* (1977), and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). In this late modernist entry, a male journalist (Elliot Gould) continuously evades assassination in order to rescue at least one of the uncooperative astronauts (James Brolin) already targeted for extermination, and so 'triumphantly' exposes NASA's faked Mars landing thereby. Audiences might have stood up and cheered for such an ending if their craving for social critique hadn't been superseded by the irresistibly dazzling new spectacle of special-effects-oriented escapism on screens everywhere else.



**Figure 6.** Similar to the priest in *The Exorcist*, the protagonist of *The Conversation* wrangles with his conscience in a dream sequence, here shouting out excuses through the mist to the recent target of his surveillance work.

The pattern of masculinized paranoid narratives eventually found a Satanic context in 1976 with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox release of *The Omen*. As in *Rosemary's Baby* and *Eye of the Devil*, this film's protagonist (Gregory Peck) must pursue a ratiocinative process of uncovering an occult conspiracy, also requiring almost the entire duration of screen time. However, this protagonist is a *male* American ambassador stationed in Britain, and such a premise at least vaguely harkens back further to *Night of the Demon*, in which an American man (Dana Andrews) arrives in Britain to investigate occult activities emanating, as usual, from an estate in the English countryside. At the same time, *The Omen* trilogy of films embraces its two 'maternal' narrative predecessors' inclusion of demonized offspring, more decidedly appropriating the birth of Satan's mutant son in *Rosemary's Baby* and allowing this 'antichrist' character to mature across its three installments. And, at the end of the first film, the protagonist's fatal attempt to dispatch his false son (Harvey Stephens) leaves the boy in the foster care of the American President, implying the 'evil' conspiracy will infiltrate the government inevitably. The next entry, *Damien: Omen 2* (1978) associates the adolescent antichrist (Jonathan Scott-Taylor) with corporate America, whose interest here is to exploit agricultural resources in underdeveloped countries. And then the third film, *The Final Conflict* (1981), positions this character (Sam Neill) as the President of the United States himself. So these films' hardly veiled antiestablishment allegory conflates agendas of *The Conversation* and *Parallax View*, for example, by literally demonizing both corporate and governmental influence in America. But, as I suggested with respect to these other films, moviegoers were already gravitating away from modernist narratives by the time *Damien: Omen 2* appeared, and so the ultimate defeat of Satan's son in the third film only looked like a desperate concession to the spectacular optimism of *Star Wars* and other blockbusters. Beyond the trilogy's demonization of children, nevertheless, Andrew Scahill locates additional demonization of the American white bourgeoisie, lower-class insurrection, and homosexuality all at the same time, concluding that "a single narrative spectrum can animate both a critique and a reactionary defense of whiteness, childhood innocence, and normative development."<sup>10</sup> While his examples from the films certainly support this

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Scahill, "It's All for You, Damien": Oedipal Horror and Racial Privilege in *The Omen Series*," in *Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema*, eds. Andrew Scahill and Debbie C. Olsen (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), 104.

aggregate perspective, I find it more productive to recognize a *shift* in sympathies between the first two installments. The first film actually expends great energy in building sympathy for its wealthy white protagonist Ambassador Thorn, whose affectionate dedication to his increasingly victimized wife (Lee Remick) is celebrated on screen in multiple scenes. This inversion of Rosemary's alienation from her conspiratorial husband does not support a case for allegorizing these two toward a critique of bourgeois whiteness, and, if anything, compels the audience to associate their demonized antagonists exclusively with the larger modernist agenda of similar paranoid narratives appearing at this time. However, in the next entry, the wealthy white couple assuming parental duties for the Satanic adolescent become estranged in their attitudes toward the boy, and the woman (Lee Grant) finally murders her husband (William Holden) to protect Damien. This artificially lamebrained female character could certainly be understood to satirize a bourgeois 'ignorance' of all manifestations of invasive otherness as personified by the devil-boy and his enablers, the latter of whom, according to Scahill, are representatives of a homosexual underclass. But also unlike the first film, the 'apostate' characters are now white representatives of corporate and government interests. For example, the ambitious younger executive (Robert Foxworth) proposing agricultural exploitation must invoke Satanic forces to kill an opposing elderly colleague (Lew Ayres), and then must circumvent his CEO, who, as Ambassador Thorn's brother, is treated just as sympathetically as that character is in the first film. So, in this case, the narrative does not configure 'opposing' demographic categories as readily as Scahill would have it. And this is another reason I prefer to associate these Satanic films, in light of their narrative differences, with other paranoid films of the era.

Concurrent with the stream of paranoid narratives depicting 'loner' male protagonists pitted against the establishment, all of which can be traced back to countercultural road films like *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Vanishing Point* (1970), there is a number of conspiratorial Satanic cult films putting young couples 'on the road' and/or sending them out to peripheral zones off the highway and straight into deadly rituals. These films include: *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), *Race with the Devil* (1975), and *The Devil's Rain* (1975). The first of these three films, for example, sends a couple and their daughter into small desert community whose children are ultimately

possessed by the members of the town's Satanic coven. And *Race with the Devil* reconfigures Peter Fonda's rebel biker character as a settled, married man, who merely wants to enjoy a motorhome trip across the country with his wife and another couple. As in the previous film, they also discover that even the elderly and the local police are complicit in a Satanic ring who sacrifices its members. *The Devil's Rain* also sends a couple to a peripheral ghost town of Satanists from which there is proverbially 'no return.' By demonizing small-town communities, these films are less invested in behaving as British pagan narratives than in exploring the increasing angst of Baby-Boomer couples settling into their parents' middleclass suburban existence, which they had previously sought to avoid through fantasies of liberation, portrayed in *The Graduate* (1967), for example. The emergence of so many 'wild' motorcycle gang films across the 1960s was simply another manifestation of countercultural fantasy — eventually negated by *Easy Rider* and the 'conspiratorial' assassination of its biker protagonists by conservative Americans populating small towns across the United States. And so these subsequent films merely swapped out the bikers for married couples, and murderous rednecks for Satanic cults. Also more readily comparable to the narrative template of *Easy Rider* is the film *Werewolves on Wheels* (1971), whose sympathetic biker gang is eventually consumed by a Satanic coven. And this film would find its British corollary in *Psychomania*, although the latter film is more in keeping with the 'British' Satanic narrative paradigm from the 1960s, since its motorcycle gang of attractive, rebellious youths is aligned with an aristocratic, albeit Satanic, estate in the English countryside. In this way, New Hollywood and its peripheral American production companies sought to perpetuate a countercultural critique of the establishment, while also expressing fears of the counterculture's inevitable conformity to middleclass American domesticity. These modernist narratives were eventually eclipsed by the release of *Halloween* in 1978, which would introduce the 'slasher' antagonist to a younger generation of moviegoers less interested in or attuned to social critique. This emerging subgenre sought, rather, to entertain teenagers curious about sex and yet afraid of defying their parents. Satanic premises would, of course, be subsumed into some of these 1980s-era films, just as Schreck affirms in his attempted trajectory of Satanic cinema.



**Figure 7.** The Satanic urn entrapping souls for eternity in *The Devil's Rain*, especially through its bluish hue, points more readily to the impact of television on suburban malaise in America.

My purpose here has been to reconfigure Satanic films according to their specific cultural context, and particularly in the Hollywood mainstream context of the 1970s, where the proliferation of these films should be understood within New Hollywood's larger modernist agenda for social critique. Films involving characters positioned as victims of Satanic cults should also be reconceived more broadly within a trajectory of paranoid narratives whose roots are closer to the unreliable narrative of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* than to *Faust*, for example, even though the latter two German films' 'contract with the devil' also applies to *Rosemary's Baby*. I would emphasize, however, that, in treating Polanski's film as responsible for mobilizing the mainstream Satanic content to follow, regardless of *Eye of the Devil* and other British harbingers, one should nevertheless acknowledge that the once-Faustian protagonist, appearing in *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1941), for example, is now relegated to a secondary role—to be associated



with other secondary characters conspiring *together* against an ambiguously delusional protagonist as their victim. In this way, a more productive cultural trajectory of cinematic narrative should be traced from *Caligari* to *Rosemary's Baby*—and then onward to *The Conversation*. Intermediary narratives including Satanic cults, namely *The Black Cat* and *The Seventh Victim*, also feature female characters as victims, but their own exploration of social fears are not as productively correlated to Polanski's film, merely for the sake of their Satanic conspirators. That is, these two films do not behave so readily as paranoid narratives, especially in their dearth of psychological ambiguity. Of course, Satanic road films appearing in the wake of *Rosemary's Baby* are no less unambiguous in their positioning of peripheral American towns and their surrounding desert landscapes as epicenters of occult ritual, but the point is that these films are the 'bestial' offspring of *that* film, although hybridized via the just-as-pivotal release of *Easy Rider*, as well as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), also demonizing policemen within a road-oriented context. Ultimately, paranoia for its own sake becomes the driving force of these modernist narratives, rather than occult ritual or its impetus to summon metaphysical entities, *per se*. Even *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* series, in their portrayed affirmation of metaphysical demonic forces, have more stake in exposing the plight of the American individual within a 'demonized' establishment than reinforcing Christian faith for a mostly faithless audience. In any case, if and when one attempts to achieve an aggregate perception of 'Satanic' media, as in Schreck's nonetheless engaging survey, it must inevitably correlate cinematic practices wholly antithetical in their agendas. Underground filmmaker Kenneth Anger's work immediately comes to mind. Rather than behaving as modernist critique, films including *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969) and *Lucifer Rising* (1972) are spiritual experiments. These films do not exploit Satanic ritual for narrative purposes as much as they emulate its subcultural intentions as an authentic alternative to mainstream ecclesiastical practice and social conformity. And, for this reason, such films, even if they are certainly to be associated with the same American counterculture that mobilized the New Hollywood and its many cynical releases across the 1970s, must be treated as a different cultural phenomenon.

Thus, I would prefer to dedicate a chapter to Satanic mainstream cinema within a larger study of 'modernist New Hollywood' or even 'modernist cinema' more broadly, rather than attempting to define 'Satanic cinema' for its own sake. If he were to reflect moreover on his running, aggregate disappointment with Satanic content onscreen, I imagine Schreck would agree with me.

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*“Sabrina, you’re not yourself.”*  
*The Borrowings of Sabrina Spellman*

WILLEM DE BLÉCOURT\*

**Abstract:** This article examines the contradiction between shallowness and silliness in the television series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* from the perspective of creative piracy. I argue that the show adopted the superficiality of the 1960s comics. Despite substantial hijacking of elements from series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or a movie *Something Wicked This Way Comes* the writers failed to lift this new Sabrina to a better quality. The borrowed elements simply made it more chaotic.

**Keywords:** Sabrina Spellman, witchcraft, *ChAoS* series, sources, *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, cultural borrowings.

I have always had problems making sense of the television series *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003). Sabrina has been called the “bubblegum witch,” or to be accurate: “a bubblegum tween version” of commodified witchcraft and that summed up my own reservations: she was easily blown apart and the sticky stuff ended up in all kind of unwanted places.<sup>1</sup> I don’t like bubblegum anyway nor the specific version of pop-culture which it referred to. I found that analysing the Sabrina series was too much of a challenge because it did not have any depth. But the recent remake looked

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Hopkins, “Sabrina, the Teenage Witch,” in *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Claudia A. Mitchell & Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2008), 513-514.

more promising: after careful consideration a Christian critic still found it “a dark, disturbing tale.”<sup>2</sup> Taking apart what were not only from a Christian point of view “satanic” witches is at least an option. Or so I thought. It appears that the new series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (ChAoS) is open to scholarly scrutiny, but that the outcome is not always very exciting. The fledgling Sabrina scholarship is shown by studies on gender and race, though not (yet) on witchcraft.<sup>3</sup> One can presume that students give the subjects of their studies due time and thought. Critics, on the other hand, need to air their opinion at the spur of the moment. Sometimes they make an interesting observation, more often they miss things.<sup>4</sup> I have nevertheless framed this paper by the remarks of two critics, who agreed on the content of the show, but assessed its quality diametrically differently. To be fair, they dealt with different parts. The critic Alison Keene, applauded the tension between the witch and the human side of Sabrina in the first part, expressed her uneasiness with the second part as follows:

There really isn't much exploration of anything, including what was the core conflict of Sabrina feeling like she must balance her natures. That, again, leads to the new season [meaning part 2] feeling a little lost. The world the show has created is one worth spending plenty of time in, and the fantastic actors brought in to populate it have boundless potential. But this time around, it all feels a little empty.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> S.D. Kelly, “The Problem of Evil in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*,” *Christianity Today*, 5 April 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Among others: Danielle Steinke, “#MeToo and the Witching Hour: Contemporary Feminist Discourse on the Representation of Witchcraft in the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*,” Student paper MacEwan University 2019, <https://roam.macewan.ca/islandora/object/gm:1815>; Hector Manuel Franco, *Season of the Witch: The Externalization of Feminine Powers*, Master thesis San Francisco State University 2019. See also: Anna S. Rogers, *Appropriation of the “Witch” Stigma as White Women’s Self-Empowerment*, Doctoral dissertation University of South Carolina, 2019, <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/5395>. See also note 24.

<sup>4</sup> See for critical English reviews: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/chilling\\_adventures\\_of\\_sabrina](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/chilling_adventures_of_sabrina).

<sup>5</sup> Alison Keene, “*Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* Part 2. Review: A Marginally Magical Return,” *Collider*, 1 April 2019.

The review of the third part in the same journal struck a different tone. Haleigh Foutch wrote:

And it's weirder, wilder, and more absolutely ridiculous than ever. Don't get me wrong, I mean that as a compliment. One of *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina's* most endearing qualities has always been its embrace of camp, which gives the series a delicious spark of irreverence and appropriately devil-may-care je ne sais quoi. Anything goes, really, in this silly-meets-deadly-serious world of Satanic witches.<sup>6</sup>

Against the emptiness of part 2, she emphasised the "jam-packed (...) very busy Season 3." "At times," she continued, "it feels like it's too ambitious in its breadth, too downright silly and indulgent, and overall just too much". The two opinions are not necessarily contradictory; they address different aspects. Full visual impressions can still mask an empty plot. In this article, I want to discuss the viewing of *ChAoS* in the light of its frequent borrowings which are here primarily related to witches.

It turns out that *ChAoS* is a case of televised comics, but a quite different caliber than for instance the Marvel comics and their film and television versions. The Sabrina comics conformed to the American Comics Code which, since 1954, forbade excessive violence, sexual perversions (as defined at the time), and horror. In 2011 Archie Comics, the publisher of Sabrina, was one of the last publishers to abandon the code.<sup>7</sup> Although they subsequently progressed into horror themes they retained their superficiality and silliness.

A last introductory remark: I make frequent use of Wikipedia articles below, but only those I found trustworthy. Consulting Wikipedia about witchcraft, even more so witchcraft history (or werewolves), is not to be recommended, however. The anonymous authors are usually not the main authorities on the subject and, moreover, their text can be changed. This is also true of film and television reviews, but they are less speculative, probably because their subject is more topical.

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<sup>6</sup> Haleigh Foutch, "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina Season 3 Delivers Its Most Delightfully WTF Witchery Yet," *Collider*, 24 January 2020.

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comic\\_Code\\_Authority](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comic_Code_Authority).

## Introducing Sabrina

The current television series *ChAoS* is the latest manifestation of a web of comics, animated series, video games and earlier television series stretching back to 1962. Especially *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* which ran over 7 seasons from 1996 to 2003, with 163 episodes of 22 minutes each, will be one of the older viewers' main reference points. This series was accompanied by the television movies *Teenage Witch* in 1996, *Sabrina goes to Rome* in 1998, *Sabrina Down Under* in 1999. Melissa Joan Hart starred in all of the series as well as the movies. *The Teenage Witch* Sabrina conforms to the ingenue witch, as defined by Emily Edwards:

The ingenue witch is a child or teenager who learns she possesses magical power and must discover how to use that power as she copes with the trepidations of growing up and discovering who she is. In many films and television depictions, she must contend with the wickedness of middle or high school and the perverse social world of teenagers, where confidence is blighted and young people attempt to become what they believe will best help them to fit in with the social crowd. The ingenue witch is oftentimes an outsider, unpopular and picked on, even by other witches.<sup>8</sup>

Sabrina's first television appearance was in an animated series in the early 1970s; another animated series with 65 episodes aimed at children was released in 1999. Another animated film, *Friends Forever*, appeared in 2002 and *Sabrina's Secret Life*, an animated series, followed in 2003-2004. *Secrets of a Teenage Witch*, with 26 episodes, was first shown in 2013-2014. The last targeted a slightly older age group of adolescents. In *The Guardian* Lucy Mangan, awarded the first half of the present TV series three out of five stars; she remarked that a good children's story can be equally enjoyed by adults.<sup>9</sup> *ChAoS*, however, remained children's viewing.

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<sup>8</sup> Emily D. Edwards, *Metaphysical Media, The Occult Experience in Popular Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 110-111.

<sup>9</sup> Lucy Mangan, "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina Review – Where has the Magic Gone?" *The Guardian*, 27 October 2018.

The first animated series of Sabrina was based on comics, published by Archie Comics. Sabrina originally appeared in these in 1962 and was given an own comic series from 1971 to 1983. In October 1962 she was introduced as a slim waisted teen-ager with pointed breasts sitting on the floor of a modern bedroom with a TV set and a cat lying underneath it, listening to a record player, saying:

Hi! My name is Sabrina! I hope I haven't disappointed you! I mean... I hope you didn't expect to find me living on some dreary mountain top... wearing some grubby old rags and making some nasty old brew.

Readers of comics were indeed used to old witches in rags, like in the 1950 EC comics, *The Haunt of Fear*, *Tales from the Crypt*, and the *Vault of Horror*, where The Old Witch was one of the three hosts. Yet they were also familiar with young, beautiful witches, for instance in the 1958 film *Bell, Book and Candle* with Kim Novak, showing the courtship between a witch and a non-witch. This theme, albeit with a married couple, was later picked up by the very popular television series *Bewitched*, starring Elizabeth Montgomery and broadcast for eight seasons from September 1964 to March 1972. The combination of good and bad witches had entered American culture through the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, but also earlier books, stage acts, puppet plays, films and a musical. Appearances denoted moral character. As the Good Witch Glinda said: "Only Bad Witches are ugly."<sup>10</sup> Sabrina perpetuated this tradition with a twist: some evil witches could also be attractive and as a teenager she had the opportunity to bungle her spells, or as she herself acknowledged: "Sabrina, you goofed."

Sabrina's family featured in the comics, too. Her aunt Hilda as early as February 1963 and December 1964, followed by her cousin Ambrose (in suit) in December 1969. The head witch Della and Fairy Witch Mother Greta had more or less regular roles, but both disappeared after a while. Hilda and Della enticed Sabrina to plague humankind, that is to say her friends, but that usually had an opposite effect. Aunt Zelda had a small part in December

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<sup>10</sup> Willem de Blécourt, "Witches on Screen," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, ed. Owen Davies (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 253-280, 287-288.



1968 where she was shorter and stockier, yet unnamed only to re-emerge a year later in December 1969. The early comics showed Sabrina as a “typical” teenager, hanging out with her friends (the Archie comics bunch) with an interest in boys.

A next series of comics ran parallel to the series with Melissa Joan Hart: 32 issues between 1997 and 1999.<sup>11</sup> In 2000 the comic series was re-launched at no. 1. It ran till no. 57 in 2004 and then continued in manga form till 2009 with 43 short stories. Reprinted as *Sabrina – The Magic Revisited* and *The Magic Within*, the stories differed slightly from the previous comics and television series. There was much more interaction with other witches and a greater exposure of the Magic Realm. Recently, a new series has started about Sabrina’s schooldays in Greendale: *Sabrina the teenage witch. ChAoS*, still aimed at adolescents, was preceded by its own comics as a kind of trial run for the television series. When one compares these latest comics with the present television series it becomes clear that the school and the group of friends were inserted only in the television series (and less based on the last *teenage witch* comics), yet they also partly referred to the original comics.

The latest manifestation of Sabrina has thus to be set against an enormous number of comics, animated series, and films. Yet, while the *Teenage Witch* can be characterised as light entertainment, today’s television series with Kiernan Shipka in the role of Sabrina, is much darker than its predecessors. It figures Father Blackwood, a high priest of the Church of Night where the Dark Lord, also known as Satan is worshipped and where witches, among them the Weird Sisters, are supposed to do evil. *ChAoS* has a manipulating Madam Satan as one of its main antagonists. As the name suggests it is designed to chill and seems thus a huge departure from *The Teenage Witch*. Or to phrase it according to the classification system by Emily Edwards: Sabrina moved from being “perhaps one of the best-adjusted of ingenue witches” to a satanic witch, complete with coven, magical school and an over-lord. In episodes 17 and 18 says: “I Am the Dark Lord’s Sword” and “I Am the Herald of Hell,” and follows this by her realisation: “I am evil.”

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<sup>11</sup> For general information about the Sabrina comics, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabrina\\_the\\_Teenage\\_Witch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabrina_the_Teenage_Witch).

## ChAoS

The new series was developed by comic book writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa.<sup>12</sup> He was born in 1973 as the son of a Nicaraguan diplomat which may explain Catholic influences and a preoccupation with death, or “afterlife” as it should be called it more accurately. After the success of introducing zombies into Archie Comics he became its chief creative officer. Sadly, he is no Whedon or Gaiman and Archie is no Marvel. Nevertheless, Sabrina is part of the American witch figure and in this she occupies an extreme position. As the animated series declares: “using magic is usually not the solution to her day-to-day problems.”<sup>13</sup> In *ChAoS* her boyfriend Harvey Kinkle becomes more and more convinced that Sabrina should not use magic, and on the meta level of the show, the message seems to be that Satan is never a preferred choice even for his daughter. Magic as a sign of female empowerment maybe a nice fantasy, but in actual politics it is a double-edged sword.

Certainly a new and exciting character in the Sabrina universe is Mrs. Wardwell, also known as Madam Satan. She is a conglomerate of different figures, one of them appeared first in *Pep comics* in 1941, as Aguirre-Sacasa explains.<sup>14</sup> But she also shares characteristics with the Head Witch Della in the first Sabrina comics of 1962. In *ChAoS* she takes on the shape of the teacher Mrs. Wardwell. She is also the first witch: Lilith. Below I will elaborate on the structural resemblance between Wardwell and Rupert Giles, the librarian in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Much of the plot relies on Wardwell’s actions and their consequences. As is revealed at the start of episode 16, Wardwell’s behaviour leads to Sabrina performing a string of miracles that are blasphemous versions of those performed by the Nazarene. This provokes the season’s apocalypse. From episode 14 onwards, however, the Wardwell storyline takes a turn that is, at first sight, incomprehensible: a fiancé suddenly turns up, only to be brought to an untimely demise in episode 17.

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<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roberto\\_Aguirre-Sacasa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roberto_Aguirre-Sacasa).

<sup>13</sup> See note 11.

<sup>14</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa & Robert Hack, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina. Book One* (2018), no page numbering.

In the third part (episode 21-28) the witch's coven, lead by Aunt Zelda since episode 18, becomes more and more female. First, they start to worship Lilith instead of Satan, in episode 28 they find they need to revere the moon and call upon the triple Goddess Hekate.<sup>15</sup> In Edward's typology they now transformed into New Age Witches.<sup>16</sup> The only difference with the majority of the other cinematic witches is that the *ChAoS* witches prefer to operate in a coven, a concept popularised by Margaret Murray in her *The God of the Witches* (1933).<sup>17</sup> The move from Satanic to New Age Witches leaves Satan out of the picture and I suspect this was part of an (undisclosed) deal with the Satanic Temple who had sued Netflix because *ChAoS* had appropriated their version of the Baphomet statue.<sup>18</sup>

## References

*ChAoS* contains a spectrum of internal and external references. While I cannot claim to have spotted all of them (see the trivia in the IMDb and the song Sabrina sings in episode 20 is apparently from *The Phantom of the Opera*), I have found enough to discern a pattern. Examples run from minor and occasional to vital and structural. For instance, quite a few warlocks are named after horror writers: Blackwood; Lovecraft as Howard in episode 15; brother Bierce; brother Machen; Dorian Gray comes from the Oscar Wilde story. Then there are Salem names: Putnam and Hawthorne (the principal in part one) are lifted from *The Crucible*, which incidentally is also the title of the first *Chilling Adventures* comic book. Dorcas, too, is a Salem name. The Academy of Unseen Arts seems to refer to Terry Pratchett's Unseen University. Other names in the third part such as Caliban and Sycorax are taken from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hecate>.

<sup>16</sup> Edwards, *Metaphysical Media*, 121-126.

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret\\_Murray](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Murray); see also: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/coven>.

<sup>18</sup> Bryce K. Hurst, "The Devil is in the Trademark: A Discussion of the Satanic Temple v. Netflix," *Law and Religion* 20 (2019), 219-237. See also: Joseph Laylock, *Speak of the Devil: How the Satanic Temple Is Changing the Way We Talk About Religion* (Oxford: OUP, 2020).

