

# **The Monstrous Feminine and the Abject**

**in HBO's *Game of Thrones***

*Conflating Three Aspects of the Pre-Christian, Western European Goddess, or "Sovereignty"*

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## Abstract

In Post-Modern Western culture three stereotypical visual representations of witches can be identified, namely: the ‘evil Crone’, the independent ‘Maiden’ and the more Euro-centric traditionally knowledgeable ‘Mother’ (Matthews 1998). HBO’s *Game of Thrones* combines these three stereotypes into one in the person of the Red Witch, Lady Melisandre (O’Brien 2015, ‘Melisandre: priestess or witch?’). Potentially this problematizes simplistically bifurcated portrayals of witches as either terrifying or alluring, which begs for an analysis of witches’ enduring ability to inspire fear. Witches’ culturally mediated capacity to inspire fear, based on an understanding of Abjection, as described by Julia Kristeva (1982, *Power of Horror*) and Barbara Creed (1993, *The Monstrous Feminine*), illustrates the efficacy of Martin’s Melisandre, whose terrifying yet alluring portrayal is intimately connected to her association with the monstrous feminine, magick as well as all three aspects of the Sovereign Goddess of Pre-Christian Europe. Melisandre, while complying with Western ideals of beauty, represents a filmic witch who is both normative and abject, making her both exceedingly terrifying and oddly acceptable. This study re-evaluates witches’ ability to inspire fear, illustrating how the character of the witch in visual texts represents a part of our own individual consciousness which needs to be ordered and suppressed. Barbara Creed (1993, p.71) explains that women are associated with abjection because their genitals threaten castration. Julia Kristeva (1982, p.91) describes ‘abjection’ as a “breakdown in the distinction between what is self and what is Other” which leads to the ‘casting off’ or rejection of abject elements to protect the self. Since the witch, as a horror trope, challenges boundaries, it helps the human psyche integrate itself by re-establishing its own borders. Medieval stereotypes’ unique individual ability to inspire fear, based on the patriarchal understanding of females’ connection to nature, are triplified by their combination in the person of Melisandre. This study investigates the implied relationship between the ‘Monstrous Feminine’ and magick (spelled with a ‘k’ throughout this text to indicate archaic, occult practices as opposed to performance magic), revealing the extent to which visual and/or textual representation of witches has altered from the Middle Ages into the Post-Modern era. *Game of Thrones* draws on polytheism (Estés 2008, p.4) and historical accounts of the Middle Ages in Western Europe, which is why studies which point to Western witches’ implied relation to the triune aspects of the pre-Christian Western European Goddess also feature in this research. The function of witches in literary sources is described in terms of the educational role of myths and fairy tales in Western Europe’s early

polytheistic society (Lawton 2016, p.8-9). Analysing how filmic representations perpetuate or change ideas of witchcraft is therefore crucial since films are imbued with the potential to affect the psychic development of cultural groups. This dissertation uncovers the complexity of dichotomously terrifying, yet alluring witches like Melisandre. Film series like HBO's Game of Thrones endear witches to Western and global audiences, while simultaneously inviting the rejection of their visual representations, leading to an internal crisis.

## Chapter I – Introduction



ost-modern witchcraft practices differ greatly from Medieval beliefs and accounts and a substantial number of written and visual texts which contain references to witchcraft practices still subscribe to outdated stereotypes which prove that beliefs regarding witches and their craft have, in many cases, not been adjusted. In Western culture three stereotypical visual representations of witches can be identified. The first is the witch as independent ‘Maiden’; the second is a more Euro-centric portrayal of the witch as traditionally knowledgeable ‘Mother’ and the third is that of the old ‘Crone’ or grandmother. Women in Western Europe became more readily associated with witchcraft accusations than men owing to woman’s symbolic associations with the processes of life and death, which were taken to make her threatening. Representations of witches as Maidens, Mothers and Crones are currently in circulation in Western media in reasonably fixed moulds, as horror tropes, along with such ‘monsters’ as zombies, vampires and werewolves. HBO’s *Game of Thrones* not only combines these three stereotypes into one in the person of Lady Melisandre but manages to subvert the witch trope in the process. Potentially this problematizes simplistically bifurcated portrayals of witches as either terrifying or alluring, which begs for an analysis of her enduring ability to inspire fear.