There is a werewolf reference in first episode. At night, a car drives along a lonely road. The song *Bad Moon Rising*, by Creedence Clearwater Rivival, and used in a central scene of *An American Werewolf in London*, is playing in the background. The car scene is from the 1994 film *Wolf*. In the *Chilling Adventures* comics the werewolf verse is recited: "even a man who is pure in heart, and says his prayers by night..." (from the 1940 films with Lon Chaney). It echoes the werewolf in the first episode of *Secrets of a Teenage Witch*, the computer-animated series of 2013 and perhaps gives a wink to one of the early episodes of *Bewitched* from 1965. The reference is deliberate but at the same time spurious as there is no werewolf in the first episode and hardly so in the rest of the series, apart from the jumble of "werewolf" quotes in episode 14, Luperclia, unrelated to the earlier quotations.

The so-called "hedge-witches," who are not aligned to a coven,<sup>19</sup> are an odd mixture taken from stories in diverse places. Gryla is Icelandic and Pesta is Norse.<sup>20</sup> More generally medieval witches were thought to have spread pestilence and after the trials started they were accused of boiling babies; thus their role in *ChAoS* does not appear completely strange; at the most it is exaggerated. The references are increasingly bewildering, however. Mambo Marie or Marie LaFleur refers to Marie Laveau, a nineteenth-century midwife, herbalist and voodoo practitioner in New Orleans.<sup>21</sup> Mother Hubbard was one of the Salem witches whose first name was Elizabeth; there is also a (probably unrelated) English nursery rhyme.<sup>22</sup> The members of the Carnival are mostly derived from Greek mythology, although there are some double references. Pan is otherwise known as Carcosa after Ambrose Bierce's "An Inhabitant from Carcosa," a part of the Chtulhu mythos which also featured the name The Old Ones for the old gods, although one has to be careful here; the old gods also feature in *The Wicker Man* and there they are derived from Murray. The name of Nagaina, the snake charmer, comes from the Hindu half-deity

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<sup>19</sup> Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca* (New York: Facts on File, 2008, third edition), 159; she refers to *A Guide to Solitary Witchcraft* by Rae Beth (1990) who would have first used the term.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* III (London: Bell, 1883), 1045, 1188.

<sup>21</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie\\_Laveau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Laveau).

<sup>22</sup> Iona and Peter Opie, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Oxford: OUP, 1997 – second edition), 374-380.

Nāga,<sup>23</sup> but with her snake hair she behaves like the Greek Medusa, whose look turns people into stone. Circe, together with Medea (not used) the archetypal fairy-tale witch, made a name for herself by turning Odysseus' companions into animals. In *ChAoS* episode 25, she turns four boys into pigs, the same boys who were tricked by Sabrina and the weird sisters in episode 2 to make love to each other. Hekate, the triple goddess, of course, also has a Greek origin.

Sabrina is both witch and mortal, the dichotomy deriving from *Bewitched* and already present in the earlier television series and films. In *ChAoS* it leads to double school attendance and the pressure to sign *The Book of the Beast*, which eventually means simply acquiring enough power to deal with the threat on Greendale – which is to say that the threat is enough to push Sabrina over the line. So much for a principled refusal.

### **Buffy, the Slayer of Vampires**

In episodes 2 and 26 of *ChAoS* aunt Hilda is killed by her sister Zelda but subsequently brought back to life. Any resurrection in twenty-first-century popular culture is reminiscent of the resurrection in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, created by Joss Whedon, when Willow brings Buffy back from the death at the start of season 6. This alerts one to the similarities between Buffy and Sabrina. The Dutch student Floortje Schuurmans, who compared the two teenage heroines, found that “some scenes in the pilot episodes are eerily similar to each other” and concluded: “Both shows revolve around ‘good’ girls, trying to live normal high school lives in spite of being ‘the Other,’ and dealing with both the mundane such as friendships and relationships as well as supernatural, life-threatening situations.”<sup>24</sup> The relation between the two series, however, goes somewhat further. The main borrowings from Whedon's series are structural, often characterised by opposites. Sunnydale is at the American west and Greendale at the east coast; at least that is implied by the Salem

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<sup>23</sup> At least according to the fanpage: <https://riverdale.fandom.com/wiki/Nagaina>.

<sup>24</sup> Floortje Schuurmans, *Transgressive Women Warriors or a Post-Feminist Masquerade? The Evolution of Gender Portrayals in Female-Fronted Teen Television Series* (Bachelor's thesis, Nijmegen: Radboud University, 2019), 43, 45.

reference: the Greendale thirteen were hanged at about the same time as the Salem witches, thus the action took place in Massachusetts. Another example of the convergence between the two series is the (missed) opportunities of the socially awkward double.

In *Buffy* season 5, episode 18, *The Intervention*, the so-called Buffybot plays a part. The Buffybot is a robot, made to look exactly like Buffy, but her program restricts her when she has to interact with other people. Thus she has the tendency to blurt out all she knows at once. Meeting Xander Harris, she says: "You're my friend, and a carpenter!" In another exchange, this time with Willow, the Buffy replica reveals her true purpose: "I had sex with Spike. I'm sorry if it bothers you. You're my best friend." The double of Sabrina in *The Mandrake* (episode 19) is vegetable instead of mechanical, but exhibits a similarly odd relationship with her friends. She wants to turn them into mandrakes, too, so that they can all be together. As she explains in an exchange with cousin Ambrose:

A: Sabrina, what's going on?

S: It's my friends.

A: [gasps] Oh. What happened?

S: Harvey, Rosalind, and Theo. Their heads were smashed in. Their bodies were pulped. The ground was soaked in their fluid.

A: Sabrina, you're not making any sense.

S: They were so beautiful.

A: Why would anyone kill those poor souls?

S: They were going to love me. We would have grown up together.

A: Hm.

S: I just wanted them to love me.

A: [gasps]

S: You love me, don't you?

A: Off course I do. But, erm, perhaps you should lie down and rest?

S: Can I sit on your lap?

A: Sabrina, you're not yourself.

The solution to having two Sabrinas is a duel between the two. The real Sabrina, being a human, cheats and kills her double. In season 9, volume 2 of the continuing comic series of *Buffy, A Part of Me*, Buffy's mind is partly

transferred to a new Buffybot. She now also fights herself. After this is interrupted, it is decided to put the whole Buffy back together again. Sabrina, by killing her mandrake self, loses her power which was transferred to the magical root; she regains it in a later episode. Buffy season 9 stems from 2012; the Sabrina episode is seven years later. The writers of Sabrina were surely inspired by Buffy in a very detailed way. Yet this is apparent in more than a single episode as an important part of the human half of Sabrina is structurally similar to Whedon's vampire slayer.

For evidence one only has to look at the Scooby gang in *Buffy*, the friends Buffy surrounds herself with from the start. Certainly, in *Teenage Witch* Sabrina has school friends, namely Harvey Kinkle and Jenny Kelley, but in some important aspects Sabrina's friends in *ChAoS* resemble the scoobies more. I sum up:

Buffy Summers – Sabrina Spellman, both becoming sixteen and acquiring their powers.

Willow Rosenberg, from a Jewish family, a witch – Rosalind, "Roz" Walker, the daughter of Greendale's minister, has "cunning" (premonitions), that is to say she is a cunning woman. A cunning woman is the opposite of a witch.

Xander Harris, secretly in love with Buffy, dates Cordelia and has a brief affair with Willow – Harvey Kinkle, starts as Sabrina's boyfriend and then moves on to Roz.

Susie/Theo Putnam from *ChAoS* relates to Cordelia Chase, or Daniel "Oz" Osbourne in *Buffy* (or to both).

The most important borrowing from *Buffy*, however, is Mary Wardwell as the librarian Rupert Giles; there are even moments in which she acts like a librarian. In episode 3 of *ChAoS* about books banned from the school library, Wardwell supports the action by enabling a "secret book club where they only read banned titles."<sup>25</sup> In episode nine she tells Sabrina:

W: Now you weren't thinking of borrowing my *Book of the Dead* without permission, were you? Not when all you need do is ask. Go on. Take it.

S: [Sabrina sighs, stammers] Ms. Wardwell?

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<sup>25</sup> [www.adventuresofsabrina.fandom.com/wiki/Chapter\\_Three:\\_The\\_Trial\\_of\\_Sabrina\\_Spellman](http://www.adventuresofsabrina.fandom.com/wiki/Chapter_Three:_The_Trial_of_Sabrina_Spellman).

W: Yes?

S: I picked up the wrong book. I was looking for the *Occultist's Almanac*. For some extra credit I'm doing for Father Blackwood. Is it okay if I borrow it?

In the course of the episodes Wardwell build up trust and becomes a mentor to Sabrina, like the "watcher" Giles to Buffy. In episode six Wardwell tells Sabrina that her father Edward sent her to watch over her. Subsequently she supports her performing an exorcism. Thereafter, she gives Sabrina a copy of the *Book of the Dead* in order to raise Harvey's brother. The next step is to retrieve the brother's soul from limbo and Wardwell guides Sabrina to a portal. In a twisted way, Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa has even recreated the relationship between Giles and Jenny Calendar; Wardwell's fiancée Adam is now killed by Satan. Beyond this citation, there is hardly anything relevant in the Adam storyline.

Another similarity between the two series is that Buffy sends her boyfriend Angel, who has temporarily become soulless, to Hell (in season two). A nice touch in *ChAoS* is that the boyfriend is called devil (Nick Scratch). He goes to Hell, too, after being possessed by Satan (thus in a sense having two souls). Like the Hellmouth below Sunnydale, Greendale has its entrance to the Hell in the mines and, like in *Buffy*, the problem is how to keep it shut. Blood, however, is a much better means than signs scribbled on paper. In the third part of *ChAoS* Nick morphs into Riley Finn, another of Buffy's boyfriends, by becoming addicted to sex demons. There are, however, limits to the similarity of the two series: a struggling dark Willow is nowhere to be seen in *ChAoS*.

## Films

In episode 18 a visual quote occurs from *Practical Magic* (1998).<sup>26</sup> Sabrina stands with a broomstick on the roof of her house against a blue background and a full moon. The same film is quoted when Zelda slays Hilda, although the killing of a boyfriend with saucepan is more imaginative than one aunt killing another with a hammer or a bullet. Both the boyfriend and Hilda are

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<sup>26</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Practical\\_Magic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Practical_Magic).



resurrected. In the film *The Craft* (1996) four high-school witches feature, which are quoted when Sabrina joins the three Weird Sisters in episode 2. *The Craft* is also one of the few witch films in which a main figure of worship is mentioned.<sup>27</sup>

More citations are taken from the 1972 film *Necromancy*, starring Pamela Franklin and Orson Welles, reissued in 1983 as *The Witching*. Apart from a witches' puppet, a magic shop, a satanic ritual, an orgy and a devil with a goat's head, not to mention the coven leader's strict control of the town Lilith, there is a little ghost boy. He is akin to the boy Quentin in *ChAoS*, also a ghost, first in episode 4, then in episode 17. Whereas all the first mentioned characteristics of *Necromancy* can be designated as part of the common language of Satanism, the boy stands out and can thus be seen as a quotation. The third part of *ChAoS*, especially the travelling carnival, leans heavily on *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, the book by Ray Bradbury, who also wrote the script for the eponymous film. It ends as a persiflage of *The Wicker Man*.

The 1983 film *Something Wicked This Way Comes*<sup>28</sup> features a carnival, also called pandemonium. It thus stands to reason for Pan in *ChAoS* to be the head of the pandemonium (although there the name is transferred to Hell). In *Something Wicked* the numerous odd performers of the carnival are part perpetrators and part victims: Mr. Dark and the fortune teller, the dust witch, belong to the former; the bearded woman to the latter. Such a dichotomy is missing in *ChAoS*. Naigana is only a weak reflection of Bradbury's dust witch. *Something Wicked* is interwoven with the 1973 film *The Wicker Man*, and Mr. Dark and Lord Summerisle merge. This British film provided a reference to the old ones, the hare, the Green Man (as the name of the inn) and the animal masks (*ChAoS* episode 24), apart from the sacrifice in the huge wicker figure

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<sup>27</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Craft\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Craft_(film)).

<sup>28</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something\\_Wicked\\_This\\_Way\\_Comes\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something_Wicked_This_Way_Comes_(film)); this article only has a small plot description. On the earlier novel, also written by Ray Bradbury, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something\\_Wicked\\_This\\_Way\\_Comes\\_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something_Wicked_This_Way_Comes_(novel)).

See also: Robin Ann Reid, *Ray Bradbury. A Critical Companion* (Westport/London: Greenwood Press, 2000); Jamil Mustafa, "The American Gothic and the Carnavalesque in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*," *The New Ray Bradbury Review* 5 (2019), 52-67.

in episode 28.<sup>29</sup> In the American context the remark of Carcosa, "We were here first," can be read as referring to the native American people and the reaction of the Greendale coven reflects the imperialism of America's colonisers. But one should seriously ask how in *ChAoS* the "old gods" could be set against Hekate, who has the same mythological ancestry as Pan, Circe, or Medusa. It is debatable whether Pan can be seen as patriarchal: he is too disruptive.<sup>30</sup>

Themes in witch films include the domestication of the female witch, a loss of the sense of self (in cases of resurrections), the question of identity or the matter of turning evil. They can be observed, for instance, in *Practical Magic*, *The Craft*, in the 1987 film *The Witches of Eastwick* or in Romero's *Season of the Witch* (1972) and also in *Buffy*.<sup>31</sup> Such concerns do not bother Sabrina. The inhabitants of Green Town in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* are driven by their desires, regrets, frustrations and secrets. Mr Dark is feeding on these – Carcosa (Pan) on his turn only symbolically targets Harvey's father by letting Naigana sleep with him. In *Lilith*, the town where *Necromancy* is situated, Mr. Cato desperately wants to bring his son back to life; in *ChAoS*'s Greendale Quentin only appears twice and then without much emotional baggage or a father. The grandfather of the lord of Summerisle, where *The Wicker Man* takes place, has convinced the inhabitants of the feasibility of the old religion and they sacrifice the Christian virgin representative of the king for good reason. The pagans who arrived in Greendale are just out for power. They try to accomplish their aim by burning a wicker man with a life human in it to resurrect the Green Man. But why would it be necessary to resurrect a god? This is especially questionable when the genuine Green Man, Robin Goodfellow, is already settled in Greendale and has entered into a relationship with Theo. The original films on which *ChAoS* draws have much more coherence and also show more depth. *ChAoS* is a superficial collage and indeed what the acronym portrays: it is chaotic.

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<sup>29</sup> Mikel J. Koven, "The Folklore Fallacy. A Folkloristic/Filmic Perspective on *The Wicker Man*," *Fabula* 48 (2007), 270-280; Valentina Bold, "The Wicker Man: Virgin Sacrifice in Dumfries and Galloway," in *Fantastical Imaginations: The Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture*, ed. Lizanne Henderson (John Donald Publishers, 2009). See also: David Huckvale, *A Green and Pagan Land: Myth, Magic and Landscape in British Film and Television* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. The Great God Pan, a 1894 story by Arthur Machen: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Great\\_God\\_Pan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_God_Pan).

<sup>31</sup> De Blécourt, "Witches on Screen."

## Final considerations

The citations go beyond witches. For instance the use of the time egg (a return of two Sabrinas) derives from a 1995 video game.<sup>32</sup> The idea that Judas Iskariot was the first vampire comes from the film *Dracula 2000*.<sup>33</sup> It is certainly necessary to situate Sabrina in an existing popular witch lore but nor is it a crime to add to it, too. To portray a recognisable witch, the writers of the series had to emulate some of her main features and to apply a common witchcraft imagery, especially when the witch is no longer old and ugly. It almost looks as if they were prohibited from being original. In this they continued the silliness of the early comics. In her Satanic guise, Sabrina is still defined by bubblegum.

The main question is whether all this actually matters. In films the copying of plots and scenes is constantly happening. To give some examples from witch films and television: *Bewitched* copied its main theme from *Night of the Eagle*; many features in *Harry Potter* are derived from *Bewitched*. Yet the extent of copying in *ChAoS* is unparalleled. Are the citations and references in *ChAoS* then a homage or do they indicate a lack of creativity? Possibly both. In my view, in the case of *ChAoS* it is also a matter of aesthetics: the many citations make the series too crowded and this has clearly been noticed by critics. Sabrina is too many witches at once, and, one can argue, she thereby loses herself. There is never enough space to realise the potential of particular themes. Some story-lines go nowhere. I do not know whether it would make any difference for the viewers who may not know the connections pointed out here – Foutch would probably still love the series. I have done little further research on the reception of *ChAoS*.<sup>34</sup> It should matter, however, for studies of female empowerment versus hegemonic masculinity and the like. The texture of superficiality and borrowing pervades the gender relations in the series and should thus emerge in a good analysis.

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<sup>32</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrono\\_series](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrono_series).

<sup>33</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula\\_2000](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula_2000).

<sup>34</sup> See IMDb, User Reviews: [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7569592/review?ref\\_=tt\\_urv](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7569592/review?ref_=tt_urv).

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## *“Bewitched:” Between Housewifery and Emancipation*

ALEX McCANN\*

**Abstract:** It is not inconsequential that the first broadcast of *Bewitched* coincides almost perfectly with the publication of Betty Friedan’s preeminent work *The Feminine Mystique*, often considered the starting point of Second wave feminism. The book and the series have a common goal: enabling housewives to become aware of their alienation and gradually bring them towards emancipation. It is therefore by using the portrait of the American housewife of the 1950s discussed by Betty Friedan as a framework for analysis that we propose to show how *Bewitched*, through Samantha’s character as a housewife, renews the portrait of the typical housewife, but by being a witch, allows a whole generation of women to become aware of the bonds which imprison them and thus to tend towards a release.

**Keywords:** bewitched, witch, feminism, feminine mystique, emancipation, housewives.

One can learn a great deal about any given society by watching the monsters it produces, for they are allegorical manifestations of its deepest fears. By analyzing these monsters, one can then understand what frightens, worries or motivates said society. Having established that, it is then not that surprising to see the figure of the witch emerge during feminist campaigns. The proof is all around us: following the #MeToo movement, witches are everywhere. In cinemas, with Luca Guadagnino’s remake of *Suspiria* as well as on television with other reboots of classic shows about witches, like

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*Charmed* or *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. The use of the witch as a feminist icon is relatively recent, dating back to the 1960's with W.I.T.C.H.'s (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) 'curse' on Wall Street, causing the market price to go down by thirteen points. Nevertheless, it doesn't change the fact that the two are now indissociable in our minds. This is due to the fact that the modern resurgence of the witch by feminist groups helped make it a symbol for victimized but still independent women, who were being victimized precisely because of their quest for independence.

One of the first manifestations of the link between witchcraft and feminism in popular culture appears at the beginning of the 1960's with the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and the first airing of *Bewitched*, one year later. When one considers the social climate of change in this decade, it is not surprising to see that both the book and the series discuss the emancipation of American housewives. There's no denying the importance of *The Feminine Mystique* in feminism, but this paper aims to prove that *Bewitched* also played an important role, mostly because Samantha served as an effective model of emancipation for American housewives, a model that was absent prior to the series release. First, *The Feminine Mystique* will serve as the starting point for this analysis through showing how Samantha embodied the appearance of a typical 1960's housewife. Then will be analyzed the conditions according to which housewives identified themselves with the character of Samantha and then will be discussed how the witch succeeds in infusing in women the desire to change.

### ***The Feminine Mystique* and the Typical Housewife**

It is at the beginning of this decade known for its wind of political and social changes that Betty Friedan first publishes *The Feminine Mystique*, an instant classic considered by most to be the beginning of Second Wave feminism in America. In her work, Friedan shows American housewives as women stuck in what she refers to as the "feminine mystique," which manifests itself as a very narrow conception of femininity imprisoning women in the role of a passive being, devoted entirely to her family and her husband, whose place is outside of the world and inside the house. The women who were victims

of this mystique are portrayed by Friedan as depressed, lonely, and unable to pinpoint the exact cause of their unhappiness; this latter aspect is one of the strong points of *The Feminine Mystique*, to have put into words this feeling of ambiguous dread and which she dubbed the "Problem That Has No Name." At that time, doctors and psychiatrists were unable to understand an affliction that seemed to only target women and to be caused by a longing for something *more*. Therein lies another one of the book's strengths: not only did it name the problem; it also highlighted its causes while proposed possible solutions. In this sense, the "*Feminine Mystique* was a kind of self-help book because it changed how women felt about themselves and their lives. Some divorced, went back to school, sought employment, and negotiated more egalitarian marriages, and many saw their depression lift."<sup>1</sup>

Among the specific causes of this discomfort, Friedan mentions that women may find it so difficult to extricate themselves from this mystification largely as a result of their denial, voluntarily or not, of their own social potential. Even in the presence of numerous possibilities that were previously unavailable to them – largely because education was being more accessible to women than ever before at that time – women stayed reluctant in pursuing higher education or finding jobs for themselves outside the home. This could be explained by their association with "dysfunctional" models, since the heroines presented in women's magazines of the time are all women who, like them, have preferred to marry rather than pursue a career, those options being mutually exclusive at the time. For example, in articles published in *McCall's* or in the *Lady's Home Journal* of the 1950's, there's an unrelenting promotion of the idea that in order to be happy, women should live according to their 'nature' and should stop 'pretending to be men'. Thus, faced with this myriad of stories all agreeing to what the feminine mystique stands for, women find themselves at a loss for a clear emancipation model, mostly because "the new mystique makes the housewife-mothers, who never had a chance to be anything else, the model for all women... Beneath the sophisticated trappings, it simply makes certain concrete, finite, domestic aspects of feminine existence ... into a religion, a

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Whittier, "Everyday Readers and Social Movements: Considering the Impact of *The Feminine Mystique*," *Gender & Society*, 27, n° 1 (February 2013): 113.



pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity."<sup>2</sup> This leads to a feeling of being defeated among young women, as a student interviewed by Friedan states: "We don't like to be asked what we want to do. None of us know. None of us even like to think about it. The ones who are going to be married right away are the lucky ones. They don't have to think about it."<sup>3</sup>

However, this absence of role models for emancipation is not limited only to the public sphere: its ramifications also spread into women's private lives. In fact, they can't even look to their mothers for guidance, because these mothers are also housewives – and unhappy housewives on top of that. Indeed, Friedan tells us that these women experienced the war on the home front and the subsequent departure of men for Europe, which gave them the necessary space to occupy the positions usually reserved for men. Nevertheless, they also experienced the disillusionment caused by the return of these same men, which prompted their return to the domestic sphere. No longer the career women with jobs that brought them pride that women's magazines derided, they returned to their role as housewives, unhappy and unfulfilled, which is to say in the role that these same magazines strived to portray as the pinnacle of feminine joy. As the children of the baby boom began to grow, the mothers tried to make sure that their daughters did not repeat their same mistakes: they knew that their daughters need more to be happy. Unfortunately, despite their many efforts, it did not pay off:

But even if our mothers urged, insisted, fought to help us educate ourselves, even if they talked with yearning of careers that were not open to them, they could not give us an image of what we could be. They could only tell us that their lives were too empty, tied to home; that children, cooking, clothes, bridge, and charities were not enough. A mother might tell her daughter, spell it out, "Don't be just a housewife like me." But that daughter, sensing that her mother was too frustrated to savor the love of her husband and children, might feel: "I will succeed where my mother failed, I will fulfill myself as a woman, and never read the lesson of her mother's life."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W Norton, 2013), 36.

<sup>3</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 69.

<sup>4</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 71.

This situation, while revealing the difficult relationship between mother and daughter in which the former is ignored even though she is, in that particular case, the voice of reason, clearly shows the extent of the pernicious power the feminine mystique held over women and girls, the ideals of which infiltrated the minds of these future housewives and succeeded in making them believe that the only way for them to achieve happiness is to comply with what society (read "patriarchy") considered to be the epitome of femininity: to be an accomplished mother and spouse. Even more pernicious, it created a feeling of competition between women where sad or depressed wives were not only seen as failed housewives, but as failed women; this only prompted more women to try to be *happy* housewives. Like the Aristotelian machine which only needs a starting impulse to function eternally, the creators of this feminine mystique only needed a flick to set in motion a dangerous ideology for women, an ideology which will long be maintained and promoted, often unconsciously, by the same women who were its victims.

Agreed, this overview of Friedan's book is, let's face it, a bit brief. If it does not dwell on drawing up an exhaustive list of the multiple causes of the entrenchment of women within this mystique – something the book already does really well – at least it tried to highlight the main characteristics of the American housewife as understood by Friedan, which could be summarized by a young woman at a loss for an adequate emancipation model and afraid to seize all the opportunities in front of her. Turning a deaf ear to the imprecations of her mother, she chooses to be a housewife and this choice is also telling of the 1960's housewives' tendency to ignore, or at least forget, their potential.

### **A Portrait of the Witch as a Young Housewife**

At the beginning of the 1960's, Betty Friedan's work is not the only one aiming to present housewives this way. Indeed, approximately a year after the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, the character of Samantha Stephens is introduced to the American public as the heroine of the show *Bewitched* created by Sol Saks. This magicom would soon find its place within the annals of American pop culture and tells the story of Samantha, a witch, who marries Darrin Stephens, a mortal. The young witch waits until her wedding night

to reveal the truth about her nature to her husband. Following the revelation, Samantha promises her husband that she will not use magic anymore and that she will be a 'normal' wife; in other words, a promise of obedience and submission. Eight seasons will follow, gripping viewers with the couple's misadventures, misadventures often caused by the fact that Samantha has some trouble keeping her promise to Darrin.

Samantha, and this is a key element to this analysis, has all the appearances of the typical American housewife as described by Friedan for she too seems to forget and negate her own potential for the benefit of her life as a wife and mother. Here, Samantha's potential is symbolized by her magic, which she chooses to deny, at least in part. In giving up using magic Samantha presents the appearance of a typical housewife, since the promise of submission she makes to her husband who serves to silence her power prevents her from transcending the mystique, which is what one would normally expect from a witch. Indeed, if magic is what makes Samantha so strong and unique, it is also, historically, the case of the witch. As Mona Chollet tells us, if the witch has been demonized through the ages, it's because she is perceived as the uncontrollable woman who lives alone and casts spells, supplies potions, cares for the sick or injured, or helps women give birth.<sup>5</sup> This is what makes the witch a symbol for the victims of patriarchal oppression and this is also why feminist groups, but also more generally oppressed groups, claim the symbolic power of the witch.

The vast majority of accusations of witchcraft can be linked to a desire for emancipation, whether it was the desire to live alone or to have control over one's life and over one's own body. Sylvia Federici illustrates this by linking witch hunts to the arrival of capitalism in England. She explains that the arrival of the enclosures, that is to say the redefinition of the lands by the richest, led to the multiplication of beggars. Among these beggars were mainly widows who, due to the change in laws, found themselves without money and unable to survive on their own: "In other words, women were charged with witchcraft because the restructuring of rural Europe at the dawn of capitalism destroyed their means of livelihood and the basis of their social power, leaving

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<sup>5</sup> Mona Chollet, *Sorcières, la puissance invaincue des femmes* (Paris : Zones (La découverte), 2018), 17.

them with no resort but dependence on the charity of the better-off."<sup>6</sup> This situation feeds in these widows' anger and resentment that some will associate with the wickedness of the witch. Even more, old women were more persecuted because they represented the bridge between the old conception of the world - which saw the human being an integral part of nature - and the new one, inherited from capitalism and which sees the man as a production tool. The role of guardians of memory from which these women inherited placed them as threats to the new world order since "elderly women were the ones who remembered the promises made, the faith betrayed, the extent of property ... the customary agreements, and who was responsible for violating them."<sup>7</sup> They had to be silenced, one way or another.

The accusations of witchcraft were also closely linked to female sexuality, which they strongly condemned. Accused of infanticide, fornication or even prostitution, the witches were also women who opposed the capitalist conception of femininity and sexuality of women, a conception that greatly recalls that of the mystical feminine: "sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination to the male world, accepting as natural the confinement to a sphere of activities that in capitalism has been completely devalued."<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, the witch is a strong feminist symbol because she represents not only the persecuted woman, but also the women freed from all limitations and overall domination by the omnipotence that her powers give her. This is reflected, among other things, by the phallic imagery of the broom, a common household item and reclaimed as a symbol of sexual liberation through the witches' control. It is also reflected by the image of the old crone, a symbol of the aging female body freed from dictates of beauty. These two images, once assumed, are a way for feminists to assert themselves simply as women. Thus, if the witch is demonized, it is first and foremost because she is feared, independent, and because she can accomplish exploits that are inaccessible to ordinary people.

In *Bewitched*, Samantha's magic allows her to influence and affect the world around her as she pleases. By a simple twitch of the nose, she can get

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<sup>6</sup> Sylvia Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2018), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Sylvia Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women*, 32.

<sup>8</sup> Sylvia Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women*, 32.

rid of boring domestic tasks such as doing the dishes or cleaning the house, she can make things appear or disappear at will and can even transform her husband's appearance. Truly omnipotent, Samantha, being a witch, finds herself to be superior in many ways to her husband: there is nothing she can't do, she is much older than him, she is also well-traveled while Darrin hardly ever left America, and this superiority is precisely why the use of magic is forbidden when it is not put to use at the husband's service. Indeed, in the Stephen's household few exceptions are tolerated regarding the use of Samantha's powers: as long as magic is performed in the domestic sphere, it is accepted, even though frowned upon. If Samantha wishes to use her powers outside of the limits of the home, their use has to be approved by the husband or they must be explicitly used to help him because in *magicoms* such as *Bewitched*,

seemingly normal-looking female characters possessed magical powers which men begged them not to use; if women did use them, their powers had to be confined to the private sphere. Whenever women used these powers outside the home, in the public sphere, the male world was turned completely upside down. Business simply could not be conducted as usual, and logic and rationality were often overthrown and rendered useless. Men were made impotent by these powers, and the husbands ... of such women were stripped of their male authority and made to look foolish and incompetent in front of their male superiors.<sup>9</sup>

This use of magic the service of man is another way of reinforcing the power of the feminine mystique: the role of the woman, as magical and powerful as she might be, is to take care of her house and of her husband. The home is her kingdom in which she can do as she pleases so long as it doesn't interfere with the outside world. Relegating the witch to the confines of the house is way to neutralize her or even harness her power in order to submit it to men. It's precisely because she's scary and superior to her husband that Samantha has to promise not to use her magic, which amounts to her denying, at least in appearance, her potential.

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<sup>9</sup> Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Book, 1994), 126.

However, the similarity between Samantha and the American housewives doesn't stop there. *Bewitched* also replicates the relational schema between the housewives and their mothers for the relationship between Samantha and her mother Endora is, most of the time, tense – to say the least. The only difference between the mother-daughter relationship portrayed in *Bewitched* and the one described in *The Feminine Mystique* is that Endora, contrary to the 1940's American housewives, is not unhappy and miserable. This can be explained by the fact that she is impervious to the entrapments of the feminine mystique due to her being a witch. She then appears as a fully emancipated woman: divorced from Samantha's father – or at the very least, single – always travelling and enjoying life at its fullest. She also isn't the type to stop herself from using her magic whenever she sees fit. Resolutely feminist, Endora will not hesitate, for example, to force men to experience the symptoms of pregnancy in order to make them see what their wives are going through every day. Even though Endora is not in the same position of submission as the mothers described by Friedan, she nevertheless borrows their discourse of disappointment since she openly and repeatedly denounces her daughter's marriage to a mortal. For Endora, this union is the symbol of a submission she can't understand, and this is why the mother and the daughter are arguing most of the time: both represent what the other does not want to become.

Thus, Samantha has, in almost all respects, the appearance of a typical housewife. Not only does she choose to deny her potential or submit it to the whims of her husband, she also remains deaf to the grievances of her mother. This resemblance between the viewers and Samantha is part of the process of identification at work in the series and contributes to making the witch a viable model of emancipation for the housewives at the time.

### **The Witch Within**

In order to fully grasp the importance of Samantha's influence on housewives at the time, it is important to look carefully at how this identification process works. In the series, there are three recurring female characters, which are Samantha, Endora, and Gladys Kravitz – Samantha's nosy neighbor, a pathetic and comical character, stuck in a loveless marriage with her husband

Abner. When placed along an axis, these three characters represent three distinctive types of women, made of two “extremes” (Endora and Gladys Kravitz) and a more nuanced character represented by Samantha. Of course, Endora is the fully emancipated woman while Gladys Kravitz is the middle-aged frustrated housewife, prisoner to the feminine mystique. When thinking about this schematization of the female characters, one question comes to mind: why do women identify more with Samantha than with Gladys Kravitz whose life seems to be way more similar to theirs? Besides the obvious considerations of the diegetic importance of Samantha – naturally much more present than Mrs. Kravitz – the answer to this question lies in the representation of the characters.

In truth, the two older women are represented in a more grotesque way than Samantha. On that matter, Susan J. Douglas argues that “with her overly bouffant, bright red hairdos, two-inch-long [sic] false eyelashes, and thick eyeliner that shot up at a forty-five-degree angle to her eyes, Endora made gestures of femininity that were exaggerated, like a Mardi Gras mask. ... The other grotesque female character is the baggy-faced, chinless, relentlessly nosy neighbor Mrs. Kravitz”<sup>10</sup> Thus, no viewer can identify with these women straight out of the world of caricature, a fact that does not prevent viewers from enjoying them anyway. They liked Endora’s “dismissive assessment of Darrin as an impotent doofus, took great delights in her outrageous transgressions, and in her unmovable loyalty to Samantha”<sup>11</sup> whilst they still enjoyed Gladys Kravitz, mostly because of her comical potential. Facing these two extreme – albeit enjoyable but not all-together desirable – options, viewers are left to identify with Samantha. Women will then admire her: they will want to be this witch who seems to be able to so effortlessly balance the multiple natures that oppose her, that of a wife and mother, and mostly that of a woman.

In other words, it is precisely because she is not scary and does not go to extremes that the character of Samantha speaks to women: she looks like them. However, just because she is moderate does not mean that she is not emancipated. Walter Metz, in his book *Bewitched*, explains that when analyzed episode by episode, it is easy to see the show as a glorification of patriarchy

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<sup>10</sup> Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 132.

<sup>11</sup> Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 132.

since at the end, everything is back to normal, that is to say that the rupture of the initial balance caused by Samantha disobeying and using magic is repaired: Samantha becomes obedient again and authority of the husband is restored. However, "Samantha's rupture of Darrin's patriarchal control is seen to forever continue, being temporarily resolved in one episode but then immediately reactivated in the first minutes of the next."<sup>12</sup> Thus, the emancipation of Samantha, if not immediately visible, is still very present and is manifested by the use of her magic, which expresses a desire for freedom on the part of the witch, but which but also make her an active agent in the world.

This emancipation is also seen through the fact that Samantha *chose* her life. She made the conscious choice of refusing to use magic and to be obedient to her husband. This promise of submission is, however, quite contradictory because she does not surrender by necessity, but by choice. This transforms her act of surrender into an act of self-determination. This might have been hard to see for earlier feminist critics of *Bewitched* because

to love fully, one must be able to surrender – to give up control. If we are to know love, then we cannot escape the practice of surrender. In patriarchal culture women who love men take a risk that our willingness to surrender may create a space of vulnerability where we can be wounded, violated. This is why there was such a critique of romantic love in early radical feminist discussions and why it was believed that it was difficult for any woman to fully realize feminist practice in a heterosexual relationship.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, it remains a way for Samantha to manifest her emancipation, especially since her submission is not really definite: she promises to stop using her powers, not to get rid of them. If the situation deteriorates, she can always use magic to save the day or to punish her husband, should he deserve it.

One might wonder what motivates the decision to represent Samantha's emancipation in such a subtle way when it would have been easy to represent her as a potential Endora. Furthermore, if she is to serve as a model

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Metz, *Bewitched*, (Detroit : Wayne State University Press, 2007), 133.

<sup>13</sup> Bell Hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class In the Movies*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 21.



for emancipation, should it not be a more explicit and clear one? Admittedly, such a strategy would have the merit of clearly announcing its intentions but would hardly have had the desired effect. To understand the forces at play, it is necessary to come back to Friedan for a brief moment. In *The Feminine Mystique*, she recalls that when she was writing for women's magazines, one of the imperatives she had to comply with was that women should be able to identify with the character. She adds that at the beginning of the 1960s, a study found that women under thirty-five were unable to identify with the character of a career woman but that they could, on the other hand, sympathize and react to the plight of a paralyzed young man. Thus, Friedan writes that in order to speak directly to women, it is better to create characters who look like housewives, but are not really one: "You could sometimes get away with writing about a woman who was not really a housewife, if you made her *sound* like a housewife."<sup>14</sup> Ironically, this is one of the critics received by Friedan about her book: her sometimes too blunt posture had shocked some women who did not like that their life choices seemed to be questioned by the author, as explains Gail Collins in her introduction of the most recent edition of *The Feminine Mystique*. However, in *Bewitched*, no viewer is fooled since if Samantha seems submissive, each episode proves to us that in reality, it is she who dominates. Using her magic outside of her established codes of conduct serves as a plot point for all episodes, but it conversely makes Samantha the only one who has the power to resolve the situation, which makes her not a typical housewife, but a woman who *has the appearance* of a housewife.

Nevertheless, in order to speak to women of the time it was necessary to tread carefully, which the creators of *Bewitched* understood. Indeed, each episode is punctuated by small acts of rebellion on the part of Samantha who, if they seem very innocent because tolerated or ignored by Darrin, speak to women. Take for example the well-known sequence from the first episode where Samantha tries to prepare her husband's breakfast: unable to do this with mortal techniques, she resigned herself, almost reluctantly, to use magic. The result: what would have taken several minutes to prepare is done in a few seconds. On that matter, Susan J. Douglas argues that "it is hard to imagine a woman watching who did not identify with the fantasy of cleaning the kitchen

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<sup>14</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 47.

or preparing dinner just by twitching her nose."<sup>15</sup> Thus, to see Samantha refuse to use magic when it would make her life easier shocks viewers - both those of the time and more contemporary viewers - and all of them say they would like to be in her place. For them, such an attitude amounts to spoiling one's potential, which subtly reminds them of their condition and might inspire them to change.

Such a conclusion may seem far-fetched. Indeed, how can a TV series have so much power among an entire group of people? Because numerous studies, notably those of Jennifer L. Barnes, show that the fictional characters with whom we identify are perceived by our brain as real friends. This is what we call parasocial relationships: "the term parasocial relationship has been defined as a one-sided relationship formed with a fictional character or real-world celebrity via the consumption of media."<sup>16</sup> Studies also show that these relationships have the same benefits for our brain as real relationships. However, these relationships need to be nurtured and there are multiple strategies for doing this: "individuals engaged in parasocial relationships may talk to the character ..., daydream about the character ..., or, in the case of fanfiction writers, write elaborately imagined stories in which the individual and the beloved character(s) interact."<sup>17</sup> All of these strategies show a certain commitment on the part of viewers to the object of fiction that they consume and guarantees an in-depth analysis or even a decoding of the text. This ensures or at least asserts that, contrary to what one might think, viewers of so-called popular culture think about and interact as much with the cultural object as if it were more "serious" one.

It is all the truer that films (and by extension TV series) almost always assume an educational role in the lives of people who watch them (whether or not it is the avowed goal of creation). At least that is what the feminist critic Bell Hooks thinks when she asserts that it is by their fictionality that

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<sup>15</sup> Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 130.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer L. Barnes, "Imaginary Engagement, Real-World Effects: Fiction, Emotion and Social Cognition," *Review of General Psychology*, vol.22, n°2, (2018), 130.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer L. Barnes, "Imaginary Engagement, Real-World Effects: Fiction, Emotion and Social Cognition," 130.

these objects allow an incursion into a universe different from ours: “movies remain the perfect vehicle for the introduction of certain ritual rites of passage that come to stand for the quintessential experience of border crossing for everyone who wants to take a look at difference and the different without having to experientially engage ‘the other’.”<sup>18</sup> This incursion into “the other” is thus completely safe since one engages with this universe without risking really doing it: watching a film or series, or reading a work of fiction is a bit like living through a proxy. More so, Jeanette Winterson argues that “strong texts work along the borders of our mind and alter what already exists. They could not do this if they merely reflected what already exists.”<sup>19</sup> By being put in front of this witch character who seems to live the perfect life, viewers thus reflect on their own condition, even after the television is turned off and they return to their own lives of submission.

Samantha therefore appears as an emancipated housewife, but in a “moderate” way since this emancipation is not radical: rather, it’s noticeable in the balance that Samantha seems to maintain between her life as a woman and her life as a witch, a balance which is explained by the fact that being a housewife is her choice. As a housewife she is of course submissive, but it is not a violent submission since it is done voluntarily, and especially since her witch powers remain a reliable means of escaping and balancing the scales. Samantha is the personification of a true reconciliation of the ideals of the liberated woman and the housewife, which speaks to the viewers who identify with her; partly because they are forced to do so and partly because Samantha represents an ideal, a model to aspire to. In Samantha women have certainly found a friend, but above all they found a mirror which, if it reflects back to them what they are, also shows them what they can be.

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<sup>18</sup> Bell Hooks, *Reel to Real*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 21.

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« *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* » :  
*érotisme, kitsch et sorcellerie chez Alain Robbe-Grillet*

TILL R. KUHNLE\*

**Abstract: “Successive Slidings of Pleasure”: Eroticism, Kitsch and Witchcraft in Alain Robbe-Grillet’s Work.** According to Alain Robbe-Grillet, his movie *Successive Slidings of Pleasure* (1974) has been directly influenced by the essay *Satanism and Witchcraft* (French original: 1862) of the romantic historian Jules Michelet and also by the reading of this book by Roland Barthes in the sense of a new criticism. In the same sense, we propose here a comparative study of our corpus, based on the idea of a particular archaic universe of magical practice, shamanism and witchcraft as it is described by Hans Peter Duerr: “The ‘dream place’ is everywhere and nowhere, just like the ‘dreamtime’ is always and never. You might say that the term ‘dream place’ does not refer to any particular place and the way to get to it is to get *nowhere*.” (*Dreamtime*, 1987; German original: 1978). Despite its rationality, modern civilization is mainly based on an irrational principle: the commodity fetishism (Marx). Thus in modern societies you can find a sliding eroticism of fetishism, now in the Freudian sense of the term (cf. Jean Baudrillard), that may transform every object into an object of desire, with the consequence that even the human body enters as a “fetish” into sexual relationship. In his works, Robbe-Grillet reproduces this universe by restituting to this fetishism its magic appearance throughout kitsch (representing anti-nature) and pornography in the “dream place” called cinema. The “generator” in *Successive Slidings of Pleasure* is the perfect female beauty of the seventies, associated to that of a witch. A similar effect produced by the woman’s body can be found, according to the “new critic” Roland Barthes and the “new novelist” Robbe-Grillet, in the work of Jules Michelet.

**Keywords:** Fetishism, commodity fetishism, cinema, witchcraft, kitsch, eroticism, pornography, sterility, anti-nature.

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En 1974, Alain Robbe-Grillet sort son film *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* qui fait scandale et sera interdit en salle dans de nombreux pays. Selon Catherine Robbe-Grillet, son mari voulait tourner ce film autour de l'actrice Anicée Alvina, une jeune femme en lutte ouverte avec les institutions.<sup>1</sup> Il s'agissait d'une production *low cost*, et Alain Robbe-Grillet a mis toute son ambition à ne pas dépasser le budget de 100000 dollars, afin de garder toute sa liberté de créateur.

Effaçant les limites entre le rêve et la réalité et faisant émerger les scènes érotiques, les images s'enchaînent comme sous un coup de baguette magique et créent un espace onirique. L'intrigue de ce film intrigant est vite racontée puisque son fil se perd à travers de nombreux flashbacks et associations. Après le générique qui est entrecoupé de séquences avec des images diverses – de deux femmes, de scènes de captivité, d'œufs mélangés à un liquide rouge (sang, sirop, peinture... ?), de traces rouges d'une main sur fond blanc, d'une voiture de police américaine traversant Paris, de gros plans des acteurs masculins, d'une femme nue disparaissant derrière un feu, de mannequins, de scènes érotiques entre deux femmes, etc. – et des sons en off – sirènes de police, coups de mitraillettes et coups de fouet –, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* débute sur un inspecteur qui découvre dans un appartement vide la jeune Alice (Anicée Alvina, alors 21 ans), présentée comme étant encore mineure, puis dans la chambre de cette dernière, sur un lit de fer, Nora (Olga George-Picot, alors 34 ans), apparemment assassinée avec une paire de ciseaux. Ensuite, l'inspecteur (Jean-Louis Trintignant) et le magistrat instructeur (Michel Lonsdale) se mettent à la reconstitution du crime pendant que l'accusée reste en garde à vue dans une prison austère aux murs blancs qui est gérée par des religieuses impliquées dans une série de rituels pervers. Certaines parmi elles, en revanche, seront perverties, le long film, par leur jeune prisonnière qui dit d'elle-même : « j'ai un pouvoir magique : il suffirait que je prononce à voix haute une phrase qui te condamne à mort. »<sup>2</sup> La caméra suit les tentatives de restitution qui ne débouchent que sur une suite de scènes dont aucune ne contribue à élucider

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<sup>1</sup> « Préface » de Catherine Robbe-Grillet dans le « bonus » du DVD *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, édité dans *Alain Robbe-Grillet – Récits cinématographiques – Coffret 9 DVD*, 2013. Par la suite, nous nous référons à Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir. Ciné-roman* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974), qui suit les plans du film.

<sup>2</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements*, 54.

le mystère, dans la mesure où le film se refuse à toute narration linéaire. À tour de rôle, ce sont les instances juridiques et religieuses représentées par le magistrat et par un prêtre (Jean Martin) qui ne savent pas se défendre contre l'enchantement qu'exerce la meurtrière présumée. Désormais aucun fait ne s'avère établi à coup sûr, même pas la mort de Nora : au cours de l'enquête cette-dernière réapparaît dans la personne de l'avocate pour participer à des installations SM avec sa meurtrière. Une bouteille – au goulot cassé ou intacte, parfois remplie d'un liquide rouge – et des verres cassés constituent le leitmotiv du film (« Le thème du verre cassé »<sup>3</sup>). À la fin, lors d'une séance de SM avec Alice, Nora attachée au lit de fer est tuée par accident avec un débris de verre ; Alice finit par enfoncer une paire de ciseaux dans la poitrine de son amie.

Le film gagne une dimension onirique surtout par l'utilisation de la *voix off* qui est poussée à son extrême en doublant les dialogues de manière que les locuteurs ne paraissent pas appartenir à l'espace diégétique de la séquence en question. Force est pourtant de constater avec Dominique Château et François Jost que, malgré tout, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* « n'est pas dépourvu de diégèse – ou du moins d'effets diégétiques. »<sup>4</sup> Bien plus : Robbe-Grillet « utilise souvent des séquences narratives correctement formées du point de vue de la grammaire du récit. »<sup>5</sup> Les séquences paraissent surgir d'un coup de bâton magique afin de miner toute instance narrative, dont des personnages comme le détective dans le roman *Les Gommages* ou l'inspecteur dans *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* sont à la fois les figures allégoriques et la parodie.

Comme les autres films d'Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* place le spectateur dans un univers où règne le « temps du rêve » (*Traumzeit*). Nous proposons ici cette notion que l'ethnologue allemand Hans Peter Duerr a forgée dans son essai éponyme sur les pratiques situées à la limite entre le monde sauvage et la civilisation, à savoir la magie, le shamanisme et la sorcellerie, puisqu'elle nous permet de saisir mieux l'effet produit par le film d'Alain Robbe-Grillet :

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<sup>3</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements*, 62.

<sup>4</sup> Dominique Château et François Jost, *Nouveau Cinéma, nouvelle sémiologie. Essai d'analyse des films d'Alain Robbe-Grillet* (Paris : 10/18, 1979), 117.

<sup>5</sup> Dominique Château et François Jost, *Nouveau Cinéma, nouvelle sémiologie*, 117.



Ce qui se produit dans le temps du rêve [*Traumzeit*], ne s'est jamais produit, et ne se produira jamais. Ou pour l'exprimer plus précisément : le temps du rêve [*Traumzeit*] signifie pour la perception une perspective, dans laquelle un événement est ce qu'il est, sans tenir compte du moment temporel auquel ce dernier puisse se situer.<sup>6</sup>

Ce rapprochement d'un livre culte de l'Allemagne des années 1980 pourrait paraître arbitraire si Alain Robbe-Grillet n'avait pas déclaré lui-même, dans *Angélique où l'enchantement*, que *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* représentait « une sorte d'adaptation (très libre, on s'en doute) de *La Sorcière* – ouvrage majeur et nettement féministe lui-même, écrit par Jules Michelet un siècle auparavant – ou, pour être plus exact, de la lecture qu'en faisait Roland Barthes. »<sup>7</sup> Certes, le nouveau romancier cinéaste n'a pas connu l'œuvre de Duerr, bien qu'il fût familier avec les travaux de Mircea Eliade, un des maîtres de l'ethnologue allemand. Toutefois, la notion de *Traumzeit* peut servir de point de départ heuristique pour analyser l'esthétique du film *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* dans la perspective d'une analogie entre les pratiques magiques et le fonctionnement de la civilisation moderne, analogie qui remonte à la théorie du fétichisme de la marchandise établie par Marx, puis développée par de nombreux penseurs marxistes ou marxisants. Il s'agit de montrer que Robbe-Grillet transpose l'image romantique de la sorcière et des pratiques magiques en celle d'une femme fétiche qui structure une chronotopie particulière. Celle-ci met *en abyme* l'art cinématographique en évoquant le temps de rêve (*Traumzeit*) d'un univers magique.