This ability to inspire fear supposedly stems from the presumed closeness between women and outwardly mysterious natural processes, stemming from ancient cultures (Plutarch c.46-125 AD). For example, Barbara Creed (1993, p. 74) explains that women are strongly associated with abjection because their genitals threaten castration. The vagina is often considered to be ‘toothed’ in terms of the ‘vagina dentata’ construct, which stems from earlier civilizations’ beliefs regarding women’s sexuality. Classical mythology was populated by female gendered ‘monsters’, with their terrifying aspect often resembling the female sexual organ. Creed explores the extent to which modern horror films refer to this method of gendered representation in their portrayal of female monsters. The witch is one of the types of female monsters Creed analyses; her portrayal in modern film is often tied to her political deviance and not merely to her gender. Keeping all these aspects of witches’ terrifying aspect in mind, it can be argued that three stereotypes of the Medieval witch and her unique individual ability

to inspire fear can be considerably amplified by their conflation into one person. This can be seen, for example, in the person of Melisandre, the Red Witch from *Game of Thrones* who is concurrently a Maiden, Mother and Crone at different times throughout the iconic series; both her sexuality and her political allegiance inform her terrifying aspect.

The research objectives of this dissertation also investigate Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject (1982, p. 91) as a "breakdown in the distinction between what is self and what is Other" which leads to the 'casting off' or rejection of abject elements in an effort to protect the integrity of the self. Abjection accounts for the repulsion that popularized the horror film genre. Since the witch, as a horror trope, challenges boundaries, it helps the human psyche integrate itself by re-establishing its own borders. This study evaluates witches' ability to inspire fear, illustrating how the character of the witch in visual texts represents a part of our own individual consciousness which needs to be ordered and suppressed. This element of the subconscious, in close relation to the functions of 'heroism' and maturation, helps to develop an integrated ego. Our fear and terror, coupled with a strange and inescapable fascination with magick, originate in the womb or our own mother, as Creed (1993, p. 166) elucidates. Central to the idea of witchcraft, to its efficacy and our wariness of it, is the idea that life and death are integral parts of the female condition and, seeing as magick is also abjected, feared, regarded as repulsive and impossible to be understood or controlled, it is primarily the realm of the female. The aim of this study is to explore representations of the three previously identified aspects of witches in Seasons 1 to 7 of *Game of Thrones* in order to investigate this implied relationship between the 'Monstrous Feminine' and magick. *Game of Thrones* draws on polytheism and historical accounts of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. Research on polytheism (Assmann 2004) will help to situate the three definable aspects of witches' relation to the triune aspects of the pre-Christian Western European Goddess or 'Sovereignty' as described by Caitlín Matthews (1989).

The design of this dissertation is focussed on the illustration, by method of identification, analysis and categorization, of the portrayals of the witches in HBO's *Game of Thrones*, with references to other films that include witches and which may have influenced the portrayal of the witch trope in Western visual culture. The purpose of said process is to uncover the witch's

culturally mediated capacity to inspire fear, based on an understanding of abjection, as described by Julia Kristeva (1982) and Barbara Creed (1993). Different types of witches in *Game of Thrones* are identified, with particular attention to the way representations of these witches draw on the world that inspired much of the fictional setting, namely the Western Europe of the Middle Ages. This study provides a clear definition of the three Medieval European aspects of witches, followed by an engagement with their filmic portrayals and the manner in which these representations are described in relation to the three aspects of the early European pre-Christian, pagan Monarch, 'Sovereignty'. This illustrates the efficacy of Martin's 'Red Witch', Melisandre, whose ability to inspire fear is intimately connected to her association with not one, but all three aspects of Sovereignty. Melisandre, while complying with Western ideals of beauty, represents a filmic witch who is both normative and abject, making her both exceedingly terrifying and oddly acceptable. The function of witches in literary sources is described in terms of the function of myths and fairy tales in Western Europe's early polytheistic society.

The witch trials of Western Europe have had a wide-reaching impact on cultural conditioning in the West, which has influenced not only Western horror tropes in filmic presentations, but also the psychological conditioning of the Euro-centric societies which espouse said ideals. What this dissertation hopes to accomplish is to analyse the extent to which the functions of the different aspects of the 'Divine Feminine' have altered, in order that said discoveries may add value to Western society's current understanding of the witch trope as it is used in the media today. This will uncover the mechanisms that are employed in the filmic portrayal of witches, as well as their resulting influence on Euro-centric society's subconscious fears and beliefs about the abject. It will also invite commentary on the extent to which Euro-centric society has reconciled with the stereotype of the witch and her many 'terrifying', yet functional aspects. Such a process uncovers the complexity of dichotomously terrifying, yet alluring post-modern witches like Melisandre, whose filmic portrayals endear them to a Western audience, while simultaneously inviting that audience to reject what they represent, leading to an internal crisis.

To accomplish what this study sets out to do, the following structure is followed: chapters II and III constitute a literature review and historical overview. This is followed by a discussion

of the different aspects of the triune Goddess or Sovereignty of Britain in chapter IV, leading into these stereotypes' relation to the theories of Creed's monstrous feminine and Kristeva's abject witch in chapter V. Chapter VI discusses how these aspects of the witch trope have informed the different representations of witches in today's media and analyses the person of Melisandre from HBO's *Game of Thrones* (Chapter VII), who is a conflation of many of these characteristics. The dissertation concludes with a final synthesis of the analyses relating to witches in the modern West.

It should be noted that this dissertation has its limitations, for example: there is not enough space within the scope of the study to delve into all the different types of magick and magick practices which are associated with witchcraft, nor is there space to delve into the full cultural and historical developments leading up to and culminating in the witch trials of Western Europe. Feminism also has a colourful history, which cannot fully be delved into in order to discover the origins of its underlying gender-based theories in the patriarchal societies which contributed to gender-based prejudices in the Middle Ages. However, a few main theories will be discussed and referenced. A detailed study of the horror film genre also cannot be fitted into this dissertation, though a mention of some of the elements of film study is necessary. That being said, further research into these aforementioned aspects might be of value to the general film watching public of today. Organizations such as the controversial anti-political, privacy campaigners *Anonymous* suggest that television especially has been used to control and direct the actions of the screen-loving public. Post-modern film studies can reveal the underlying motivations of those in control of the media world-wide, which may be beneficial to global audiences. For the purpose of this study, religious organizations which currently espouse the life style or persona of the witch, such as New Age movements, Wicca or other pagan philosophies, cannot be discussed in full here, though they are well worth mentioning for their role in championing the trope as a political agent (Scott 2018). Therefore, to locate her role within recent historic events, a brief mention of the socio-political role of the witch as symbol for activists today (Yar 2018) will introduce the rest of this dissertation.



## Chapter II: Literature Review



s alluded to in the introduction, this dissertation considers the theories of Barbara Creed (about the monstrous feminine) and Julia Kristeva (the abject) as applied to an analysis of the portrayal of witches in HBO's *Game of Thrones*. By analysing the series' conflation of the three aspects of the pre-Christian Western European Goddess into one person (Melisandre), the focus is to uncover the witch's capacity to inspire fear, based specifically on women's association with magick. A gendered understanding of witches is necessary because the witch trials of the West (in Europe and America), as opposed to those in the East, tended to associate witchcraft with the female sex – as many modern filmic portrayals in the West still tend to do. *Game of Thrones* combines the three stereotypes of the Goddess as identified by Matthews (1989) into one and manages to subvert the witch trope in the process. This problematizes simplistically bifurcated portrayals of witches, the stereotypes for which stem from the Middle Ages and before. Though some modern film producers have tended towards the same kind of subversion, - for example: the Harry Potter franchise in which witches are presented in a plethora of different roles ranging through an entire spectrum of gendered and moral differences found in modern Europe today. Over-simplified portrayals of witches are still being produced and their juxtaposition to the latter kind of portrayal reveals this problem. Overly simplistic witch portrayals leave the public to question the very nature of witches as well as their socially acceptable stance towards them, especially with the witch as trope becoming a growingly 'acceptable' role to inhabit in the socio-political sphere (Yar 2018, *Witchcraft in the #MeToo Era*).