À l'instar du nouveau roman de Robbe-Grillet, les choses dans *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* cessent d'être des attributs : au moment où elles sont lues comme des indices, leur valeur sémiologique s'efface comme s'efface la certitude de leur identité, à l'instar de celle de la bouteille au goulot brisée, puis la distinction entre corps humain et objet est abolie à travers des manipulations

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<sup>6</sup> Hans Peter Duerr, *Traumzeit. Über die Grenze zwischen Wildnis und Zivilisation* (Frankfurt a. M. : Suhrkamp, collection « edition NF », 1985), 191 : « Was sich in der Traumzeit ereignet, ereignet sich nie, und es wird sich nie ereignen. Oder, um es genauer auszudrücken: Traumzeit bedeutet de Perspektive der Wahrnehmung, in welcher ein Ereignis ist, was es ist, ohne Beachtung des Zeitpunktes, an dem es sich befinden mag ».

<sup>7</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Angélique ou l'enchantement* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), 206.

sadomasochistes sur des mannequins. Le statut du corps de la femme en particulier, que le film *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* cherche à transmettre, devient manifeste à travers le commentaire donné dans le ciné-roman éponyme sur la séquence montrant Nora assassinée :

Cette image doit être belle dans son horreur : les soucis d'esthétique priment absolument sur le réalisme ; la posture du corps, l'arrangement de la blessure, tout doit être parfaitement apprêté, sophistiqué même.<sup>8</sup>

Le corps de la femme est transformé en fétiche, objet magique d'un désir détourné. Jean Baudrillard dénonce un tel objet-femme comme étant « déstructuré » puisque : « Cette femme n'est plus une femme, mais sexe, seins, ventre, cuisses, voix ou visage : ceci ou cela de préférence. À partir de là, elle est 'objet', constituant une série dont le désir inventorie les différents termes, dont le signifié réel n'est plus du tout la personne aimée, mais le sujet lui-même dans sa subjectivité narcissique [...]. »<sup>9</sup> *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* entraîne dans ce tourbillon de la fétichisation des objets, qui vont alors développer chez le spectateur le sentiment d'une inquiétante étrangeté dans la mesure où, d'une séquence à l'autre, même leur identité est mise en question. Et envoûtée par Alice, Nora (l'avocate) vit sa propre fétichisation en tant qu'objet dans un monde constitué d'objets dont la seule fonction est de capter le spectateur dans sa subjectivité narcissique. En même temps, on peut voir dans *Glissement progressifs du plaisir* une réponse à la pudibonderie de la culture populaire américaine. N'oublions pas que les années 1970 sont celles d'*Emmanuelle* et d'*Histoire d'O* qui mettent en scène les corps immaculés de femmes nues, tout en attirant l'œil sur leur sexe poilu – en quelque sorte le logo de la nouvelle libération sexuelle, mais aussi d'une sexualisation de la société. Par ailleurs, un an après la sortie de *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, Robbe-Grillet fera appel à Sylvia Kristel « pour la plastique »<sup>10</sup> afin de jouer aux côtés d'Anicée Alvina dans *Jeu avec le feu*. Par ailleurs, c'est le moment

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<sup>8</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 35 sq.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Le Système des objets* (Paris : Gallimard, collection « Tel », 1978 [1968]), 141.

<sup>10</sup> « Adieu 'Emmanuelle'. Le cancer emporte Sylvia Kristel à 60 ans, star malgré elle du 'porno soft' », article non signé, paru le 19 octobre 2012 dans *Le Temps* pour commémorer l'actrice Sylvia Kristel, reproduit sous <https://www.letemps.ch/culture/adieu-emmanuelle> (dernière consultation: 01 janvier 2020).

où les « Trente glorieuses » s'apprêtent à s'effacer avec les « frêles romantiques sylphides » mises en scènes par David Hamilton. Bien que leurs contours soient dilués sous l'effet du filtre flou, elles obéissent, selon Robbe-Grillet, au même canon corporel que les « sportives aux seins de fer de Leni Riefenstahl. »<sup>11</sup> Tout le long de son œuvre produite depuis les années 60, Alain Robbe-Grillet fait référence à ce canon d'une « beauté fétiche » qui, selon Baudrillard, « est Anti-Nature même, liée à la stéréotypie générale des modèles de beauté, au vertige perfectionniste et au narcissisme. »<sup>12</sup> Vues de près, toutes les représentations – ou faut-il dire incarnations ? – de femmes chez Robbe-Grillet vont de pair avec une fétichisation de leur corps les faisant échapper aux lois de la nature et notamment à l'emprise du temps. Ainsi Robbe-Grillet écrit-t-il dans *Angélique ou l'enchantement* :

À l'empire immense de la ride (empire des signes du déclin, de la mort qui vient et s'installe en nous peu à peu, à notre insu, du poids sur nous de toutes les fatalités trop humaines) s'oppose ici le royaume du lisse, de l'inentamé, vierge et immarcescible. La ride, en un mot, serait la garantie du bon vieil humanisme, l'inscription du temps sur l'être.<sup>13</sup>

Une fois de plus, l'univers fétichisé de la modernité fait appel au « temps du rêve » (*Traumzeit*), qui seul ne connaît pas de vieillissement. De fait, Alain Robbe-Grillet radicalise ici – une fois de plus – son anti-humanisme proféré depuis ses articles réunis dans *Pour un nouveau roman*, en projetant le spectateur du film *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* dans l'atmosphère stérile d'intérieurs peu meublés ou dans une nature évoquée sous forme de prises de carte postale, comme dans les scènes de plage. C'est comme s'il s'agissait d'une illustration de ce constat de Baudrillard au sujet de la beauté fétiche : « C'est le signe en elle [...] qui fascine, c'est l'artefact qui est objet de désir. »<sup>14</sup> Les signes font du corps un objet parfait, sans aucune valeur symbolique. Robbe-Grillet prétend même avoir profité de l'aspect artificiel des seins d'Olga

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<sup>11</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Angélique ou l'enchantement*, 163.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une Critique politique du signe* (Paris : Gallimard, collection « Tel », 1986 [1972]), 103.

<sup>13</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Angélique ou l'enchantement*, 163.

<sup>14</sup> Baudrillard, *Pour une Critique politique du signe*, 104.

Georges-Picot.<sup>15</sup> Celle-ci aurait eu des implants en plastique. Ce qui va à l'encontre de cet idéal d'une beauté fétiche ce sont les séquences mettant en scène deux manières de représenter le corps mutilé : soit dans une pose bien arrangée et d'une étrange stérilité où la victime, notamment l'actrice aux seins artificiels, paraît transformée en poupée de cire, ou sous forme de mannequin. Ainsi, Alice et Nora 'torturent' un mannequin représentant le corps d'une jeune femme, attaché avec des chaînes à un lit de fer qui se trouve sur une plage : « *Nora l'embrasse [le mannequin] sur la poitrine, lui caresse les lèvres, le cou, l'entre cuisse, etc. ; puis elle prend un fort couteau pliant à large lame recourbée [...] qu'elle fait pénétrer à l'intérieur du sexe dont le triangle a été garni d'une toison pubienne très vraisemblable [...]. Chaque nouvelle entaille laisse une longue marque sanglante [...].* »<sup>16</sup> Dans une autre séquence, Alice – désormais évoquant *Alice in Wonderland*<sup>17</sup> – ouvre un placard dans lequel se trouvent les fragments d'un mannequin, jambes en l'air et la main posée sur le pubis, comme si cette femme en plastique se masturbait. Interrogée par son avocate, Alice commente cette séquence : « Je reconstitue. »<sup>18</sup> En effet, le pubis est en quelque sorte un des générateurs du film qui situe les représentations du sexe de femme au croisement de l'organique et de l'anorganique : une touffe poilue sur un mannequin, les œufs qui s'écoulent sur le mannequin ou sur le pubis de Nora en pose de mannequin, arrosée de sirop rouge sortant d'une bouteille au goulot cassé..., et ainsi de suite. Dans ces scènes rappelant des rites sataniques, le sexe de la femme sert d'interface non seulement entre l'organique et l'anorganique mais aussi entre le réel et cet étrange univers magique d'un monde fétichisé. À un moment donné, après avoir erré « dans des espèces de greniers ou entrepôts, où sont entassés des objets et meubles en grande quantité »<sup>19</sup> (allusion à la prolifération des objets chez Ionesco ?), Alice passe devant un confessionnal, où se trouve un prêtre apparemment

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<sup>15</sup> « Bonus » du DVD *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*.

<sup>16</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 82 sq. Les italiques se trouvent dans le texte de Robbe-Grillet.

<sup>17</sup> Dans un entretien avec Michel Rybalka, Robbe-Grillet souligne que le livre de Lewis Carroll comptait parmi les livres qui l'ont marqué : « Robbe-Grillet commenté par lui-même », *Le Monde*, 22 septembre 1978.

<sup>18</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 143 sq.

<sup>19</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 135.

exaspéré. Elle demande alors à ce dernier : « Ecoutez le flot montant du plaisir que nul amour ne purifie... [...] J'ai dans tout mon corps une mer violente et douce qui coule lentement, hors de moi, hors de moi... Mon père, il faut m'exorciser. »<sup>20</sup> Ce qu'elle demande, c'est d'être délivrée de l'univers immuable où règne ce « temps du rêve » (*Traumzeit*) par un univers d'objets qui, transformés en fétiches, ont perdu tout « rapport d'ustensilité » (Heidegger : *Zeugzusammenhang*)<sup>21</sup> qui renvoie à un être-au-monde. Mais, se sentant trop las, le prêtre refuse de l'exorciser, alors qu'elle ne demande que le retour au « temps de l'état de veille » permettant l'assouvissement du plaisir, à savoir à la temporalité du récit, et cela au moyen d'une pratique qui remonte à l'époque des procès en sorcellerie :

Autrefois, vous m'auriez brûlée comme sorcière, après m'avoir longuement enfoncé des aiguilles dans tout le corps pour chercher la marque du diable, cachée toujours aux points les plus secrets, et vous auriez joui de mes hurlements et de mes râles.<sup>22</sup>

De fait, Alice évoque ici le plaisir mâle éprouvé jadis par les tortionnaires. Or, personne n'est délivré des glissements du plaisir, et surtout pas les clients d'une Alice prostituée dont le corps s'est transformé en lieu de passage. Mais la séquence qui montre l'« image de purification par le feu : Alice livrée aux flammes ; son visage est immobile, serein, vaguement extatique »,<sup>23</sup> ne reste qu'une vision, car les flammes ne portent pas atteinte au corps de la fille restée derrière elles comme derrière un rideau de gaze.

Initialement, le film devait s'intituler *Déplacements progressifs du désir*, mais ce titre a été abandonné pour ses résonnances trop freudiennes, sur lesquelles ironise d'ailleurs Alice lors des interrogatoires.<sup>24</sup> Avec son film

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<sup>20</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 136 sq.

<sup>21</sup> C'est Robbe-Grillet lui-même qui utilise la terminologie heideggérienne : *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1963), 53. Cf. Till R. Kuhnle, « D'une épave de moissonneuse à l'épiphanie : *La Bataille de Pharsale* de Claude Simon », in *De l'Écriture et des fragments. Fragmentation et sciences humaines*, Peter Schnyder et Frédérique Toudoire-Surlapierre éd. (Paris : Garnier, collection « Classiques », 2016), 410-421.

<sup>22</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 137.

<sup>23</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 137.

<sup>24</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 49.

en revanche, Robbe-Grillet prétend vouloir mettre en scène la femme sans qu'aucun discours idéologique n'en détourne l'image. Ainsi explique-t-il, dans son recueil de fragments autobiographiques *Angélique ou l'enchantement* : « Cela devenait, en effet, peu supportable de n'avoir éternellement que Freud, ou D.H. Lawrence, ou Sade, ou Mahomet (ou Diderot) pour nous expliquer ce que c'est qu'une femme. »<sup>25</sup> Robbe-Grillet s'interdit toute parole, tout geste qui pourrait rationaliser la narration du film. Et avec les personnages masculins arrive ce qui arrive avec les objets qui perdent leur fonction d'indices sous le glissement du sens intervenant au travers des constellations. Ainsi le magistrat et le prêtre dans *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* ne sont plus les garants de l'autorité – ce qui suggère une explication freudienne. Au contraire, tombés sous l'emprise de cette fille qui se transforme en piège éblouissant, les détracteurs perdent leur pouvoir sur celle-ci. En effet, la *LOI* au nom de laquelle ces derniers agissent n'est qu'un instrument pour assouvir leur désir – comme celle au nom de laquelle agissait l'Inquisition décrite par Michelet. *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, en revanche, fait apparaître le cachot comme le lieu d'une mise en scène sur laquelle les tortionnaires finissent par perdre toute emprise dès que leur victime est mise à nu. Alain Robbe-Grillet joue sur les contrastes créés par les couleurs qui dominent chacune des deux sphères évoquées dans le film : dans les scènes autour du meurtre présumé – l'enquête et les interrogatoires –, dominent les couleurs claires d'une intensité artificielle assignant à l'ensemble un aspect stérile ; les scènes du cachot en revanche sont pour la plupart tenues dans un ton tabac. Mais partout les corps des femmes restent intacts dans leur beauté. À un moment donné, Alice inscrit l'empreinte de son corps sur un écran que forment le mur et le sol blancs d'une chambre sans meubles – représentant ainsi le passage du corps vers un espace bidimensionnel :

La jeune fille, toute nue, vue en pied, debout dans un angle (murs et soles immaculés) dépourvu de tout meuble, se peint le devant de son corps lentement avec un très grand pinceau de soie molle qu'elle trempa dans sa cuvette pleine de peinture rouge ; ensuite elle applique son corps, à quatre ou cinq reprises, contre les parois blanches de sa cellule.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Angélique ou l'enchantement*, 209.

<sup>26</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 124.

Or cette technique rappelle celle des *Anthropométries bleues* d'Yves Klein. Mais la signification ici est toute autre : elle sert à *mettre en abyme* le travail du cinéaste qui à son tour fait apparaître le corps de la femme sur l'écran du cinéma. Notons ici que peu avant *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, Claude Simon a sorti *Les corps conducteurs* où il développe un emblème de l'écriture. En effet, *Les Glissements progressifs du plaisir* est aussi un film sur le cinéma, à l'instar de *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, qui voulait rendre justice à l'esthétique d'un cinéma affranchi des impératifs de la littérature.<sup>27</sup> Robbe-Grillet a toujours considéré le cinéma comme un art agonistique, ne transmettant aucun autre message que celui d'être un film. Or son cinéma intègre un grand nombre d'éléments kitsch. Selon Hermann Broch, le kitsch promet l'assouvissement immédiat d'un désir,<sup>28</sup> bien entendu au second degré. Un film comme *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* en revanche refuse ce plaisir, en refusant le récit. Notamment les objets fétiches provenant de cet univers appelé « kitsch » se voient ébranlés dans leur fonction initiale puisqu'ils sont 'entraînés' par la caméra. L'effet qui en résulte fait penser à Kafka écrivant sous l'emprise d'une présentation cinématographique : « Le cinéma prête aux objets qu'il montre l'inquiétude de son mouvement. »<sup>29</sup> Mais le kitsch présente ici encore un autre aspect de l'univers de Robbe-Grillet : l'antinature par excellence dans laquelle il veut plonger le spectateur.

Avançons encore vers un autre rapprochement osé : pour Elie Faure, le grand défi du cinéma, c'est de « réaliser un drame cinéplastique – et rien que cinéplastique – où l'action n'illustre pas une fiction sentimentale ou une intention moralisante, mais fait un tout monumental, projetant du dedans [...] sa vision propre de l'objet. »<sup>30</sup> Les scènes évoquant les *Anthropométries bleues* d'Yves Klein suggèrent en effet la création d'une sculpture dans un espace bidimensionnel

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<sup>27</sup> Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification du cinéma* (Paris, Klincksieck, 2003), 62.

<sup>28</sup> Hermann Broch « Einige Bemerkungen zum Problem des Kitsches », in *Schriften zur Literatur 2*. (= *Kommentierte Werkausgabe IX.2*), éd. P.M. Lützel (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1975), 158-173.

<sup>29</sup> Franz Kafka, « Le cinéma prête aux objets qu'il montre l'inquiétude de son mouvement... (1911) », in *Le Cinéma : naissance d'un art. 1895-1920*, Daniel Banda et José Moure éd. (Paris : Flammarion, collection « Champs arts », 2008), 285-287, 286.

<sup>30</sup> Elie Faure, « Charlot », in *De la cinéplastique à son destin social (1921-1937)* (Paris : Éditions d'Histoire et d'Art, Librairie Plon, 1953) 47-59, 51.

en situant une suite d'images et d'actions dans un décor sobre et minimaliste. On est tenté de suivre Deleuze dans sa lecture presque kantienne en distinguant dans les films et les écrits théoriques de Robbe-Grillet une tendance du cinéma de son temps à ne laisser « émerger que des situations optiques et sonores pures, des opsignes et des sonsignes. »<sup>31</sup> Mais l'erreur du philosophe, qui part de la polémique menée par le nouveau romancier contre *La Nausée* de Sartre,<sup>32</sup> réside dans le fait qu'il contourne les productions érotiques de Robbe-Grillet. Ce dernier était loin de vouloir détruire l'effet primaire des scènes à caractère pornographique, à savoir celui d'exciter les sens. Il suffit de lire *Angélique ou l'enchantement* ou les entretiens recueillis dans *The Erotic Dream Machine: Interviews With Alain Robbe-Grillet on His Films*.<sup>33</sup>

C'est par le biais de l'érotisme que la référence au livre *La Sorcière* de Jules Michelet gagne toute son importance. Ce dernier y développe une image romantique des sorcières et notamment des procès qu'on leur a fait. Vu de près, le livre de Michelet, dont le récit s'arrête sur des nombreuses images « figées », comme les *screen shots* d'un film qui – en montrant « les trop belles sorcières livrées à la torture »<sup>34</sup> – font penser, en effet, au style des romans et des films d'Alain Robbe-Grillet. Citons un exemple tiré de *La Sorcière* :

La femme eut là tant de misères, de coups, de soufflets sonores, qu'elle s'affaissa, défailloit. Sur la froide pierre du seuil, elle se trouva assise, à nu, demi-morte, ne couvrant guère sa chair sanglante que des flots de ses longs cheveux.<sup>35</sup>

Une lecture détaillée montre bien que dans les deux œuvres – *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* et *La Sorcière* – les scènes de sang et d'humiliation sont, en tant que leitmotivs, d'un esthétisme particulier : c'est l'horreur qui finit par

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<sup>31</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2. Images-temps* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1985), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un nouveau roman*, 66.

<sup>33</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, Anthony N. Fragola et Roch C. Smith, *The Erotic Dream Machine: Interviews With Alain Robbe-Grillet on His Films* (Carbondale et al.: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1992).

<sup>34</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Angélique ou l'enchantement*, op. cit., 193.

<sup>35</sup> Jules Michelet, *La Sorcière* (Paris : Collection Hetzel, 1862), 75. Cette édition est reproduite sur archive.org.



céder à la volupté. Autrement dit : ces scènes ont indéniablement un côté érotique qui fait partie intégrante de la stratégie esthétique du film. Chez Michelet, si l'on veut suivre l'argumentation de Roland Barthes, c'est une femme toute réelle qui s'inscrit dans ses travaux : Attenais Mialaret, la seconde épouse de l'historien, « qui ressemblait beaucoup au portrait que Michelet nous donne de la première Sorcière. »<sup>36</sup> Et Roland Barthes continue par évoquer une ambiguïté manifeste chez Michelet, notamment dans son essai *La Sorcière* : « c'est aussi ce qu'il a toujours décrit avec délice : la possession insidieuse, l'insertion progressive dans le secret de la Femme. Les images, dans ce livre même, sont innombrables [...]. Partout domine l'image, non d'une pénétration, métaphore banale de l'érotique ordinaire, mais d'une traversée et d'une installation. »<sup>37</sup> Ces propos font en effet penser à Alain Robbe-Grillet, bien que ce dernier ait recours à la « métaphore banale de l'érotique ordinaire », mais dans le monde fétiche la pénétration s'effectue sur un mannequin, et c'est le mannequin qui paraît se masturber – comme si le passage à l'acte érotique sur le vivant équivalait à un rapprochement de la mort. Une telle lecture de *Glissement progressif du plaisir* suggère du moins la scène sur le cimetière, pendant qu'on entend le bruit de la bêche d'un fossoyeur : « Alice est appuyée en arrière contre une tombe, debout, les jambes légèrement écartées »,<sup>38</sup> et demande à Nora de la caresser. Avec Walter Benjamin, on peut voir dans cette représentation de l'érotisme lesbien un reniement de la nature et une soumission au fétichisme de la marchandise qui finissent par engendrer un culte de la stérilité.<sup>39</sup> Malgré cette stérilité affichée chez Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* est un film tourné « autour » d'une jeune femme bien réelle : Anicée Alvina, dans le rôle d'Alice, cette « sorcière » immaculée d'un monde envoûté par la marchandise, qui par ailleurs se prostitue « comme tout le monde aujourd'hui [Nora]. »<sup>40</sup> Celle-ci attire le regard du voyeur, comme la Sorcière

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<sup>36</sup> Roland Barthes « La Sorcière [Préface au livre éponyme de Michelet, 1959] », in *Œuvres complètes I. 1942-1965*, éd. Éric Marty (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1993), 1250-1259, 1255.

<sup>37</sup> Roland Barthes « La Sorcière », 1255.

<sup>38</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 129.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Benjamin, « Zentralpark », in *Abhandlungen* (= *Gesammelte Schriften I.2*), éd. Rolf Tiedemann & Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 655-690, 661 et 670.

<sup>40</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 72.

(c'est Barthes qui utilise toujours la majuscule dans ce contexte) qui est à l'image même de l'épouse de Michelet. Toutefois, le romancier-cinéaste cherche à se démarquer de l'essai *La Sorcière* :

Dans *La Sorcière*, l'éternelle jolie fille est surtout une victime, que l'on torture à loisir (et par plaisir, évidemment) pour lui faire avouer des forfaits imaginaires ; en vérité, c'est le scandale de sa splendeur trop sensuelle – la beauté du diable – qui excite des bourreaux. Dans *Glissements*, au contraire, sans négliger l'arme candide que représente l'éclat de son corps nu, elle met toute sa volonté, maligne et perverse, à subvertir les raisonnements du magistrat instructeur. Celui-ci voudrait remettre en bon ordre, attribuer un sens à chacune, les diverses pièces à conviction trouvées sur les lieux de l'assassinat. La jeune suspecte, dont il tente ainsi d'établir la culpabilité, s'ingénie dans une direction inverse, à faire glisser sans cesse les significations possibles à la surface des choses, de manière à faire empêcher toute explication globale.<sup>41</sup>

En d'autres termes : Alain Robbe-Grillet cherche à rendre à l'accusée sa force d'envoûtement. Il s'ensuit que pour lui la sorcellerie est la force de la féminité qu'il cherche à libérer en tant que générateur esthétique de ses films et livres. Mais la séduction fait désormais place à un jeu de domination et de soumission, tout cela dans l'univers d'une modernité froide. Certes, on ne va pas pour autant trop loin en appliquant au nouveau romancier ce constat fait par Barthes au sujet de la Sorcière : « c'est en effet que Michelet ne conteste jamais l'efficacité de l'acte magique : il parle des rites de la Sorcière comme de techniques couronnées de succès, rationnellement accomplis, bien qu'irrationnellement conçues. »<sup>42</sup> C'est notamment le caractère répétitif du kitsch et de la pornographie qui s'en porte garant – à l'intérieur d'une ciné-sculpture qui fait échapper ses personnages à la mort, à l'instar des vampires et des fantômes vivant dans l'univers immatériel annoncé par « les douze coups »<sup>43</sup> qui sont évoqués à la fin de *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*.

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<sup>41</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Angélique ou l'enchantement*, 207.

<sup>42</sup> Barthes, « La Sorcière », 1256.

<sup>43</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1961), 172.