There can be no doubt that witches represent a force of contention. History has brought to light the unacceptable, politically and religiously charged nature of many of the causes of the witch trials in Western Europe. The 'tainted' intentions of Inquisitors, enforcers and those in power during the time of the witch trials in the West (1400s – 1700s) have been exposed, so much so that the term 'witch hunt' has come to mean "the searching out and deliberate harassment of those (such as political opponents) with unpopular views" (Merriam Webster Dictionary, definition of *witch*). Yet, despite this, the stereotype of a powerful, 'mysterious' and controversial woman is, for some, still too frightening to accept. This may be precisely because

she represents a force more powerful and terrifying than herself - one that elicits fear even after Salem tried to make amends for the innocent deaths that were a result of its trials in 1682.

According to Yar's article in the *New York Times* (2018, para.8) there has been an "influx of young people drawn to occultism" which some refer to as the "millennial 'witch wave'". Whether this influx is a clear indication that witchcraft, like other religious systems, is becoming more commodified (Redden 2005, p. 233) as part of a trend, or whether post-modern ideas about the danger and 'taboo' nature of witches have begun to transform, is unclear. According to witchcraft historiographers Barry and Davis (2007, p.16) witches' capacity to inspire fear supposedly originates from the presumed closeness between women and outwardly mysterious natural processes. In Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, as introduced in *The Powers of Horror* (1982, p. 91), she describes the notion of 'abjection' as a "breakdown in the distinction between what is self and what is Other" which leads to the 'casting off' or rejection of said abject elements in an effort to protect the integrity of the self. Since the witch, as a horror trope, challenges boundaries, it helps the human psyche integrate itself by re-establishing its own borders. Though the witch is a mere woman, she has always been considered to be much more than that. The authors of the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487 in Rodker 1948) ascribed to her the power to control the weather and to manipulate the fate of entire populations. Religion also contributed towards her terrifying façade. By positing her as the 'other' in opposition to its doctrine, the witch became the physical embodiment of biblical evil.

In her chapter entitled *Semiotics of Biblical Abominations* Kristeva contends that "biblical impurity is... a *logicizing* of what departs from the symbolic, and for that very reason it prevents it from being actualized as demonic evil" (1982, p. 91). What biblical semiotics does is to 'inscribe' "the demonic in a more abstract and also more moral register as a potential for guilt and sin". This means that the very potential for disobedience towards God (or the law, or the symbolic which the male represented during the Middle Ages) became synonymous with the mysterious intervention of a force such as that which is said to be controlled by a witch or demon, in other words, by that which sets itself 'apart' from the symbolic, which is 'different' from truth and symbol – that which is situated within the fickle realm of the emotional, imaginary and impressionably feminine or 'other'. In this case 'symbolic law' signifies "pure

logical order regulating social performance”. In contrast to that and standing in an ‘abject’ position towards it is the ‘maternal power’; this power, be it ‘historical, phantasmatic, natural or reproductive’, signifies a perhaps earlier power which needed to be subjugated to the will of God – a primal maternal force which, like that of an ancient goddess, was inescapably present in nature herself and which represented the earlier pagan religions which once challenged the authority of Rome (and therefore God) in Europe (the realm which the medieval Roman Catholic Church considered to be the ‘civilized world’).