En passant vers la terminologie de Duerr, on peut parler de la confirmation du « temps du rêve » (*Traumzeit*) dans une société déterminée par le fétichisme de la marchandise, où le cinéma occupe désormais la place de la magie : la sorcière, au dire de Barthes, « devient professionnelle, c'est-à-dire que le thème bénéfique de la fécondation est ici coupé par le thème maléfique de l'imitation, du mécanique. »<sup>44</sup> Par conséquent, le film *Glissement progressifs du plaisir* se termine sur des effets de coup de baguette magique – « sans souci de continuité narrative – un peu comme dans les bandes dessinées – ni de justification rationnelles par apparition des choses. » Apparemment par accident, lors d'une séance SM, l'avocate est tuée par Alice, qui finit par être trouvée devant le cadavre de son amie « poignardée par les longs ciseaux. »<sup>45</sup> La scène est pourtant tournée « de manière à éviter les boucheries. »<sup>45</sup> Au détective ahuri, il ne reste qu'à constater : « Alors, tout est à recommencer. »<sup>46</sup> La Ponctuation finale du film, en revanche, est marquée par un « Plan large de la plage et des petites vagues successives qui viennent mourir sur le sable lisse. »<sup>47</sup>

Malgré les propos de Robbe-Grillet sur la libération de la féminité, il faut se garder de considérer *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* comme un film révolutionnaire. Si subversion il y a, elle se joue uniquement dans les deux dimensions qu'offre le cinéma. En dehors de la salle du cinéma, c'est la société industrielle qui continue à lui fournir son matériau. Autrement dit, il s'agit ici d'un produit réactionnaire dans la mesure où il assume pleinement le contexte culturel qui lui offre la possibilité de faire scandale. Et accompagnée d'un érotisme affiché devenu une fin en soi, cette étrange inquiétude provoquée par le mouvement des objets n'est-elle pas tout simplement un effet kitsch ?

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<sup>44</sup> Roland Barthes, *Michelet*, in *Œuvres complètes I. 1942-1965*, éd. Éric Marty (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1993), 244-571, 277. Les italiques se trouvent dans le texte de Barthes.

<sup>45</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 147.

<sup>46</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 147.

<sup>47</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 147.

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## *Representations of Witches in the Coming-of-age Subgenre*

CLAUDIA NEGREA\*

**Abstract:** This paper aims to analyze the portrayal of two teenage characters with supernatural powers. Norwegian film *Thelma* by Joachim Trier and American film *The Witch* by Robert Eggers deal with the topic of self-discovery and maturation through the perspective of characters that could be, at some point, identified as witches. Approaching topics like sexual identity or family dynamics, the paper will explore the mechanisms that integrate the two films in the broad horror genre, and will also identify the elements that define them as coming-of-age films. Moreover, the research will focus on analyzing the symbolic level of the two films, determining the specific aspects that incorporate them in the universe of witchcraft. Regarding the coming-of-age subgenre, the suggested directions of analysis will be mainly based on studying the protagonists' evolutionary course by exploring how their journey of self-discovery affects the social and the family dynamics around them.

**Keywords:** coming-of-age, witches, horror, self-discovery, family, sexual identity.

In order to discuss about the specifics, impact and thematical universe of the coming-of-age subgenre, it's important to understand that, unlike the continuous debatable definitions of the Bildungsroman (the literary genre that this film subgenre is the easiest to compare with), film studies have 'settled' upon a clear spectrum of elements which define and validate certain films

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that can be integrated in this category. The chapter *The phantom Bildungsroman* from Marc Redfield's *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the 'Bildungsroman'* focuses on how perspectives on the Bildungsroman have been altered and redefined throughout the history of literary theory:

One would be hard-pressed to find another instance of a genre in which particularity and generality appear to mesh so thoroughly. For since the Bildungsroman narrates the acculturation of a self – the integration of a particular 'I' into the general subjectivity of a community, and, thus, finally, into the universal subjectivity of humanity – the genre can be said to repeat, as its identity or content, its own synthesis of particular instance and general form. [...] It is uncertain whether this genre exists to be described in the first place. Scholarship in this area has turned up one complication after another. Problems begin, appropriately enough, on the level of the signifier itself, since the word 'Bildungsroman,' purportedly the name of a nineteenth-century genre, was nearly unknown before the early twentieth century – its widespread popularity is, in fact, largely a postwar phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the author cites from Robert Musil's *Tagebücher, Aphorismen, Essays und Reden*, identifying and highlighting a rather 'sinuous' conceptualization of the genre:

When one says 'Bildungsroman,' [Wilhelm] Meister comes to mind. The development of a personal *Bildung*. There is, however, also Bildung in what is at once a narrower and a more extensive sense: with every true experience a cultured man educates himself [bildet sich ein geistiger Mensch]. This is the organic plasticity of man. In this sense every novel worthy of the name is a Bildungsroman. The Bildungsroman of a person is a type [Typus] of novel. The Bildungsroman of an idea, that's quite simply the novel per se.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the 'Bildungsroman'* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 38-40.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Musil, *Tagebücher, Aphorismen, Essays und Reden, in Gesammelte Werke*, ed. A. Frise (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1955), 57.

Any conceptual relation between the literary genre and the coming-of-age is merely the result of a more or less abstract perspective on the evolution of the central character. While the term *Bildungsroman* is used in order to reflect a certain realistic dimension (of the main character, first of all) that outcomes from the evolution/involution of the character's cultural/moral values and/or social status, in film, the term coming-of-age is representative for stories that depict the emotional/psychological/physiological transformation of young protagonists that find themselves on a 'journey' to maturation. A more popular term for coming-of-age films, the 'teen film' is widely used especially for Hollywood productions that depict certain aspects of American teenage life through the perspective of more or less 'classical' adolescent issues such as high school relationship dramas, external conflicts with adults, with other teenagers or with different kind of systems. Catherine Driscoll identifies some of the elements that include a teen movie in this category:

There are certainly narrative conventions that help define teen film: the youthfulness of central characters; the content usually centered on young heterosexuality, frequently with a romance plot; intense age-based peer relationships and conflict either within those relationships or with an older generation; the institutional management of adolescence by families, schools, and other institutions; and coming-of-age plots focused on motifs like virginity, graduation, and the makeover.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, these themes and conventions are not to be found only in American teen films, as they are obviously universal issues that concern, one way or another, every filmmaker who wants to approach and explore lives of teenagers. However, we can establish in a more bluntly manner that the straight America teenager from the middle-upper class will face different problems than the homosexual (or sexually confused) eastern European teenager from a disadvantaged environment. Certainly, we should not necessarily discuss about extreme situation of teenage dramas, but it's important to mark a few differences between what a teen film and what a coming-of-age film explore.

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine Driscoll, *Teen Film. A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 2.



Nowadays, some of the more appreciated and discussed coming-of-age films produced in Europe present the struggles of self-discovery and the dramas of teenage or childhood years. For example, French director Céline Sciamma continuously explores the theme of self-acceptance and social integration of children (*Tomboy*, 2011) or teenagers (*Water Lilies*, 2007 and *Girlhood*, 2014) by also putting subthemes like gender identity or sexual orientation into perspective. It is also the case of the more popular, Palm d'Or winning *Blue is the Warmest Color* by Abdellatif Kéchiche, a film that meticulously represents an intense and powerful story of sexual discovery through the perspective of teenager Adèle. Although teen films are widely associated with more superficially represented dramas of American teenagers, independent coming-of-age films mainly focus on more relatable/realistic situations that, unlike teen films, don't generally revolve around humoristic misadventures of their protagonists. For example, *Mean Girls*, the 2004 teen comedy film by Mark Water, satirizes the appearance-obsessed girls, hierarchized friendships and high-school lives of American upper-class teenagers by focusing on group dynamics through the perspective of a once simple and modest teenager. In a not so different manner, indie coming-of-age film *Juno* (2007) directed by Jason Reitman raises the issue of teenage pregnancy also through a sort of dark-humoristic perspective. The spectator is once again initiated into the universe of high school life with all its typical dramas and social interactions, but the stake is obviously different from the moment when Juno has to decide whether to keep the baby or whether to undergo abortion. Even though these differences seem to transpire in big budget films and in independent productions, it's hard to conclude on a strict 'recipe' that applies to one or the other.

The fact that audiences have been introduced to more or less dramatic representations of teenagers' journey of self-discovery doesn't discredit any other perspectives on this subject. Richard Kelly's cult film *Donnie Darko* (2001) or David Lynch's psychological horror *Twin Peaks: Fire walk with me* (1992) – a prequel of the famous *Twin Peaks* series (1990-1991) – are only two examples that explore what seem to be ordinary lives of teenagers by creating a supernatural dimension around their universe. In this perspective, one of this paper's main purposes is to identify the mechanisms used in order to create a supernatural environment or characters when it comes to coming-of-age films and also

to question and to try to explain the reasons of their creation. There are two films that have recently explored two very different types of stories revolving around teenage transformation, growing up, self-discovery and family dynamics. One of them is *Thelma*, Joachim Trier's 2017 supernatural thriller that depicts a young girl's journey of sexual discovery. The other one, Robert Eggers's *The Witch* is a 2015 supernatural horror that also illustrates a teenager's path of self-discovery, in a darker, more frightening manner that is very much sustained by the story's setting (1630s New England).

One of the main questions that initiate discussions around this type of movies is related to the necessity of such representations of teenagers. Why is it important for some filmmakers to illustrate a coming-of-age story through the lens of one's supernatural powers and what made them make this choice? What perspectives are we 'stimulated' to gain when we are faced with characters that we can't really empathize with? We are being introduced to children/teenagers with supernatural powers throughout film history (Brian de Palma's adaptation of Stephen King's *Carrie* or the popular *Sabrina*, the main character of several TV shows, movies and animated series), so that contemporary portrayals of such characters are no longer surprising. However, the nature of the approached themes is representative for this day and age, especially in what Joachim Trier's *Thelma* is concerned. While comparable on some level with *Carrie*'s story and conflicts, *Thelma* establishes a new set of 'ground rules' in order to absorb and reflect, first of all, a very present and powerful theme that's been and continues to be widely debated and analyzed: sexual identity and orientation and how they are perceived or understood by the persons in question and by the society. Although we are in both cases confronted with teenagers who use their telekinetic powers in order to achieve or to obtain something they've been (more or less subconsciously) wishing for, Trier's approach on the matter is more subtle, as one of the film's goal is not to shock (this is not a horror film), but to create an identifiable character whose 'superpower' is merely a metaphor for her struggles in the self-discovery and self-acceptance process.

*Thelma* (Eili Harboe) grows up in a strict, religious family who lives in a somewhat secluded area of Norway. The film opens with a scene that we later connect to the story's ensemble as it represents an important flashback: a young *Thelma* and her father are out hunting in the woods. In a moment of

hesitation, the father points his shotgun towards Thelma's head, but doesn't shoot. We are basically introduced to a very disturbing family dynamic that obviously raises a series of questions because of the revolting image of a grown-up imagining the possibility of brutally killing a child – the displeasing tableau of an innocent character being targeted in this manner can only lead to questioning that innocence. In the present, high school graduate Thelma prepares herself for moving to Oslo to start university. She's a quiet, introverted and demure girl who's facing difficulties with adapting to the university lifestyle. After having had minimum contact with society, Thelma must acclimate to the typical student activities and campus vibration. During her first weeks at the university she starts experiencing what seems to be epileptic seizures that remain medically unexplained. These are shown to be triggered by her new connection with another fellow student named Anja (Kaya Wilkins), a character who gradually brings about Thelma's sexual curiosities, desires and perception of her own sexual identity. As their friendship intensifies, Thelma's romantic feelings are shown as more of a burden on her emotional and psychological wellbeing, especially as Anja represents everything she's not: she's independent, outgoing, has a healthy social life and no problems adapting to the new environment. Her journey of discovering her sexual identity is interspersed with confusion, rejection and doubt in relation to her sexual orientation, as homosexuality is a concept that stands in strong contradiction with her religious upbringing.

Joachim Trier juggles with the explanations for Thelma's sudden seizures, as while the doctors don't seem to identify their medical cause, the girl resorts to elucidating the mystery through alternative methods. After watching different videos that debate and explore the relation between witchcraft and epileptic seizures through the lens of medieval times and superstitions, Thelma begins to make some connections, especially when she finds out about her grandmother's mysterious past. The film doesn't revolve so much on this particular idea as its objective is not to depict aspects associated to witchcraft and all its narrative and conceptual implications. However, the supernatural dimension this film carefully and subtly installs can't be explored without basing some arguments on this particular information. After all, the film never offers a clear explanation for Thelma's seizures. The storyline clearly lets some room for a supernatural layer that's organically

constructed into the film's atmosphere and universe. The fact that Thelma's seizures sometimes end with another character's disappearance would be one of the major key-elements that one can identify as a 'missing piece' from the girl's vague notion of her own powers. Through flashbacks, we are introduced to Thelma's childhood, more specifically to an event that changed her parents' perception on her. While developing a common type of jealousy and frustration because of her parents' focused attention on her baby brother, Thelma manages to make him vanish through what seems to be the power of her own mind. She obviously doesn't remember this episode and doesn't seem to have any recollection of her brother's existence whatsoever. The flashback scenes are also constructed in a linear manner with the baby's disappearance and reappearance in the frozen sea, under a thick layer of ice serving as a climax for this particular storyline. However, the events unfolding in the series of flashbacks are only presented to the spectators, as their purpose is to clarify the aspects concerning Thelma's sudden abnormal symptoms. In fact, most of the film's narrative or aesthetic elements offer a strong metaphorical weight to the story, leaving enough room for interpretation: a YouTube presenter explains that "even the word seizure comes from being seized by supernatural forces, the Gods or the devils, depending on what century we're in"; one of the doctors Thelma visits also tries to pull a less scientific explanation for her seizures by telling her that "The body reacts to something being repressed," a suitable hypothesis taking in consideration the girl's newly discovered and rejected sexual identity and desires. Furthermore, she visits her sick grandmother (of whom she thought to have been dead for a long time) only to find out that she also had the ability of making people disappear, as her husband simply vanished while being on a boat.

Thelma decides to undergo an induced epileptic seizure hoping this would identify the causes of her symptoms and therefore could begin treating them properly. After epilepsy is ruled out and no other medical explanation seems to exist, she discovers that Anja disappeared. The girl's disappearance is also presented through a parallel montage that only 'allows' the viewer to observe the effects of Thelma's strong epileptic seizure on a different person. After making the connections to her grandmother's past and supernatural powers, Thelma returns home to her family feeling frightened and confused.

The family's decision to hide all the information from Thelma, creating a restrictive and ultra-protective environment for her upbringing seem to backfire in the second part of the film where the father starts feeding his daughter certain medication that make her rather passive, sleepy and somehow lethargic. One can immediately make the connection to the state of Thelma's grandmother who's hospitalized in a psychiatric ward in a deep vegetative state. This part of the film represents a major turnover for Thelma's perspective on her own identity and powers as it culminates with her decision to 'eliminate' the father, a person she can no longer perceive as family, but as an immediate danger to her life and freedom. She's ready to confront her domineering father by truly accepting who she is. In her last attempts of praying to God, she's actually addressing her insecurities and desire of being able to be herself and accepted by the ones around her. We can finally see her father bursting into uncontrollable and unstoppable flames while he's on a boat on the deep lake, having no chance of rescuing himself. This event is not only linked to how Thelma's grandmother made her husband disappear, but also to how her father made her burn her own hand as a child, just to see "what hell is like all the time". Thelma's relation to witchcraft is presented in subtle manner, as we can discover and understand her superpowers only through her own perception of the changes she's going through. The fatal consequences of her uncontrollable telekinetic abilities can easily define her as more of an antagonist, an aspect that brings her much closer to what it means to be a witch. "A witch is one who knowingly tries to accomplish something by diabolical means,"<sup>4</sup> explains Jean Bodin in the book *On the demon mania of witches*. Of course, in Thelma's case the diabolical means don't represent actual spells or other consciously done actions, as the girl is unknowingly and unconsciously controlling the disappearances. However, one of the elements that make this a coming-of-age film is also shown through the evolution of Thelma's supernatural abilities, as she willingly kills her father and gives her mother the ability to walk again. If these actions were once controlling her and her environment, now she's finally able to control them and use them consciously in her advantage. She understands that she needs to

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Bodin, *On the Demon Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 45.

eliminate the elements that represent a threat to her or that would eventually confine her, but she also realizes that her powers can be used in beneficial ways, too.

Joachim Trier introduces a symbolic dimension to his story through the presence of crows and snakes, creatures that are invisible for the characters, as they appear only to mark different key-moments from Thelma's evolution. For example, the snake appears at a party where she's unconsciously sitting on a couch, fantasizing about her and Anja kissing. Although the snake has been linked to magic in numerous ways, in this case it's a symbol of transformation as they regularly renew their skin and as Thelma needs to go through a process of rebirth herself. The crows appear before Thelma's first seizure and also when she uses her powers to kill her father. These can be interpreted as omens for bad news and in this case they somehow announce the fatality of an immediate event.

Regardless of the films' obvious realistic approach towards student life and somewhat average teenage problems (conflicts with older family members, difficulties in adapting to the social aspect of university lifestyle), the metaphorical layer manages to transmit the message in a quite shocking manner. The uncomfortable and disturbing image of a daughter so consciously and lucidly killing her own father definitely provokes an initial revolting reaction. However, as the father is carefully and strongly antagonized right from the first scene of the film (the one where he points his shotgun to Thelma's head for a few seconds), the more natural reaction to his death would be one of relief.

Thelma's character evolves in spite of her preconceived notions of right and wrong. Her manifestations in relation to the newly discovered sexual identity and orientation are firstly of reluctance, even rejection. The more initiated (or perhaps just more open to experiences) Anja attempts to introduce Thelma to the realm of sexual knowledge and everything this acceptance would involve. On one hand, this character functions like a supporting initiator that leads or indicates the way for Thelma in her journey of self-discovery. On the other hand, Thelma's character arc needs an apparent inconvenience that pulls her out of her comfort zone, surfacing her inner true self – and this is undoubtedly Anja. At first, Thelma rejects the other girl's advances

and consciously tries to inhibit any urges. However, this attitude only leads to her 'eliminating' Anja who vanishes from her own apartment leaving only a hair stuck in the window.

Evidently, the film must be 'read' in a metaphorical key, as the supernatural is organically intertwined with the realistic dimension of the story. If all the supernatural elements of the film were extracted or inexistent to begin with, the story would be about a young girl who goes off to college where she's confronted for the first time in her life with her own sexual desires. Instead of making her friend disappear, she would just shut her down in order to escape the hypothetical temptations. In the film, Anja disappears as if through magic being 'swallowed' by a window that breaks and that immediately reconstructs itself. Anja's disappearance lasts just as long as Thelma needs to know herself and to acknowledge her powers and ability of being independent. After she escapes the domineering father who would never accept or understand the daughter's life choices and newly discovered identity she can finally return to university where Anja is also present. The film's final scene presents the girls as if they would have finally settled on their relationship status.

*The Witch*, directed by Robert Eggers, raises the issue of teenage transformation in a darker manner, introducing obvious elements of horror and approaching the family dynamics from a much closer perspective. Set in 17<sup>th</sup> century's New England, *The Witch* tells the story of a numerous family: William, Katherine and their five children: young adolescent girl Thomasin (Anya Taylor-Joy), twins Mercy and Jonas, young boy Caleb and a newborn, Samuel. After being banished from their Puritan Colony they build a farm in a secluded area, near a forest. While Thomasin is playing peek-a-boo with Samuel, the baby suddenly vanishes from under her eyes and we are introduced to the depths of the forests where a witch sacrifices the baby in order to create a flying ointment from his remains. The family's official explanation for his disappearance is that it got stolen by a wolf. However, after a while, Thomasin's younger sister reveals her certitude that their brother was actually stolen by a witch that she actually saw, an argument that could be easily interpreted in two ways: she could have really seen the witch as children are sometimes portrayed as being able to see what grown-ups can't or that she wants to raise disputes and tension in a childish manner, because of an active

imagination. After repeatedly accusing Thomasin that she might be the witch responsible for the brother's disappearance, the girl angrily confirms this, most likely in order to silence her sister by scaring her off. However, this episode launches a series of events that revolve around the family's speculations on Thomasin's witchcraft. These are mostly fueled by the second disappearance, as Caleb also vanishes while being with Thomasin in the depths of the woods. This time, the boy is seduced by a witch that apparently puts a strong spell on him before sending him back home. The boy dies after a few days of agony and the family's despair is increasing.

Like in *Thelma*, the family's isolation plays an important role, as the tension intensifies and they seem abandoned from any kind of outside help – divine or human. However, this story doesn't leave any room for interpretation in terms of veracity when it comes to supernatural forces. The presence of witches and of the devil is clearly represented, as we see all these characters (especially in the final scene where we are presented the performance of a specific flying ointment ritual). Furthermore, the family's black goat named Black Phillip adopts the role of a literally scapegoat when desperate Thomasin is trying to put the blame of all tragedies on the unusual connection the twin brothers have with the animal (their constant playing around and attempts to communicate with it). Nonetheless, the family keeps assuming Thomasin played an important role in all the supernatural and unusual events that happened and decide to lock her in the improvised stable together with the twins and the goats. In spite of this, when the father finds one morning all the other goats killed, the brothers missing and Thomasin the only survivor he's automatically convinced of the girl's evil spirit and witchcraft. After Black Phillip kills the father and Thomasin her mother in an attempt of rescuing herself from the woman's madness, she turns to the goat, her only hope for survival. When her speculations of its incarnation of Satan are confirmed, the girl agrees to make a pact that would make her "live deliciously," as he said. In the middle of the woods she finds the witches performing a ritual and, as her hands are already tainted with the blood of her parents, we can see her happily levitating and therefore, becoming a witch herself.

The symbolic layer of this film is much anchored in the superstitious spirit of those times' society. The belief in witchcraft is confirmed by the actual existence of witches and reincarnation of Satan. The film doesn't put



much emphasis on the supernatural nature of this universe, as it mainly focuses on the central character's evolution in relation to the family dynamics and conflicts. While observing how the decision power is transferred from father to daughter, it can be concluded that this film also focuses on the coming-of-age story of young Thomasin, a character who's discovering her potential and ability to control her own destiny. The murders and deaths of her family members are merely necessary steps that lead to her liberation and discovery of a better life. Thomasin's family is condemned to an ill-fated destiny from the moment they leave the community: they hardly find any food, whatever they plant can't grow and their few animals are obviously not enough to feed such a large family. Moreover, Thomasin overhears her parents planning to send her off to work for a wealthier family. All these elements accumulated with the family's increasing assumptions that she is indeed a witch, gradually push her away by isolating and stigmatizing her. The tension peaks when the father decided to literally lock her in the barn – an event that directly leads to all other characters' deaths and/or disappearance.

Seclusion and liberation are both major themes in these coming-of-age films, for they are presented as causes and effects in what the evolution of the main characters is concerned. Leaving all supernatural elements and layers aside, they both present teenagers' journeys in search for their own identity. Moreover, sacrifice represents a necessary element that can lead to numerous interpretations: in both films the youngest children of the families disappear through supernatural methods. More in *The Witch* than in *Thelma*, the theme of sacrifice is explored in relation to its effect on the protagonist's evolution. Samuel's disappearance leads to Thomasin's incrimination and banishment, but these are simply necessary and momentary obstacles that eventually benefit the girl on her journey towards liberation. Clearly, all other characters have been sacrificed one way or another, so that Thomasin wouldn't have anything else to lose. Her decision to talk to Black Phillip comes from an unspoken hope that the goat is truly the incarnation of Satan. Therefore, she accepts this last resort as she finally acknowledges that no other force, supernatural or human, is there for her. In the case of *Thelma*, 'human sacrifice' can also be considered a necessary step in the girl's story. Moreover, the implications of sacrificing newly born children are strongly highlighted by how their pureness can be related to the satisfaction of supernatural

beings. Consequently, all these events are directly connected to how these protagonists decide (more or less consciously) to gain their freedom after a restrictive upbringing.

Ultimately, the forced isolation of Thomasin and Thelma has fatal consequences in both cases. The primary purpose of these episodes is that of revealing the ultimate awakening of forces the girls are capable of: Thelma kills her father using her telekinetic powers and Thomasin murders her mother in order to defend herself. However, these scenes create a consistency that the ensembles of both stories need in order to create strong character arcs. Whether it's about discovering the sexual identity or about discovering the passions and joys of life after a lifetime of struggling and hardship, the main idea is that the supernatural dimension can be interpreted as a metaphorical vehicle for their exploration of self-discovery.

Coming-of-age films will always speak about more or less general issues children or teenagers are confronted with, but their 'core' will be in any case the need for transformation and its struggles. The choice of showing these stories through the perspectives of teenagers with supernatural powers (especially in Thelma's case) remains interpretable. However, the discussion should revolve around the type of heroes this subgenre wants to 'deliver' and how they could affect the way any kind of transformation is perceived. Imaginably, discrepancies between mentalities, behaviors and preconceptions that surface due to generation gaps could be easier to attenuate with some supernatural intervention and, of course, sometimes that seems like the only possible measure one could take in order to increase empathy and actual understanding. These films shrewdly explore the social and family dynamics around their main characters and manage to deliver situations that one can identify with (types of relations between parents and children, siblings, first love or sexual experience and so on). The supernatural dimension helps creating extraordinary characters and generates a subtle, uncanny atmosphere that they are forced to escape from. In spite of the tragic events that happen at the end of both films, the general feeling they manage to induce is one of liberation and peacefulness, even in Thomasin's case where she starts levitating in the circle of witches, happily smiling.