Witchy women were also often associated with nature because of the cyclical nature of their bodies (for example their menstrual cycle), resulting in their being considered religiously impure at certain times. In the case of Western Europe, impurity was determined “with respect to the Law”, the Temple itself signifying the Law and impurity as that which “is permeated with the tradition of defilement” and, which for that reason “*points to* but does not *signify* an autonomous force that *can* be threatening for divine agency” (1982, p. 91). As this research illustrates, and as Kristeva (1982, p. 91) suggests, “such a force is rooted, historically (in the structuration of the subject’s identity), in the cathexis of maternal function – mother, women, reproduction”. And also “the biblical test...performs the tremendous forcing that consists in subordinating maternal power...to symbolic order as...divine Law attended to in the Temple” (ibid.) In the last few years of the 1st century A.D., impurity became a “metaphor for idolatry, sexuality, and immorality” (1982, p. 93) and, in the Middle Ages, these three qualities became interwoven within the image of the witch, allowing her to be branded as a heretical sinner. “The world of illusions – the world of religions”, Kristeva writes (1982, p. 133), “brings to light or embodies the prohibition that has us speak...it gives *legitimacy* to hatred if it does not *invert* it into love”. The implied sin of fornicating with demons, of participating in lunar rights using hallucinogenic ointments to induce flight were some of the impure acts purportedly performed by witchy women in the Middle Ages. “The story of the fall sets up a diabolical otherness in relation to the divine. Adam is no longer endowed with the composed nature of paradisiac man, he is torn by covetous desire: desire for woman” (1982, p. 127), yet “Christian sin, tying its spiritual knot between flesh and law, does not cut off the abject”; not all women are threatening enough to persecute, some conform to the Law of the symbolic, adopting the visage of virgin, unblemished and pure, a servant of monotheistic, patristic strictures. Just like the virgin Mary,

any powerful woman who abided by the law and obeyed the rules upheld by the patriarchs of her time, the witch who could find herself on the right side of religion, was safe.

A stark example of this can be seen in the role of Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orléans who led the French army during the Lancastrian period of the Hundred Years' War (Théry 2017, para. 2). Joan was considered a saint by the French, but the English burnt her at the stake for cross-dressing (she wore her hair short because of her role in the military, which was considered to be heretical). Joan, a nineteen-year old girl, was executed for heresy, like other witches and heretics, not solely because of her political allegiance, but because of her strange and unsanctioned power. The God she ascribed her power to and in whose religion she was canonized as a saint after her death, was the God of the Christians in France. But how could the English, who also prayed to the God of Christians in their own country, be defeated by an army led by a young woman? If not a miracle, then Joan's deeds must have been magickal – and of the wrong sort; the 'other' sort, which positions itself against the norms of society, against the will of 'their' God. What man would turn against God in that way? Logic dictated that the symbolic, the righteous and virtuous was embodied by man just as everything that opposed the symbolic, the righteous and the virtuous was similarly embodied by woman. The distinction between the sexes was of a polar and not a dual nature (Knight 2001, p. 26), an oppositional and not a complementary sort, suggesting that good and evil would prefer one of the sexes each and not both, setting one up against the other, using one to lure the other instead of coexisting within individuals.

As a woman living in patriarchal Europe, Joan, as a representative of woman in medieval Europe, contained within her a potentially threatening force which was tied up to her sexuality. In line with an understanding of the gendered power of witches, Barbara Creed (1993) explains that women are strongly associated with abjection because their genitals threaten castration. Not only are women's bodies somehow tied to the cycles of nature, but their physical attributes are threatening in a more direct way. The myth of the 'toothed' vagina, tied to the image of Medusa, was popular in classical mythology and contributed to the gendered portrayal of female monsters throughout Western society. "Her evil powers", Creed tells us (1993, p. 76), "are seen as part of her 'feminine' nature; she is closer to nature than man and can control forces in nature such as tempests, hurricanes and storms" (ibid.), feats which, according to the

notorious *Malleus Maleficarum* of Heinrich Kramer and Josef Sprenger (1487 in Rodker 1948), were child's play for a witch. The witch's association with abject things like "filth, decay, spiders, bats, cobwebs, brews, potions and even cannibalism' contributes to her monstrous facade, giving her supernatural powers and a 'desire for evil" (ibid.) which feeds the best-known stereotype of witches: that of the old crone with a pointy nose and warty, sagging face who feeds off the flesh of children. According to Creed (1993, p. 105), psychoanalytic theory positions witches "as the oral sadistic mother and the phallic woman". Tying in with notions of the *vagina dentata* construct, several myths contain references to the toothed genitals of women who execute men and devour their penises. For example, Erich Neumann (1972, p. 174) writes of the Malekulan myth in which a "terrible goddess of Melanesia", known as *Lehev-hev*, lures men and then devours them. "The myth about woman as castrator clearly points to male fears and phantasies about the female genitals as a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow them up and cut them into pieces. The *vagina dentata* is the mouth of hell – a terrifying symbol of woman as the 'devil's gateway'" (Creed 1993, p. 106).