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## *Changing Faces of Witches in Contemporary Photography*

DARIA IOAN\*

**Abstract:** In photography, the image of witchcraft has always been associated with the quality of being different, due to the necessity of representing the inexplicable or the strange. Very rarely in the history of images the owners of paranormal powers have been presented as being immersed in banality. However, nowadays, photographers treat as well this aspect, but the image of witches is, by excellence, associated with an extravagant physical aspect. The means to do this are very different: the body, the outfit, the expression, the scenography of the environment where the witch is being represented shall take the attributes of an extravagance which underlines her/his qualities as out of the common, which also imply the idea of isolation and the glamour of a varied display of explicit powers. The new witches that some photographers depict nowadays seem born out of a desire for an anticapitalistic life, out of the system, as in the Wicca movement, for instance. In this paper, a focus is put on the aesthetic ways of presenting the image of the witch in photography, depending on the specific period of time artists refer to in their works.

**Keywords:** witchcraft, photography, aesthetics, icon, magic, history of images.

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Witchcraft stories belong generally to the narrative of the supernatural manifested in the ordinary daily world of humans. The mysterious looks of the witches and wizards have been described in an endless number of representations. From the oral description to the written one, from drawing and painting to photography and film, the image of the witch was the subject of an infinite variety of perspectives. In some of these phantasmatic images, we can see the body of the witches, in some we can only perceive the traces of their passing and magical actions. In the history of images, the witches appear to embody beings that belong to our world and to the other one, to (at least) two dimensions of life. They have the power of gathering the seen and the unseen, as well as the power to show themselves in intelligible forms, stay hidden behind strange happenings or disappear from the visible sphere. The way in which they can be perceived by the human eye is a matter of controversy in the history of images. In the introduction to *The History of the Body*, Georges Vigarello states:

The modern era doesn't make an exception to the rule that the conscience about the body cannot be separated in any society from the imaginary of life and from the vision upon the world.<sup>1</sup>

If any representation of the body is inseparable from the imagined vision of the surrounding world, the physical image of the witch is necessarily related to the same aspect. The first images of witches in film and photography were heavily influenced by the traditional representations, such as women dressed in black, wearing pointed hats and flying on brooms. The Swedish-Danish documentary film *Häxan* (1920), based on Benjamin Christensen's study of *Malleus Maleficarum*, is an early cinematic vibrant example of the ways of seeing the witches in previous times, which had led to the horrors of past hunts. This kind of representations became iconic in the history of images and it is still viral in contemporary filmmaking and photography. But the ensemble of circulating images has evolved during the 20<sup>th</sup> century to forms that are more refined and encrypted in many workstyles within the

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Gélis, "Corpul, Biserica și sacrul," in *Istoria corpului I*, ed. Alain Courbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigarello, trans. Simona Manolache, Gina Puică, Muguraș Constantinescu, Giuliano Sfichi (Bucharest: Art, 2008), 19.

field of visual arts. If ancient guides for inquisitors hunting for witches had engendered a whole display of imaginary dark representations, the evolution of ideas has uncovered new witch icons which are situated far from the traditional common places.

At the encounter of past and present cultural conceptions, the definition of the witch has been suffering a series of mutations that are still producing changes in the ways of seeing this volatile character. The monstrous faces and the horror-like behaviours of the witches that had justified abuse and punishment all over history have been slowly replaced, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by other kinds of portraiture and associations, in the attempt to escape old stereotypes of perception and resulting prejudices.

If the image of the black witch has always been a powerful icon, photographers nowadays are in the search of new faces of people related to magic and spells. In the classical approach, the appearance of the dark witch is frequently associated with death. The black cape or the rags that often cover her body are very similar to the traditional clothing that was attributed to the very strong character of death. The two icons may be sometimes mistaken one for another. In recent photography, these images are still being given great importance, even if new interpretations displace some of their ancient connotations.

The concern for the funereal imaginary, fervent in the Victorian age and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, made photographers focus on the world of those who are not among the living anymore, but also on these ones' manifestations after the end of their physical existence. The dead have been therefore depicted under two aspects: a material one, where they can be seen shortly after passing away, and an immaterial one, which opens the doors of perception towards the inexplicable phenomena that accompany their apparition as spirits. Of course, the belief in the world from beyond is ancestral, but the apparition of the photographic camera had a deep influence for the collective imaginary. From post-mortem photography to spirit and paranormal phenomena photography, the production of images dedicated to death raised the curiosity, fascination, repulsion and the obsession of the beholders. At the same time, this brought major changes in visual arts' aesthetics. The encounter with death in photography, far from leaving the public indifferent, led to the emergence of a visual appetite without precedent for the macabre and for the fantastic. Important cultural mutations took place in proportion as photographers

revealed, through their art, the crossing between the worlds. In his book *Le spiritisme*, Jacques Lantier raises the problem of the relativity of the sensitive level:

Does our sensitive universe not make the object of a collective hallucination? It is far away, in any case, from what our senses perceive from the material reality. We see things that exist only for us, at our scale.<sup>2</sup>

Those things, that we only see, can therefore exist or not exist. Lantier doesn't cast only the shadow of doubt upon visual perception, but he attests two categories of things that we can see: collectively or individually. It is interesting that the first one doesn't include the existence of the other one, and the reality of the individual, the subjective area, has the same status as the one being considered objective. Photography comes to reunite these two worlds of perception, due to its quality of being a technical document, whose authenticity is easy to prove with scientific methods and hence imposes itself as unquestionable. There were although moments of hesitation in the reception of the photography of the paranormal and the investigations which came up soon led to disappointing conclusions such as technical fraud discoveries or to real surprises when the fake could not be proved. By referring to the common matter of archaic humanity, Lantier eliminates the possibility of knowledge of infinite and eternal notions, applying the simple distinction at the level of primitive man's perception:

The earth is the place of two different worlds: the visible and the invisible, whose limit is marked by death. The living are visible; death makes them invisible. There are therefore two parts in the living: the visible that disappears and the invisible that subsists.<sup>3</sup>

By structuring the world according to what can be seen confers the images the quality of being a proof of the existence of things: if we can see them, they exist, and if not, they don't. In this way, at the time photography begins to show us what we cannot see, the cultural categories are certainly being disordered and the faith in the world from beyond and in the intense activity of its inhabitants

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lantier, *Le Spiritisme ou l'aventure d'une croyance* (Paris : Grasset,1971), 156.

<sup>3</sup> Lantier, *Le Spiritisme*, 157.

can reach the absolute of a truth. After tracing this limit, Lantier brings into discussion the forms of referring to what is invisible, which, due to this quality, can become a dangerous thing that imposes assuming some precautions. The invisible world is an unknown territory, as complex as the visible world, where both positive and gloomy events can take place:

After death, the invisible people lead an existence identical to the one they led when they were alive; their nature doesn't change. An evil man stays evil; a criminal continues his bad deeds; a witch doesn't stop doing harm etc.<sup>4</sup>

One of the negative examples of Lantier's list of invisible people who don't stop causing trouble is the witch (or the wizard). His statement casts a dark shadow over this image, as he refers to the evil nature of the witch. It is interesting though that he puts it together with that of common people, but in the negative line; the black witch continues to cast bad spells even after death.

The ways of illustrating the witch in photography are then related to the tradition according to which this figure has always a malefic potential. Its relationship with other spirits is as well considered to be an undoubtful reality. This is a reason for which a great number of uncanny photographs depicting witches have traits in common with early spirit photography, where unseen faces show up out of nowhere, under the shape of foggy floating portraits or even of strange ectoplasms coming out of a medium's body. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in William Hope's work, we can see many of these apparitions as translucent and blurry, posing together with living people. The physical dimensions of these spectral posers often variate and usually cannot be seen entirely. Even if Hope was found guilty of faking these images by substituting the plates he used in photographic sessions, his spirit portraits still represent a powerful source of inspiration even for contemporary photographers and film directors.

As well as the medium that often appear in old spirit photography, the witch is believed to be able to make the connection between the worlds and therefore associated with the imagined spirits and even with a great variety of demons or fairy tale creatures. In staged photography and/or in its post-processing phase, everything becomes possible.

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<sup>4</sup> Lantier, *Le Spiritisme*, 157.



Surrealist photography shows us multiples modes of interaction between the visible and the invisible, and their relations have not always been cordial. The complexity of the proximity of the two worlds, as well as the raids on enemy territory have been creating a sea of visual stories, from objects' levitation and the emergence of ectoplasms to the haunting, under various forms and strategies, of places by spirits or to the accomplishment of miracles and magic, in other contexts. First illustrated in photography, these imagined situations have later nourished the narrative genius of cinema, creating real cults for film genres like horror, film noir or mystery film, fantasy and sci-fi. At the present time, we are witnessing an abundant explosion of such cinematic productions, thanks to the very advanced technology, that enchant entire cinemas full of fans. The dark and scary image of the witch is still very present in many visual productions, but at the same time is being slowly replaced by other avatars.

In Silvia Federici's book *Caliban and the Witch*, the deep connections between the witch's status and the evolution of capitalist accumulation through the sexual and economic exploitation on women are brought to light in what has the pretention to be a detailed sociologic analysis.<sup>5</sup> The use that patriarchal societies have made of the dark aspect of women related to sorcery is revealed as one of the most powerful tools of oppression and enslavement.

The most important historical question addressed by the book is how to account for the execution of hundreds of thousands of "witches" at the beginning of the modern era, and how to explain why the rise of capitalism was coeval with a war against women.<sup>6</sup>

Federici revisits Marx and Foucault's theories from the point of view of women's history, searching for the answer to an imposing question:

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted here that Federici was badly and justly criticized even inside Marxist and leftist intellectual circles, for her lack of scientific information, for the "manipulation of iconography" and for the weakness of her methodology: Yann Kindo, "Caliban et la sorcière, ou l'Histoire au bûcher (1/2)," <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/yann-kindoo/blog/101217/caliban-et-la-sorciere-ou-l-histoire-au-bucher-12-0> (accessed February 2020), Christophe Darmangeat, "Caliban et la sorcière (Silvia Federici), ou l'Histoire au bûcher – 2/2", <http://cdarmangeat.blogspot.com/2017/12/caliban-et-la-sorciere-silvia-federici.html> (accessed February 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2009), 14.

Why, after 500 years of capital's rule, at the beginning of the third millennium, are workers on a mass scale defined as paupers, witches, and outlaws? How are land expropriation and mass pauperization related to the continuing attack on women? And what do we learn about capitalist development, past and present, once we examine it through the vantage-point of a feminist perspective?<sup>7</sup>

The fact that we are not anymore an idolatrizing society can be seen in contemporary photography which tends to illustrate witches or other figures who have profound connections to other worlds. Artists are nowadays demystifying the image of the malefic sorcerer and tend to reframe it in the common reality. Sometimes they approach the witch's representation as an ordinary one, far from magic and fantasy. The feared character of the witch is being replaced, in the works of many photographers, by the face and body of common people, which integrate various ritual practices into their everyday life. It can also be a matter of fashion, as we can see by reviewing a huge mass of thematic festivals and specific publications for witchcraft fans.

The contemporary appetite for magic practices regards both aesthetics and ethical codes of behaviour, as we can discover in new magazines, such as *Sabat Magazine*, which "fuses Witchcraft and feminism, ancient archetypes and instant art." On this publication's website, we can discover various definitions of what actually means to be a witch, as a reading key, between fashion and personal statements, as for example:

A Witch is somebody who stands against patriarchy and everything that is currently wrong with our society and any society throughout the ages. (April Graham)

Witch is an identity. It is an individual who has embraced their connection with the Earth and with the Goddess. (Fay Nowitz)

A Witch is a person who takes responsibility for her own transformation through acts of creativity, ritual, and focused intention. She speaks the language of symbols and lives in liminal space. (Pam Grossman)

Magic is the very essence of it all. It's spirit, the life force, that creative, inexplicable power which we all possess and seek to express in the world.

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<sup>7</sup> Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 11-12.

How well we manage to do that is a totally individual matter. (Lucius Mattheisen)<sup>8</sup>

The image of the witch, as well as its given possible definitions, is a fluctuating one: on different covers of the magazine, portraits can depict the mother, the maiden, the crone and other feminine forms of appearance, but necessarily in connection with witchcraft. The consequence is that these images don't belong to the same aesthetic register; they are sometimes dark, sometimes angelic, but connected to beauty and mystery and charm. The magazine uses only black and white photographs, which impregnate a classic dark fashion style and a film noir atmosphere to every image. Here and there, this aesthetics can be associated with Jean-Loup Sieff's, Helmut Newton's and other famous fashion photographer's work, by depicting seductive dangerous women. At the same time, it is far from using the image of women as object of desire like in the works mentioned above, for the reason that it is based on a feminist approach, more likely to revive Claude Cahun's work before World War II, one of the first photographic approaches of the feminine sexual liberation. The French artist's self-portraits undermined the traditional gender roles by illustrating a series of different avatars of herself. A similar way of working with the self was made famous by Cindy Sherman's series *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980). These images represent also a permanent visitation of the self in imagined stills from inexistent *film noir* B category movies from the '50s. Sherman is posing every time in a different character, sometimes easily to associate to famous actresses like Sophia Loren or to Hitchcock aesthetics of the female protagonists, at the border of fear and hysteria. But in her work, the American photographer is not presenting the strong side of the women she attempts to illustrate, if not weak avatars of women seen as prey in scary environments and situations.

*Sabat Magazine* is presenting women as powerful and their magic side is designed to attract and enthrall the viewer, in a romantic vein which is susceptible to revive old legends and myths on the witches' powers. The above-mentioned definitions put the image of the sorcerer in connection to the identity quest and discovery of the self in the light of ritual practices and

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sabatmagazine.com/about> (accessed February 2020).

creative use of mystic knowledge. In extension to personal development, the image of the witch promoted by the publication is politically engaged in the fight against the patriarchal system of rules that still dominate the society. Feminist by statement, *Sabat Magazine* is promoting photographs that suggest a mysterious black and white universe hidden beyond the present grey reality. The pictures used to illustrate the woman's avatars are nevertheless still bound to powerful icons in the history of images. For example, the cover of *The Mother Issue* presents to the public a sort of black Madonna underlined by heavily strong dark shades, while *The Crone Issue*, suggests the appearance of a saint figure or pure deity in a lighter composition with white veil and grapes. The look in the models' eyes has a strange focus, as if they are subject to a trance where they can see beyond appearances.

These kinds of new witches are being themselves the subject of continuous transformations, dictated by either artistic or commercial purposes. An interesting case of photographic illustration of witchy people is the Romanian photographer Ioana Cîrlig's series *Zâne (Fairies)*, which follows real persons who live in isolated or very peripheral places in Romania and who can be perceived as being magic for the reason they don't really belong to society, but they exist in in-between zones of uncertain social and economic status, like mountains and forests where common people usually never set foot. Cîrlig's Fairies are both women, men, even children and they are portrayed in their simple but harsh surroundings, at the limit of the civilized world. The photographs are realistic and the series' style is simple, documentary. Fiction is not present at all, even if the title suggests another world.

In a different manner, in my photographic work, I mixed a reality based story and fictive characters in order to illustrate the spirit of the abandoned houses in Roșia Montană, during the gold war, consisting in the attempts of RMGC (Roșia Montană Gold Corporation) to convince the locals to leave their houses and begin the gold exploitation.<sup>9</sup> Nowadays, the houses people fled from are in ruin and very few people still inhabit the village. My series puts these two elements together in order to build an archive of this

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<sup>9</sup> On this gold war and its cultural and artistic consequences, see Ioan Pop-Curșeu, "Can Art (Re)Build a Community? The Roșia Montană Case, between Past and Future," *Caietele Echinox*, vol. 32, nr. 1 (2017): 159-173, DOI: 10.24193/cechinox.2017.32.13.

vanishing patrimony and at the same time tell the local stories of the spirits still protecting or haunting the abandoned places.<sup>10</sup> One of the photographs was the cover image of the International Conference *Images of Witchcraft. Cinema, Theatre, Visual Arts* (Cluj, 15-17 October 2019).

The image I attempted to create in this series is based on the existing scenery set and the immersion of fantastic staged elements and figures that inhabit these abandoned places and still protect their vanishing human value. In the future, the village may become a UNESCO piece of patrimony. At present time, I am still documenting the traces of local history and its everlasting relation to the rush for gold, including real facts, local legends and anecdotes and memories concerning this subject, by creating a surrealist and at the same time realist image of a place which will possibly be lost forever.



**Figure 1.** Daria Ioan, *The lost Spirits* project, Roșia Montană, 2019.

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<sup>10</sup> The best repertory of fantastic stories (witches, spirits, demons) from Roșia Montană can be found in Ileana Benga, *Povestirile Roșiei Montane* (Târgu Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2011).



**Figure 2.** Daria Ioan, *The lost Spirits* project, Roșia Montană, 2019.



**Figure 3.** Daria Ioan, *The lost Spirits* project, Roșia Montană, 2019.



**Figure 4.** Daria Ioan, *The lost Spirits* project, Roșia Montană, 2019.

The interesting fact about this place that I am still documenting is that, after many locals fled to the city, some newcomers started moving to isolated houses in surrounding area of the village; most of them are concerned about healing plants and traditional medicine, so they are more likely to belong to the Wicca movement. This concept, also known as Pagan witchcraft, is considered to be both a modern Pagan religious movement and a part of the occultist stream of Western esotericism. It was developed in England during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is typically duo-theistic, worshipping a Goddess and a God. Wiccan celebrations encompass both the cycles of the Moon, named with an ancient French word *Esbats* and commonly associated with the Goddess (female deity), and the cycles of The Sun, seasonally based festivals known as *Sabbats* and commonly associated with the Horned God (male deity).

The new Wicca witches and wizards are generally perceived as beneficial persons who fight for the conservation and revival of the healing traditions, in strong connection to nature and its gifts, of the renewal and acknowledgement of the bounds with the mysterious universe. On the other side, they are also

engaged in the denial of the capitalist values, leading a simple and modest life out of the order of consumerism. This is why being a witch in the contemporary world has predominantly positive connotations and has even become very fashionable.

In photography, the new witches are portrayed in various manners, which all tend to cast a good light on them. Their visual occurrences are far from the dark image of the classic malefic witch, with all its avatars. Nevertheless, some traits are being kept. First of all, difference and extravagance have always been attributes of the witch. Very rarely in the history of images the owners of paranormal powers have been presented as being immersed in banality. However, nowadays, photographers treat as well this aspect, but the image of witches is, by excellence, associated with an extravagant physical aspect. The image of witchcraft has always been associated with the quality of being different, due to the necessity of representing the inexplicable or the strange. The means to do this are very different: the body, the outfit, the expression, the scenography of the environment where the witch is being represented shall take the attributes of an extravagance which underlines her/his qualities as out of the common.

One of the most outstanding photographer artists who have treated and are still concerned about this subject is the Spanish Bego Anton. Until today, she created two different series which present the paranormal side of the new witches: *All of Them Witches* project (2017- ongoing) and *The Earth is only a little Dust under our Feet* (2018). In the first one, she is presenting situations that evoke the past mistreatment of the witches. The characters are mostly portrayed in natural outdoor settings, which are timeless backgrounds that allow the free imaginary flow between past and present. One image of the series reveals a beautiful young woman hanged by a tree and surrounded by a pack of white sheep. Its symbolic side is easy to interpret, as white and sheep have always been associated with purity and innocence. These elements are recurrent in Anton's work, where the suggestion of sacrifice is needed. In this composition, the face of the witch is impossible to identify, because of the quite long distance between the camera and the subject. The entire series presents women who are impossible to recognize due to various techniques: the distance, the focus, the long exposure and movement, the position etc. One of the most picturesque



images reveals to the viewer a group of colourfully dressed women dancing vividly around a big tree in the middle of a forest. The long exposure time and the wild celebrating dance produce the blurry effect that confers poetic effects and great plastic value to the still. At the same time, the artist states that through her photographs, she is telling real stories that happened in the Basque Country, aiming to demystify former persecutors' accusations, precisely by illustrating their absurdity:

I started this project from a personal necessity to demystify and raise the story of these women who were unfairly persecuted. I have researched the original documents written by the Spanish inquisitors where names and evidence is given, recreating those very concrete situations. They were accused of infanticide and then of eating those children in feasts full of filthy food, destroying harvests, causing storms, taking part in disgraceful orgies where everyone had sex with everyone (even with the Devil), making ointments with dead animals and plants to kill others or even having a personal toad that helped them metamorphose into any other animal and fly from the Basque Country to Terranova in the blink of an eye.<sup>11</sup>

This series is built not only of portraits and situations where the witches are caught in action, but also of details of objects used in performing rituals, such as: animal and human dead bodies and intestines, flowers, knives, fruits, etc. The grotesque aspect of the corpses creates tension and adds to the pictures a shocking perspective, difficult to ignore.

Bego Anton's next series on witches, *The Earth is only a little Dust under our Feet* (2018), presents the beauty and strangeness of the supernatural in Iceland, where elves, fairies, witches and humans communicate in tranquillity and where all the exchanges are more likely to be explained by real interviews than shown in the photographs. Most of the protagonists of this series have traits that can be easily associated with the Wicca movement aesthetics: beautiful women of all ages with long dishevelled hair, dressed like middle age imagined maids or fairies, wearing stones or feathers and other objects used in rituals. Sometimes strange colours and light flares are introduced in

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<sup>11</sup> Bego Anton, *All of them Witches*, 2017, <https://phmuseum.com/begoanton/story/all-of-them-witches>.

the compositions, as to suggest the presence of the supernatural. But Anton is showing us also a contemporary everyday image of people in connection with the sacred. Generally, the compositions are set in wilderness (into the woods or Icelandic desert landscape) in different seasons of the year. The portraits are accompanied by personal real stories and they can be followed by simple landscapes of places where extraordinary things have been happening or post-processed images that testify magic deeds, as for instance the lamb with two heads by night time, a shocking figure of the series. One of the most astonishing stories is that of a woman telling the anecdote of elf in love with Elvis Presley, as Bego Anton explains in the text of the series on her web page in 2018:

Saenun has hidden people as neighbours and seeing them is a gift that only the women in her family possess. Elves constantly borrow things from the farmhouse and won't return them until they no longer need them. I asked Saenun what the weirdest thing was that elves had taken, and she showed me an old VHS tape of the movie *Roustabout* starring Elvis Presley. "The elves must have loved it because they kept it for years," she said.<sup>12</sup>

For photographers nowadays, it is a common working method to combine photographs with explicative texts and fragments of interviews. At the border of artistic and documentary photography, these reportages document themes and situations by mixing real information with images which can be staged or not and giving weight to the whole concept. This style of visual storytelling is specific to Western and Northern Europe photography schools, and less in Eastern Europe, where the need for realistic pictures is generally held as more important.

Another photographer who treated the subject of the magic is the Polish Marta Berens. In her series, *Fairy tale* (2015), she illustrates an alternative reality, where illusion is supposed to become truth in the visual imaginary world of childhood. Her photographs are populated by wild animals of the forest which are supposed to share a magic universe with children, strange lights and

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<sup>12</sup> Bego Anton, <https://begoanton.com/the-earth-is-only-a-little-dust-under-our-feet/>.

blurry effects. The idea that Berens had was that of intentionally building the image of a supernatural environment that surrounds children. Her images are surrealistic only by the given connotations.

In Eastern Europe, witches are generally associated with Roma women who can read the future or the past and who are able to cast spells and curses or neutralize them.<sup>13</sup> Their image has not changed a lot with the passing of time, as their outfit and their attitude have always been quite constant, maintaining a love and hate relationship to society. Strongly sexualized and mythicized during history, the Roma witches of the East are being very active at the present moment and their powers are recognized as undisputable gifts. In the last two decades, many photographers have approached their opulent and glamorous way of life and their extravagant activities. Such is the case of the Slovakian Lucia Sekerková, who recently documented in an anesthetizing and though realistic manner the luxurious universe of the Romanian witches. Her project, combined with an ethnographic study, was ongoing for 7 years and its purpose was that of showing the astonishing prosperity of the witchcraft business and the resulting wealth and glamorous lifestyle of these women. Sekerková noticed that the image of the Roma witch is full of stereotypes and psychological common places, but her series is a selection of surprising and intriguing hypostases, as for example the spontaneous and natural connection to the online media, which represents nowadays a smashing aspect of the witchcraft affair. The Roma sorcerers are consequently presented at work, looking for plants with magic powers, telling the future, fighting curses, blessing people or putting online selfies and videos of the rituals they perform. This exotic and esoteric world is not embellished by the photographer. The value of the series consists of the intimate character of the illustrated situations and of the free visual access to all the mysterious tools used in the witches' practices. Animal sacrifices partially revealed in the pictures are also an intriguing element of the series. The protagonists are being portrayed as well during daytime as during nighttime. Sekerková sometimes uses flash light and the resulting plastic effect is that of strong shining of the presented figure, which in this context is at the

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<sup>13</sup> Ioan Pop-Curșeu, "The Gypsy-Witch: Social-Cultural Representations, Fascination and Fears," *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor / Journal of Ethnography and Folklore*, New Series, no. 1-2 (2014): 23-45.

border of kitsch and art. Some other times, she creates chiaroscuro lighting sets to underline the traits of the imposing characters. The queen-like image of the Roma witches is visually based on the rich details of their opulent homes but also on fancy traditional clothes and valuable jewellery that they often wear to impress and to show the importance of their status, as for instance golden crowns, bracelets and impressive chokers. Another frequently used element of these compositions is the artificial pose of the sorcerers but the photographer alternates this type of portraits with casual ones, giving a natural fluidity to her visual storytelling.

Many other contemporary photographers have approached the mystic society of the Eastern Europe Roma witches and all the resulting works reveal a universe that is definitely out of the common and that communicates in strange ways with the everyday reality. In the United States, sorcerer images also appear in the visual media, as for example in *The New Yorker* or *The New York Times*.

In *The Many Faces of Women who identify as Witches* (2018), the photographer Naomi Fry searched for the identity aspects of women who consider themselves to have supernatural powers. The style in which they are presented is quite realistic but also slightly staged, similar to fashion magazines' pictorials. In contrast to the Eastern Europe witches, the American ones are not visually connected by traditional traits of their outfits, but they appear as individually built constructs, mixing fashion and witchcraft items from all over the ancient and modern world. The scenography in which their images are captured vary from urban to nature landscape, in no contradiction to the purpose of the series. The images are accompanied by short pieces of talks and statements which offer a firmer ground to the series.

Nowadays in Western society the witch has no more reasons to hide away like in the old dark times. On the contrary, she is often summoned to show up or to show off for the pleasure of an interested audience whose curiosity and appetite for the occult is still raising. As a resulting effect, in visual arts, and especially in photography, the image of the witch was normalized and successfully popularized. Its glamour and shining are not due anymore only to isolation and mystery, but also to a continuously growing presence in all media, influencing lifestyles, ways of thinking and social behaviours.

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## *Femininity, Transgression and the Gothic: the Witches of Cradle of Filth*

REBECA DOGARU\*

**Abstract:** While the aesthetic of the British extreme metal band Cradle of Filth strikes the onlooker with its Baroque flamboyance, its Gothic macabre and underground kitsch, its music – both classically melodious and expressively extreme – immerses the listener into a poetry of Romanticist pastiche spiced with unexpected word-plays, heavy symbolism and cultural references, taboo themes and transgressions of social norms at every level. The weave of apparent contradictions which tailors Cradle of Filth’s distinctive style in contemporary music is also reflected in one of the central themes of the band’s imaginary: the norm-defiant femininity embodied in the image of the witch. This study examines the varied typologies of the female characters of Cradle of Filth’s fiction, their traits as both heroes and transgressors in the context of the Gothic genre and extreme music. My analysis seeks to help fill some gaps in the analysis and understanding of the often misinterpreted music genre of extreme metal, and underline fundamental traits of a representative presence in this field, Cradle of Filth, not in terms of musical or aesthetic theory but of its lyrical value in the context of postmodern literature.

**Keywords:** extreme music, rock, Gothic fiction, witch, femininity, transgression.

### **Introduction**

Judith Halberstam theorizes that the Gothic is a genre that pushes the boundaries of good and evil, of normality and perversity, in a newly-developed metaphorization of subjectivity based on oppositions like interior-exterior,

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mind-body, male-female, aristocrat-proletary, and through this lens it processes the entire literary tradition of its century.<sup>1</sup> Fred Botting defines the Gothic as a transgression against social norms and progress by representations of threats against humanist values, such as the supernatural, hallucinations and mental disorder, excess and perversity and other moral and social evils.<sup>2</sup> Hence, since its inception, the Gothic was considered a threat to social conventions through instigations to vice, unbridled sexuality, anti-social and revolutionary political attitudes, and violence.<sup>3</sup> From this point of view, extreme music in its entirety, both thematically and functionally, is descended from the Gothic tradition and *Cradle of Filth*, one of its oldest and noteworthy representatives, is openly tributary to the rich heritage of English Gothic fiction.

In *Sound, Symbol, Sociality*, Matthew Unger theorizes that “extreme music in the West have reflected generally the nihilistic tendency of the rationalization of social and intellectual discourses”, representative of counter-culture lifestyles and constituted as “affronts to normative social frameworks” both in their anti-mainstream, often dissonant and aggressive sound and in their bold themes.<sup>4</sup> While mainstream music is generally a form of entertainment, approaching pleasant, relatable and mundane themes like love or enjoyment, metal music veers towards social critique (derived from beat-generation rock and later punk), religion and spirituality (starting with Black Sabbath and branched into pagan, satanic, occult and anti-Christian themes), folklore, fantasy fiction (especially in the Power Metal subgenre), consuming love and sexuality in their more aggressive aspects inspired from Gothic fictions.

Paul Ricoeur, in *The Symbolism of Evil*, explains defilement as fundamental to any experience of the sacred or the good whether modernity has repressed, forgotten or flattened these conceptions. Defilement in music and artistic performance is a means to criticize rigour by outrage,<sup>5</sup> as is the use of profanity in lyrics, of blasphemous religious imagery specific to black metal, graphic

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic (The New Critical Idiom)* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Unger, *Sound, Symbol, Sociality. The Aesthetic Experience of Extreme Metal Music* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, Harper & Row, 1969). For an application to extreme metal, see Matthew Unger, *Sound, Symbol, Sociality*, 6-9.

descriptions of violence and gore (like *Cannibal Corpse*), or engaging during live performances in animal ritual sacrifice (like *Gorgoroth*) or sexual acts (like *Umbra et Imago*), acts which may be seen as cathartic for musicians and audience through the expression of relief from social pressure and by providing a space of acceptance and communion.

Cradle of Filth's representations of the feminine in album arts and in some music videos are often oversexualized, to an untrained eye seemingly in the vein of the machist stereotype of the heavy metal genre – where the male represents power and the female only another accessory proving his supremacy – by indulging the voyeurism of a “male gaze”, to employ the feminist theory term of Laura Mulvey based on Jean-Paul Sartre's *le regard* and the psychoanalyst tools of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud. But beneath this image, at the conceptual level mirrored in the lyrics, lies a female entity who is a subject in her own right, whose overt sexuality is nothing but empowering; she is an captivating being not only for its “to-be-looked-at-ness” (to further use Mulvey's terminology) for the “male gaze” but because she is an archetype, a representative of archaic female power and authority, embodied in the character of, what we will generically call here, the witch.

The witch, for Cradle of Filth, is the representative of counterculture, a bold challenger of social norms and ethical limits. In this protagonist's historicist portrayals with emphasis on sexuality and social power, Cradle of Filth's characterization aligns with that of Silvia Federici's in *Caliban and the Witch*: she is the woman robbed of power under medieval Inquisition, marginalized under patriarchal rule and religiously demonized as a factor of corruption and chaos that is to be feared and hence, controlled.<sup>6</sup> She is an initiate in occult knowledge (songs like *To Eve the Art of Witchcraft* enunciate womankind's penchant towards this domain); she is beautiful (often described in terms of the Gothic aesthetic ideal: “a Queen of Snow [...] milky-white skin, my porcelain Yin, a graceful Angel of Sin”, “lips attuned to symmetry, [...] dark liquored eyes, an Arabian nightmare”, *Her Ghost in the Fog*), arresting and addictive (“her wicked spell cast over me, addicted to her utterly, despite the horrors that gestate beneath the beautiful”), loving but dominant, her

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<sup>6</sup> Silvia Federici. *Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004).

love combining pleasure and pain (“her rose was sweet, but her thorns were barbarous”), stirring obsession in her lover who is utterly hypnotized by her (“I’m to think beyond the pale, beyond heart-stopping eyes and sopping thighs, I’m wont to fail”, *Forgive Me Father (I Have Sinned)*), or “Sick and weak from my condition, this lust, this vampiric addiction, to her alone in full submission”, *Nymphetamine*).

It is thus little wonder that emblematic female figures of Cradle of Filth’s songs are frightfully powerful figures of world mythology, such as Eve – the instigator of the fall of man; Lilith – the mother of demons; the pagan goddesses – Hecate, Astarte, Bastet, Isis, Artemis-Diana, Morgan le Fay or the Lady of the Lake – as a representative of a hypothetical ancient matriarchy who seeks to draw man back to an unruly and demoniac heathenism;<sup>7</sup> the tyrannical ruler – such as the legendary serial killer Elizabeth Báthory; or, at the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of social authority but akin in terms of autonomy and influence, the whore – as the objectifiable-but-incontrollable breaker of rules and morality. In other words, the aspects of femininity deemed negative in the fiction of the historical West are glorified in Cradle of Filth’s witch precisely through her force, through her potential of wresting back, often vengefully, a mythical power lost to societal gender norms and subjugating man to her rule.

Thus, a typology of the female characters of Cradle of Filth’s includes the goddess, the temptress, the psychopath, the innocent, all of them displaying the magical inclinations of the witch. Further on, I will undergo short analyses of each of these types by examining the literary corpus of Cradle of Filth’s music.

### a. The Goddess

*The Black Goddess Rises* summarizes the embodiments of this typology by taking the listener through Babylonian, Greek and Judeo-Christian mythologies and selecting central female figures thereof, suggesting that the Black Goddess is not a single figure but all female gods revolted against authority. “Thee

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<sup>7</sup> For a thorough analysis of the myths of ancient matriarchy, see Cynthia Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons. The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, 1861-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

I invoke, bornless one,/ all woman, pure predator,[...]/ Thee I worship! Thou art darkest Gabrielle,/ Lilith who rode the steed,/ thou art pale Hecate rising from Thessaly", "Ishtar, my queen", a "sweet, sinful Eve", a Mary with vampiric inclinations evoking a Pietà-like scene: "Seductive evil, drink thy fill of the bleeding Christ in thy arms". Gabrielle is the female Archangel Gabriel, canonically a masculinized (instead of a genderless or feminine) angel, Lilith is an archetype of the insubordinate wife, Eve is the catalyst of mankind's fall, Mary is vampiric instead of motherly and protective, Hecate is the goddess of magic, and Ishtar is the rival in authority of "the Nazarene" whom she demands slain. Here, the male character usually plays the role of her crusader, her warring retainer.

Pre-Christian figures of English soil are also represented through the retelling of the Arthurian myth, *Haunted Shores*, from the perspective of an Arthur become king with the aid of pagan female divinity through "the glorious battles won my dark goddess provided"; when he reaches the end of his life, in the song of the banshees upon the "haunted shores of Avalon", he cries out: "Morganna, art thou me? Languid I wend my path to grave,/ I cast my sword to the sulphid grasp of the naiad 'neath the silver lake", in references to Morgan le Fay and the Lady of the Lake.

*Under Huntress Moon* describes a rite of libation and soul-offering and the "With every twist I cannot resist her/ fertile female mind control/ This wanton witch, white-rapids sister/ To whom I pour my wine and soul", ending in the repeated incantation "You mesmerize my soul, Diana, you mesmerize my soul." In *The Forest Whispers My Name*, Artemis-Diana is the goddess who bestows occult knowledge on womankind: "When the moon is full, we shall assemble to adore the potent spirit of your Queen and my mother, the great Diana. She who fain would learn all sorcery yet has not won its deepest secrets, my mother will teach her, in truth, the mysteries of all things as yet unknown." *To Eve the Art of Witchcraft* illustrates aspects of worship, the humility of the adept's prayer, "Make me as a flower that grows forever in your throne,/ that I might pollinate the world with darkness as your own,/ Embrace me with spellbinding eyes,/ the fire of life that never dies" – and the reward – "She will greet me as serpent in her dark, secret Eden" – which implies the gift of knowledge. "I will make my puppets dance, the men will bow down before me to take my flesh as lucid thoughts of dark unbridled lust."

### b. The Temptress

An avatar or priestess of the goddess, the female figure functions as a temptress for the male lyrical I, a dominatrix who manipulates him to her bidding (to the goal of achieving power, knowledge or the ascent of the deity she worships). She is a *Belle dame sans merci* in the vein of Keats in terms of her supernatural charm, akin to *Dracula's* vampire bride in terms of destructiveness and seductiveness, but one who keeps the protagonist emotionally enslaved with an obsessive love, another Gothic trope found in fictions like Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

*Forgive Me Father* tells the story of a priest whose secret fantasies center on a worshipper whom he imagines in erotic postures, tempting him like a succubus. He begins to stalk her and imagine interactions, which brings his downfall by madness through guilt and overlaps of reality and fantasy and potential excommunication. Even *Dracula* in *Lovesick for Mina* declares in anguish "One might see in Mina my disease, but it is she who has infected me for all eternity"; the Gothic roles of the supernatural male antihero and innocent mortal female appear here reversed in terms of power relations and effect upon one another.

*A Gothic Romance* furthers the Gothic setting through tropes like the castle, the masquerade ball, the graveyard and the stormy night. The "evening menuetto" turns into an erotic tryst and then descends into nightmare and death: the male protagonist is captivated by a "seductress in black" with "jade woodland eyes that ushered the impurest erotic-laden fantasies", they leave the castle together and after their affair she disappears without trace; he runs out in search of her, obsessively "like a blind acolyte" and, taking refuge from the storm in a cemetery and falling asleep inside a tomb, he hallucinates a now monstrous female being draining his life ("my veins spill forth their waters, rent by lips I cherish most") but allowing the final realization "For I must know, art though not Death? [...] Did not the Queen of Heaven come as Devil to me?". The temptress is here, again, an avatar of the goddess, this time not empowering the male character but leading him to ruin, in the Gothic key that the title of the song indicates. In this image we may see not male fear that demonizes a temptress as corruptor of but fascination for her power.

Given that the temptress-character is described in relation to the male narrator, the sexual component is perhaps the most blatant as her weapon for manipulation, making her a more self-willed but equally empowered by her own sexuality – *Dracula's* Lucy Westenra. Synonyms such as “libertine”, “seductress” and the apparently negative term “whore” are used devoid of censoring moral judgment to denote a self-willed woman in charge of her sexuality. The whore is likened to the biblical Jezebel (a comparison Cradle of Filth employs), a symbol in Christian lore for female authority, promiscuity and manipulation, a pagan queen challenging the dominant culture; furthermore, the whore is what society vilifies (or “jezebels”, to employ Cradle of Filth’s verbing, one of their examples of word-formation by conversion) – the term is appropriated and the figure glorified as a transgressor of a corrupt and ignorant society fearful of female influence. In the jarring image “The virgin raped shall seek to whore, She-wolf, bare your snarling jaw!” from *The Black Goddess Rises*, the whore is portrayed as an innocent marginalized and wronged because of it, then marginalized again out of fear, but now capable to strike back, to rebel against the unfairness, an instance of revenge shaped by an erring power-structure.

### c. The Victim

Conversely, female figures also appear in the hypostasis of an innocent victim of a superstitious and unjust (most often Christian) society, whose inclinations – true or perceived – towards mysticism trigger the fear and hate of townsfolk and authority, leading to her execution and often to her punishment through trial, social banishment, rape or murder. The witch of this category is less the men-devourer of the previous sections, and more the superstitious woman of rural areas where Christianisation permeated less thoroughly that suffered under 15-17th century persecutions, as Foucault describes the process in a 1975 course.<sup>8</sup>

Her memory arouses not the male narrator’s passion but his despair, still fed by an obsessive love, revolt against society, authority and divinity, and a desire for revenge most often violently acted upon.

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<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *February 26<sup>th</sup> 1975, “Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France”, 1974-1975* (New York, London: Verso, 2003), 201-230.

*Her Ghost in the Fog* is the Gothic tragedy of a village mystic who, while gathering magical supplies (“picking rue by the light of the moon”) at night, is captured, raped and left for dead by “five men of God”. Her lover finds her “beneath the cedar’s stare,/ her silk dress torn, her raven hair/ flown to gown her beauty bare/ starred with frost. I knew her lost,/ I wept till tears crept back to prayer”. Praying in his grief, the man finds that God himself gives him a sign, empowering his revenge: in the snow he “[espies] a gleam trodden to earth – the church bell tower key” with which he reaches the church and “[blows] their chapel ablaze, and all locked in to a pain/, best reserved for judgment that their Bible construed”. In *Blackest Magick in Practice*, the lover’s grievingly suicidal thoughts (“I should have followed my innamorata to the grave”) are converted into a necromantic ritual, where dead are risen as demons to torture her “deflowerers” (“Rape is returned a thousandfold in the garden of unearthly delights, only when their minds lie in ruin will I hand them the knife”), rape appearing again as a crime of the highest order. An inquisitional image appears as executioner of the female character in *Malice Through the Looking Glass* and *Of Mist and Midnight Skies*, one of their few explicit but dramatically satanic songs where the protagonist’s antichristian sentiments are explained in a short soliloquy: “That night they came and took her away from me, I lost the woman I loved and I learned how to curse and to spit in the face of their Jesus fucking Christ”. Similarly, in *Nocturnal Supremacy* revenge is exacted upon the earthly body of Christ, the church;<sup>9</sup> come from beyond the grave, Rorasa orders the burning of “his temple” which the lover carries out while musing not of regret, fear or anger, but of love and delight at having done her bidding: “I am enamoured and imparadised/ To watch the fires dance profanely in her eyes”.

The same trope of the male lover pushed to vengeance by his innocent beloved’s death appears in *The Death of Love* where 15<sup>th</sup> century confessed serial killer Gilles de Rais – the protagonist of the thematic album *Godspeed on the Devil’s Thunder* – begins his murders maddened by grief of Jean d’Arc’s execution, his platonic love. Her role as transgressor lies here not in her over sexuality or witchcraft, but in the virginal and pious Jean’s intimidating strength and determination (“Visions and ambition never listened to submission/

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<sup>9</sup>1 Corinthians 12:27.

As she was on a mission from the highest above") which fascinates Gilles "without desire" ("Gilles adored [...] her suit of pure white armour/ blazed against the English in a torrent of light"). The image of the dying Jean – wounded, racked and incinerated – is turned into an icon of righteous war in Gilles's eyes: "framed amidst the thick of fire, aflame, a valkyrie". Jean's words in their imaginary dialogue underline her persecution and martyrdom at the hands of an ignorant and fearfully violent society: "Where will you be when Babel builds my fire?/ Will you not flee and label me pariah?/ Where will you be, my darling,/ Where will you be when they light my pyre?", to which Gilles, in response, "swore to score the crimes jackdaws poured on his love, crimes derived from minds of the blind" as a token of loyalty to her cause and person.

#### d. The Psychopath

An underrepresented typology in fiction, the violent female psychopath is another expression of a dominant female character which stands out amid the previous types as thoroughly negative but personalized and psychologised. The type is represented by the Countess Elizabeth Báthory of the 1998 concept album *Cruelty and the Beast*. The album is structured as a series of chronological fictionalized episodes from her life, from the dark thoughts of her childhood through her loving marriage with Count Ferenc Nádasdy and her series of murders, to her arrest and lonely death imprisoned in a tower. Her portrayal is mythical in its surrealism, believable in its keen insight into female mind, not glorifying her deeds but painting her portrait akin to Milton's portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, as a poignant influence in Gothic context. To employ a politicized reading of the totalising and monstrous aristocrat in Gothic fiction in the vein of Franco Moretti,<sup>10</sup> Báthory can also be likened to Bram Stoker's Dracula and De Sade's libertines.

Elizabeth is a high-class woman, emotionless, vain, possessed of delusions of grandeur, a self-entitled rebel against any authority other than her own, a bisexual whose repression of lesbian tendencies morphs into violence, insecure enough of her aging image to kill and engage into pseudo-medical treatments and occult rituals to regain her youthful beauty. A powerful image of Cradle of Filth's defiling femininity shows a thirteen-year old Elizabeth

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<sup>10</sup> Franco Moretti, „The Dialectic of Fear“, *New Left Review*, 136 (1982), 2.



in church given to erotic fantasies elicited by a statue of the crucified Christ (“I must avert my eyes to hymns/ for His gaze brings dogmas to my skin,/ He knows that I dreamt of carnal rites/ with Him undead for three long nights”). Confessing her impure thoughts to her priest, he gives the penance of “re-baptism” as her only chance at redemption, but the end of the song finds her replacing the priest with an occult mystic and the baptism with witchcraft apprenticeship. The imagery here is blatantly feminine: menstruating presumably for the first time (“stigmata still wept between her legs”, idea reinforced by “the menstrual sky” describing sunset), the teenage Elizabeth “fled the castle in secret [...] to the forest’s vulva where the witch schooled her in even darker themes”.

The legendary episode of Elizabeth slapping a maid and observing how blood rejuvenates her skin, the onslaught of her murderous obsession, takes place in *Beneath the Howling Stars* before the ball where she meets her future husband, Ferenc “the Black Count” Nádasdy; glowing after the murder and “descending to the ball with painted blood upon her lips”, Elizabeth fascinates her guests, eliciting gossips of witchcraft among envious court maidens (“Elizabeth bewitches, see how even now the whore casts her spells upon the Black Count, whom her reddened lips holds fast”) and starting a passionate love affair with the count. Retreating from the ball to be alone, the couple walks through the town and come upon “a hunched belldame” whom Elizabeth mocks and who curses her in return: “this girl who chides will soon be as plagued with age as I”; this sparks Elizabeth’s fearful obsession and she has the Count murder her as a wedding gift. Her slaughters represent, apart from frustrated sexual desires, the struggle to escape the decay of old age, aided by the occult means of a Faustian pact. In a ritual of summoning replete with occult imagery of female sexuality (“onyx idols”, “circle”, “signs and seals”, “in pendants, natal trophies from the bellies of desanctified nuns”, ritual masturbation), the subversive Countess offers the sorceress to the demon “if thou wouldst draw a veil for me o’er the lengthening scars of age and grief” making with him a binding pact, and is cursed by her with the death of her husband in war and her own lonely insanity at old age; the curse is fulfilled in *Báthory Aria*, the concluding song of the album chronicling the Countess’s final years.

The origins of the myth are manifold, the Countess being the subject of numerous stories from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, works of fiction,

legends, chronicles, letters, diaries and other historical documents (like the 1774 László Turóczi's *Ungaria suis cum regibus compendio data* or Bél Mátyás's *Notitia Hungariae novae historico-geographica divisa in partes quatuor*) and studies of modern historians (like Raymond T. McNally or Radu Florescu). As Tony Thorne points out after having followed the ramifications of the Elizabeth Báthory myth in literature, history and folklore, "the blood-fetishist, the insatiable lesbian dominatrix and the serial murderess are constructs of our time, anachronisms",<sup>11</sup> not proven by history and not invented by Cradle of Filth. And nor is Cradle of Filth the only musical project inspired by the legendary Countess, metal bands like Báthory, Kamelot, Venom or Slayer devoting songs to her. But Cradle of Filth's is a retelling of the myth from her perspective where she is more than the sum of her legends but a protagonist in her own right with an individuality and a well-developed arc that spans the ten songs of the album creating a ten-chapter novella. In *Cruelty and the Beast*, her story thus becomes a 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic pastiche personalised with specifics that writers of the time might have imagined but would not dare publish,<sup>12</sup> all set in that contemporary format so indebted to Gothic fiction – extreme music – by a band that consistently acknowledges the traditional basis of this genre with every reference and deconstruction.

## Conclusion

In all these aspects, we can discern Cradle of Filth's acknowledgement, tribute and continuation of Gothic fiction into the postmodern: the oppositions, the social disintegration, moral transgression, religious defilement, the terror and horror, awe-provoking settings like haunted castles, graveyards and stormy nights, a nostalgia for the past (the occult medieval and the pre-Christian), the obsessive love, as well as referencing these themes in literature from the Bible through Shakespeare, Milton, Poe, Lewis, Shelley, Byron, Goethe, Wilde, and 20<sup>th</sup> century Gothic. All these find their way in Cradle of Filth's

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<sup>11</sup> Tony Thorne, "Countess Dracula": *The Life and Times of Elisabeth Báthory, the Blood Countess* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 1997), 267.

<sup>12</sup> "One hundred years ago for a writer like Stoker, the idea of choosing as a heroine a blood-obsessed lesbian mass-murderess would have been a short cut to literary obscurity," estimates Thorne in *Countess Dracula*, 17.

imagery and literary corpus, while the intertextuality, pastiche and metafiction, irony and wordplays, add elements of Postmodern fiction into their style. Additionally, the typology of female characters in *Cradle of Filth's* imaginary is varied in terms of character psychology, but united under these Gothic tropes, doubled with expressions of feminine identity including biological functions, puberty, sexuality or pregnancy, and gender violence, an imaginary singular in metal music. Through the aspects it has examined, this study offers a glimpse into the themes and lyrical expression in extreme metal and into the image of the occult – namely the representations of the witch – which is, for *Cradle of Filth*, beyond a surface illustration of defilement, not as much a personal ideology or theology of the artist, but rather a consistent postmodern fiction of Gothic inspiration integrated into music.

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# **PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS**



*Images de la sorcellerie  
dans le théâtre roumain contemporain<sup>1</sup>*

**Performance review: *Sânziana și Pepelea*, by Vasile Alecsandri (director A. Dabija, National Theatre in Cluj – 2013) ; *Țiganiada* by Ion Budai-Deleanu (director A. Dabija, National Theatre in Cluj – 2018) ; *Romaceni – Vremea vrăjitoarei* (director Tina Turnheim, Andrei Mureșanu Theatre, Sfântu-Gheorghe – 2019) ; *Macbeth* by Giuseppe Verdi (director Rareș Trifan, National Opera in Cluj – 2019)**

Ces dernières années, les critiques ont pu observer que, dans les théâtres de Roumanie, on a mis en scène plusieurs spectacles dans lesquels la figure de la sorcière joue un rôle de premier plan. Je vais passer brièvement en revue quelques-uns de ces spectacles, en ajoutant des photos illustratives, afin de saisir ce qu'il y a de spécifique dans les images des sorcières qui peuplent ces créations scéniques. À la base des spectacles dont il sera question plus bas, on trouve des textes de la littérature classique roumaine ou universelle, ou bien des créations dramatiques contemporaines.

Le premier spectacle, *Sânziana și Pepelea* (*Sânziana et Pepelea*), créé par Alexandru Dabija au Théâtre National de Cluj-Napoca, ayant eu la première en 2013, constitue à ce jour un des plus grands succès de la principale troupe roumaine de Transylvanie et continue de faire salle comble chaque fois

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<sup>1</sup> Ce compte-rendu extensif a été réalisé dans le cadre d'un projet du Ministère de l'Éducation et de la Recherche, UEFISCDI PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0067, n° de contrat 135/2018, ayant pour titre *Iconographie de la sorcellerie, une approche anthropologique : cinéma, théâtre, arts visuels*, directeur de projet Ioan Pop-Curșeu.



qu'il se joue. Mais quelles sont les raisons de ce succès extraordinaire auprès du public et auprès de la critique la plus exigeante ? Je vais esquisser quelques réponses, n'ayant pas ici l'espace nécessaire pour entreprendre une étude en profondeur.

Tout d'abord, il y a le texte original, dont certains metteurs en scène et directeurs de théâtre ont osé dire qu'il n'était plus actuel. C'est une féerie publiée par Vasile Alecsandri en 1881, mais qui fourmille d'allusions subtiles à la politique contemporaine, sur plusieurs niveaux. De ce point de vue, les acteurs du National de Cluj n'ont eu qu'à changer la politique de 1881, avec celle de 2013-2020, en obtenant des effets garantis : le metteur en scène les a laissés faire et les y a même encouragés. En deuxième lieu, il y a la musique composée par Ada Milea, qui est une valeur sûre dans plusieurs spectacles donnés sur la scène du Théâtre National ; d'ailleurs, cela ne trahit pas l'esprit d'Alecsandri, qui truffait lui-même ses pièces de théâtre de « chansonnettes comiques. » En troisième lieu, et c'est là un aspect moins remarqué par la critique que les autres, le public a apprécié la structure de conte de fées du spectacle, peut-être parce qu'on a encore et toujours besoin de rêver.

Dans cette structure de conte de fées, la sorcière est très importante. Vasile Alecsandri opère un changement qui est illustratif d'un adoucissement de l'image de la sorcière, amorcé avec le romantisme et continué jusqu'à présent. Pour résumer brièvement les choses, il faut dire que l'action se passe dans un royaume de fantaisie, *Țara lui Papură-Vodă*,<sup>2</sup> dont le nom est entré dans le langage roumain courant pour désigner un endroit où tout est sens dessus dessous et où tout peut (se) passer, en bien comme en mal. Or, dans ce royaume, c'est la sécheresse et les gens du coin, ignorants et vulgaires, ne trouvent rien de mieux à faire que de noyer une vieille femme, Baba-Rada,<sup>3</sup> accusée d'avoir noué les nuages, car elle passe pour être une sorcière et pour faire des charmes d'amour. Le seul qui a pitié de Rada et essaie vainement de la sauver, c'est le jeune paysan Pepelea (nom ridicule, qui n'est pas du tout celui qu'on attendrait du Prince Charmant), orphelin et

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<sup>2</sup> Papură = roseau. Donc la traduction de tout le nom serait : *Pays du Roi Roseau*.

<sup>3</sup> Baba = vieille femme.

sans le sou. Après avoir été noyée, Rada ressuscite pourtant sous la forme d'une bonne fée (la fée du lac) et mettra tout son savoir magique au service de Pepelea, pour l'aider à conquérir Sânziana, fille du roi Papură (Roseau), que le jeune homme finit par épouser après maintes aventures picaresques, grotesques et parfaitement savoureuses.

Le rôle de Rada, sorcière et fée, est joué dans ce spectacle par la grande actrice Miriam Cuiibus, qui semble s'être fait ces derniers temps une spécialité des rôles de sorcière. Elle est par ailleurs en train de travailler à un film, situé entre la *fantaisie* et *l'horreur*, intitulé *Straja (La Sentinelle)*, dont le réalisateur est Rareș Stoica et auquel Ștefana Pop-Curșeu et moi-même avons apporté aussi une certaine contribution.



**Figure 1.** Pepelea et la sorcière Baba-Rada.



**Figure 2.** La noyade de la sorcière.



**Figure 3.** La sorcière surgit du lac/puits, accompagnée de son cortège de fées.

Ce spectacle de Dabija est bien rythmé, dynamique, concentré, amusant et virevoltant. On ne peut pas dire la même chose de *Țiganiada (La Tziganiade)*, signé par le même metteur en scène, spectacle réalisé en 2018, toujours au Théâtre National de Cluj, avec la même troupe. Cette fois, le prétexte littéraire du spectacle est un autre texte classique de la littérature roumaine : il s'agit d'une épopée héroïque-comique, composée par Ion Budai-Deleanu autour de 1800, sur la vie des Gitans (mais qui sont ici des correspondants allégoriques des Roumains). Même si le texte se prête à une approche similaire de celle de *Sânziana et Pepelea*, le metteur en scène fait ici un pari très risqué (et perdu à mon avis), à savoir celui de privilégier le texte de l'épopée, avec très peu de modernisations, raconté et expliqué mais non pas joué, sans aucune adéquation aux demandes et rigueurs des planches. Cela nous vaut deux heures de récitations assez monotones, sans mouvement scénique, sans conflits, et le parti-pris du metteur en scène de ne pas laisser les acteurs « jouer » s'avère catastrophique pour l'effet – ou plutôt le non-effet – du spectacle.

Ce qui sauve un peu la création scénique de Dabija, ce sont quelques éléments de scénographie évocateurs de la vie gitane, ainsi que des images visuelles fortes qui s'impriment durablement dans la conscience des spectateurs. La figure d'une sorcière – qui ne pouvait pas manquer du monde gitan – fait justement partie de ces images-là. Il s'agit de Brândușa, mère de Parpangel, un des héros attachants de l'épopée de Budai-Deleanu. Le portrait de Brândușa est réalisé dans un double code référentiel : d'un côté, l'écrivain fait référence aux sorcières de l'Antiquité, notamment Circé et Médée, tandis que, de l'autre côté, Budai-Deleanu glisse dans son texte de nombreuses allusions aux pratiques magiques des sorcières villageoises roumaines. Brândușa connaît le secret des herbes qui guérissent, elle est capable de faire surgir deux dragons qu'elle attelle à son char avec lequel elle parcourt les airs, elle devine l'avenir ou bien se montre capable de préparer des philtres d'amour.

L'incarnation scénique de la sorcière est, quant à elle, extrêmement intéressante. Comme les autres Gitans du spectacle, elle porte les vêtements spécifiques, mais aussi un costume qui colle à la peau et qui en a la couleur, ce qui suggère la nudité. On sait que la nudité rituelle est un thème important des pratiques de sorcellerie, mais aussi et surtout du discours que l'on a construit autour de ces pratiques. La sorcière de Dabija a – en plus – de

longs cheveux noirs, qui couvrent entièrement son corps et lui donnent une apparence sauvage. Quant à son mouvement scénique (assez réduit, comme dans le cas des autres personnages), elle se trouve sur une plateforme qui la fait tourner sur elle-même. Aux dires du metteur en scène, la sorcière sur la plateforme constitue comme une sorte de centre symbolique de l'univers scénique, qu'elle domine par ses pouvoirs magiques inconnus et inquiétants.



**Figure 4.** La sorcière de *La Tziganiade*.

Dans un tout autre registre que *La Tziganiade* de Dabija, *Romacen – Vremea vrăjitoarei* (Romacen – L'Ère de la sorcière), au Théâtre Andrei Mureșanu de Sfântu-Gheorghe (première décembre 2019), récupère et recycle la figure de la gitane à laquelle sont attribuées dans l'imaginaire collectif de grands pouvoirs magiques. C'est une récupération féministe et revendicatrice, qui tente de rendre le public sensible aux préjugés raciaux et aux préjugés de genre, aux stéréotypes qui nous empêchent de voir les êtres humains autour de nous pour ce qu'ils sont. D'ailleurs, la production du Théâtre Andrei Mureșanu a

été faite en collaboration avec la troupe Giuvlipen, qui est une des rares troupes de théâtre rom et féministe de Roumanie et dont le but est de promouvoir la culture de cette minorité à travers les arts de la scène.

Le spectacle mis en scène par l'Autrichienne Tina Turnheim travaille un texte écrit par Mihaela Drăgan pendant une résidence de création au Royal Court Theatre, qui raconte l'histoire de six sorcières gitanes. Celles-ci, pour fuir les oppressions de toutes sortes, créent une société alternative, fondée sur la solidarité, où elles vivent sans racisme et discrimination, refondant la puissance des femmes en dehors de la misogynie et de la violence de l'ordre patriarcal. Elles voyagent dans le temps, se battent contre les injustices politiques et mettent les bases de stratégies efficaces de lutte contre le réchauffement climatique. Pour ce faire, elles brouillent les lignes de séparation nette entre la science et la magie, entre la raison et le sentiment et contribuent au « réenchantement du monde », pour reprendre une formule célèbre de Michel Maffesoli.

De la sorcière bohémienne, il faut passer à la sorcière shakespearienne, mise au goût du jour au théâtre comme à l'opéra. Je m'arrête ainsi à un troisième spectacle réalisé sur la scène du Théâtre National de Cluj-Napoca, *La Tempête*, de William Shakespeare (date de la première : 11 octobre 2019). Quoique le metteur en scène, Gábor Tompa, ne soit pas toujours très inspiré dans ses choix, ce spectacle-ci lui a bien réussi. C'est vrai qu'il est servi par une distribution remarquable et je ne citerai que les rôles qui ont directement à voir avec la magie : Prospero (Marcel Iureș), Sycorax (Miriam Cuibus), Caliban (Cristian Grosu), Ariel (Anca Hanu) et les trois fées (Angelica Nicoară, Elena Ivanca et Romina Merei). Comme on le sait, chez Shakespeare, Sycorax est seulement un souvenir, une présence immatérielle menaçante ; dans le spectacle de Tompa, c'est sous forme de projection vidéo que ce souvenir se manifeste, alors qu'il s'agit de prouver à Ariel combien la mère de Caliban a été méchante. Le costume et le masque facial de celle-ci ont été conçus par la scénographe Carmencita Brojboiu et le personnage, bien que très expressif, ressemble plus à une Gorgone antique qu'à une sorcière primitive, coupée du monde. Le côté primitif, par contre, est illustré parfaitement par Caliban.

La scénographie construite sur le principe de lanterne magique, avec des images qui passent et reviennent à la guise de Prospero, ajoute au pouvoir de fascination des présences magiques dans *La Tempête* de Cluj.



**Figure 5.** Sycorax (Miriam Cuiibus) menace Ariel (Anca Hanu), sous le geste illustratif de Prospero (Marcel Iureș).



**Figure 6.** Caliban, fils de la sorcière, interprété par Cristian Grosu.

Pour rester dans la veine shakespearienne, je n'omettrai point de mentionner *Macbeth*, dans sa transposition opératique verdienne, mise en scène à l'Opéra Roumain de Cluj par Rareș Trifan en octobre 2019. C'est un bon spectacle, avec une scénographie lourde et baroque, mais belle, dans laquelle évoluent des personnages violents et tragiques, aux prises avec la fatalité de leur destin. Si Lady Macbeth (Nadia Cerchez, chanteuse invitée) est fougueuse et avide de pouvoir, emportant l'adhésion du public par sa belle voix, Macbeth (Florin Estefan) lui-même reste –malheureusement– faible et sans force, avec une voix flasque et fausse. On arrive à se demander s'il ne s'est pas fait attribuer ce rôle principal seulement parce qu'il est le directeur de l'Opéra de Cluj...

On sait bien que, pour les besoins de l'opéra, Verdi a changé les trois sorcières de Shakespeare en tout un chœur, qui se partage en sous-groupes complexes et marque dans l'histoire de la musique quelques-unes des plus belles harmonies verdiennes. Or, Rareș Trifan a saisi toute la force de ces sorcières en tant qu'ordonnatrices du drame et que fatalités de Macbeth. Il leur a donné un air à la fois monacal et fantomatique, les habillant de blanc et utilisant leur présence comme une malédiction constante qui hante tous les espaces, qu'il s'agisse de la forêt dans la brume de l'aube ou des larges pièces du palais de Macbeth.



Figure 7. Le chœur des sorcières de *Macbeth*.



Ces sorcières ne sont pourvues de masques qu'à certains moments-clé de l'action, lorsqu'elles se confrontent directement avec les humains, avec Macbeth en particulier. À ces moments elles portent toutes une sorte de masques qui reproduisent le visage de Lady Macbeth, en multipliant ainsi sa présence et son influence néfaste. C'est une manière de redoubler les drames et les conflits des personnages principaux, mais à travers des visages bidimensionnels, immobiles et sans expression, qui montrent la pétrification des passions, des ambitions ou des douleurs.

De cette manière, elles paraissent froides, implacables, inhumaines et puissantes et, longtemps après la fin du spectacle, hantent l'imagination du mélomane.



**Figure 8.** Les sorcières masquées charment Macbeth.

En guise de conclusion, il faut dire que ces cinq spectacles prouvent que la figure de la sorcière reste toujours d'actualité sur la scène du théâtre contemporain. Elle continue de fasciner, d'interpeller, de questionner nos représentations mentales et nos préjugés, ainsi que les limites de nos

conceptions éthiques. Elle est porteuse de revendications politiques et sociales, mais elle reste toujours un noyau de fantasmes et fantaisies. Quoi que les metteurs en scène nous proposent de lire en elle, la sorcière affirme par-dessus tout sa force d'irradiation esthétique...

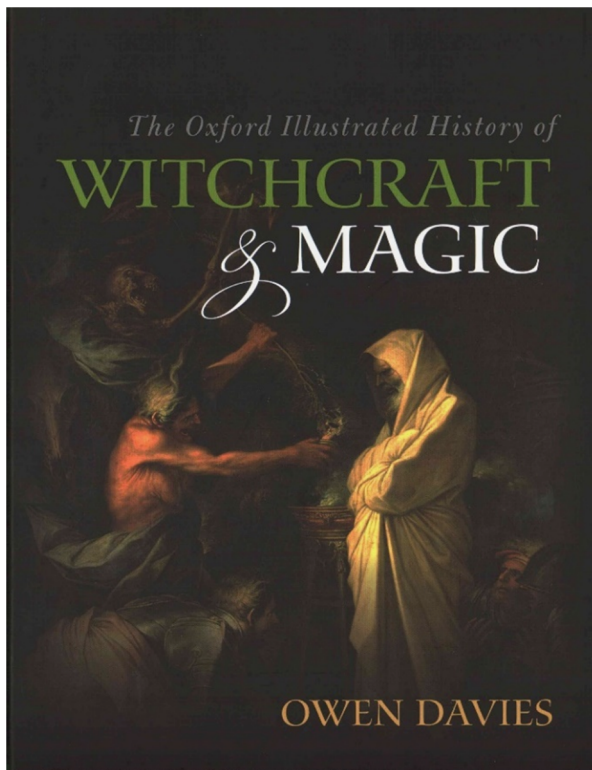
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*Un voyage historique dans le monde fascinant  
des images de la sorcellerie*

**Book review: *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*,  
Edited by Owen Davies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.**



Même si l'idée d'étudier la sorcellerie à travers divers types d'images semble évidente, peu de recherches substantielles ont été entreprises dans cette direction. Elles n'en manquent pas pour autant et le chercheur ou le simple curieux peut retirer une riche matière, parfois mal systématisée, d'études

publiées auparavant. Il faudrait citer ici quelques ouvrages remarquables, plus anciens, dont ceux de Roland Villeneuve, avec *La Beauté du Diable* (1983), ou de Maurice Bessy, avec son *Histoire de la magie en 1000 images* (1961). Dans les années 2000, d'autres répertoires iconographiques ont suivi : Candace Savage, *Witch. The Wild Ride from Wicked to Wicca* (2000 ; traduction française *Sorcières*, Paris : Seuil, 2000), ou bien Susan Greenwood (*The Illustrated History of Magic and Witchcraft*, 2011). Il ne faut pas oublier dans cette brève introduction les livres et articles de celui qui s'est avéré un des investigateurs les plus tenaces des images de la magie et de la sorcellerie : Charles Zika (*Exorcising our Demons. Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 2003 ; *The Appearance of Witchcraft. Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, 2007).

Le présent volume, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, édité par Owen Davies, s'inscrit dans le même filon. Ce qui le distingue, cependant, c'est le fait d'être un corpus de neuf articles érudits, groupés selon un principe chronologique, qui retracent une histoire de la magie et de la sorcellerie à travers les images qu'elles ont générées, depuis la Mésopotamie jusqu'au cinéma et à la télévision contemporaine. Bien qu'une telle démarche ne puisse pas prétendre à l'exhaustivité, le volume d'Owen Davies couvre cependant une bonne partie de la matière, dans ses points essentiels, essayant de ne laisser de côté aucun des moments essentiels de l'histoire de la magie et de la sorcellerie.

L'article de Peter Maxwell-Stuart, « Magic in the Ancient World, » contient des données intéressantes sur les Mésopotamiens, Égyptiens, Hébreux, Grecs et Romains et sur leurs pratiques magiques complexes, souvent circulant des uns aux autres. Il y a dans l'article de bons exemples de charmes, d'amulettes et d'objets rituels utilisés dans les pratiques magiques. Sophie Page, dans son texte, « Medieval Magic, » montre l'importance de deux phénomènes historiques, qui ont laissé une empreinte durable sur le monde magique : la christianisation du Proche-Orient et de l'Europe, ainsi que le travail de diffusion de l'ancien savoir (scientifique ou magique), opéré par les Arabes. Selon Page, il y a plusieurs types de magies qui fonctionnent dans la pensée médiévale : « la magie angélique, » « la magie démoniaque » et surtout « la magie de l'image. » Relativement à ce dernier type, Page retrace quelques pratiques qui utilisaient

l'image comme support : invocations des esprits, fumigations, etc. Son article finit sur la lente démonisation de la magie au Moyen Âge, ainsi que sur sa transformation en « hérésie, » ce qui a mené, aux débuts de l'époque moderne, à la grande chasse aux sorcières.

James Sharpe consacre un article aux spécialistes dans les agissements du diable : « The Demonologists. » L'article est illustré des portraits de quelques démonologues célèbres, dont Jean Bodin et William Perkins, ainsi que de celui d'un médecin modéré qui s'opposait à la chasse aux sorcières : Jean Wier. On y retrouve aussi des images célèbres de la sorcellerie, gravées dans les traités d'Ulrich Molitor ou Francesco Maria Guazzo, ainsi que des facsimilés des pages de titre de plusieurs traités de démonologie. Rita Voltmer, quant à elle, écrit un article sur « The Witch Trials, » dans le corpus duquel elle reproduit quelques planches gravées illustrant le sabbat (heureusement de celles qui sont moins connues et reproduites dans les ouvrages de recherche scientifique), ou bien des documents relatifs aux procès ou des images de torture.

L'article de Charles Zika, « The Witch and the Magician in European Art, » propose une investigation qui s'étend sur plusieurs siècles, depuis 1490-1590 et l'émergence d'une « nouvelle imagerie de la sorcellerie » jusqu'à l'aube du romantisme et aux premières tentatives de « parodie » des croyances en la sorcellerie et de l'absurdité des procès. Sont revisités ici, bien sûr, les œuvres connues d'artistes tels que Hans Baldung, Lucas Cranach ou Dürer, mais aussi les créations d'artistes de second plan, intéressantes cependant du point de vue de l'anthropologie visuelle : Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen, Dosso Dossi, Jan Ziarnko, Frans Francken II, Jacques de Gheyn II, Salvator Rosa, Michael Herr. Comme tous les autres écrits de Charles Zika, celui-ci aussi est écrit avec une grande précision et ouvre de vastes et stimulantes perspectives pour la réflexion.

L'éditeur du volume, Owen Davies, publie deux articles, « The World of Popular Magic, » et « The Rise of Modern Magic. » Dans le premier texte, Davies étudie le monde de la magie populaire, dans ses pratiques multiformes et fascinantes. Il analyse et reproduit quelques images d'objets à valeur magiques, dont les nombreux et célèbres livres de conjurations, qui ont circulé dans des dizaines de versions aux 18<sup>ème</sup>-19<sup>ème</sup> siècles. À ce propos, il faut renvoyer au livre de Dominique Camus, *Sorciers. Au cœur du paranormal* (Rennes : Éditions Ouest

France, 2016), qui traite les mêmes thèmes que le premier article de Davies et propose, par surcroît, de plus nombreux exemples iconographiques. Le deuxième article, sur l'avènement de la magie moderne, est beaucoup plus intéressant. Après des considérations initiales sur Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim et Marsile Ficin, l'auteur se concentre sur l'occultisme des 18<sup>ème</sup>-20<sup>ème</sup> siècles, avec ses grands représentants, dont Éliphas Lévi et Aleister Crowley, ou bien avec les mouvements néopaiens, comme Wicca. L'iconographie appelée à l'appui est bien choisie, mais l'on aimerait qu'elle soit plus riche et plus... colorée. En effet, la plupart des images commentées dans le présent volume sont reproduites en noir et blanc, à l'exception d'une sélection placée au début.

L'article de Robert J. Wallis, « Witchcraft and Magic in the Age of Anthropology, » passe en revue les différentes conceptions magiques de peuplades longtemps considérées, injustement, comme primitives. Cependant, la perspective est des plus originales, car ces conceptions sont discutées à travers quelques grandes théories que les anthropologues ont élaborées sur la magie. Tous les grands noms sont passés en revue ici et, à cause de cela, peut-être que cet article aurait pu prétendre être le premier du volume : Tylor, Frazer, Émile Durkheim, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Malinowski, Pritchard, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Victor Turner, Favret-Saada et bien d'autres. Puisque l'article de Wallis est focalisé sur la discussion des méthodes de recherche et des conceptions des grands anthropologues, l'iconographie est moins importante que dans les autres textes du présent volume : à peine quelques photos d'objets ou de personnages...

Avant de finir, une mention spéciale pour le dernier article du volume, signé par Willem de Blécourt et intitulé « Witches on Screen. » C'est une excellente analyse et les exemples sont bien choisis. Les images tirées de films ou séries télévisées montrent bien l'évolution de l'image de la sorcière, telle qu'elle a été fabriquée par les médias audiovisuels des 20<sup>ème</sup>-21<sup>ème</sup> siècles, bien sûr à partir d'éléments significatifs antérieurs. Une bonne partie des grands films de sorcellerie sont mentionnés ici : les séries *Harry Potter*, *Charmed*, *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, *The Wizard of Oz*, etc. Willem de Blécourt analyse le changement d'accent dans les portraits de sorcières, montrant que – même si le stéréotype de la sorcière laide a longtemps persisté – le public a fait savoir son besoin de voir sur les écrans des sorcières jolies, sexy, attrayantes, en quoi il a été

bien servi par les producteurs. Un autre aspect notable de l'article de Willem de Blécourt, c'est son analyse d'un phénomène de mentalité esquissé avec les débuts du romantisme et porté à ses dernières conséquences par l'art du film, à savoir la « domestication » de la sorcière. Il y a un seul aspect dont on peut déplorer l'absence de ce dernier article du volume : les portraits des sorcières qui peuplent les films d'horreur et qui sont « légion. » En effet, c'est là un champ d'une richesse iconographique extraordinaire, peu exploré jusqu'à présent, et qui attend encore des études en profondeur...

En tout et pour tout, le volume dirigé par Owen Davies complète bien la série des autres livres consacrés à l'iconographie de la sorcellerie et mentionnés dans ce compte rendu. Il est riche d'informations, d'images et suggère de nombreuses ouvertures au niveau de futurs voyages dans le monde fascinant des images magiques.

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