In terms of horror iconography, this construct is important seeing as it "plays on the fear of castration and dismemberment" (1972, p. 107), with the "duplicitously natured woman" ensnaring her victims by offering them paradise in the modern form of a mythological siren. Creed contends that castration fears refer either to "symbolic castration (loss of the mother's body, breast, loss of identity) which is experienced by both female and male, or it can refer to genital castration", the latter often referring to dismemberment (1993, p. 107). The *Femme Castratrice* is a form of the monstrous – feminine whose representation is usually stereotypically beautiful and sexually alluring (1993, p. 128). Referencing Julia Kristeva's abjection theory, Creed (1993, p. 166) posits that "these images of woman as monstrous feminine are alive and well in the contemporary horror film and represented in a variety of ways: witch, archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, *femme castratrice*, castrating mother (for example the portrayal of Ahmanet in *The Mummy* 2019, who is a combination of a witch, a monster and a demonic entity capable of possession). They shock and repel, but they also enlighten. They provide us with a means of understanding the dark side of the patriarchal unconscious, particularly the deep-seated attitude of extreme ambivalence to the mother who nurtures but who, through a series of physical and psychic castrations associated with her body and the processes of infant socialization, also helps to bring about the most painful of all

separations, necessary for the child's entry into the symbolic order." Furthermore, "Virtually all horror texts represent the monstrous feminine in relation to Kristeva's notion of maternal authority and the mapping of the self's clean and proper body. Images of blood, vomit, pus, shit, and so forth, are central to our culturally/socially constructed notions of the horrific. They signify a split between two orders: the maternal authority and the law of the father" (1993, p. 13). Addressing the fraught entry into the symbolic order, Katya Yakubov's (2017, p. 13) analysis of *The Watering Room* explores the "notion of the grotesque" as a 'boundary phenomenon' which functionally helps with the formation of one's personal and social identity.



quoting Kristeva, Yakubov (2017, p. 106) clarifies abjection as the process of the rejection of that which is 'other' in the attempt to "stabilize a sense of self". Yakubov's study uncovers the fact that "what we fear" and "what we desire", the abject and our fantasies, are related. It does this by exploring why humans take "pleasure in the perverse" through providing examples of fantasy and taboo intertwining in fairy tales, horror movies and the ethics of S&M practice (S&M stands for sadomasochistic practices, which form part of the larger term BDSM, which stands for bondage, dominance/submission or discipline, sadism, and masochism). The male figure in the narrative becomes a manifestation of patriarchy, which not only 'provokes' the female into her monstrous state, but 'projects' this monstrosity onto her, reconstructing her as a monster who threatens to castrate men. Ann McKenzie Roge (2017) explores the same theories on the abject and the monstrous feminine in "Revolting bodies: abjection and the monstrous feminine in *The Witch*". It is significant that these theorists note that there is a dual function locked up in the process of viewing any film (particularly horror films, the watching of which summon up very negative feelings), which includes, first: bringing about a direct confrontation with the abject in order to re-establish one's own boundaries and secondly, based in Freudian theory, a process through which the (male) body of the spectator actually alters physically. Creed (1993 p. 5) describes the process of the spectator becoming "stiff with terror" as irony, seeing as his metaphoric erection at the sight of the monster alludes to the stiffening of the male protagonist coming face to face with Medusa (who was traditionally associated with the female genitals owing to her use of them on her armour to inspire fear). This dual 'stiffening', Stephen Neale (1982, p. 61 in Creed 1993, p. 5) notes, represents the male reaction to any female with whose sexuality he cannot come to terms. This notion is rooted within patriarchal societies who

erroneously believe that “woman is castrated” and thus poses a threat to male power. Creed notes that this reveals not only the repulsion, but also the attraction which is caused by a male’s confrontation with female sexuality (1993, p. 129). To this end, viewing of a horror film not only establishes patriarchal beliefs regarding female sexuality, but also enforces these notions by allowing audiences to participate in the act of ‘reacting to’ and learning from the pathologies which are presented. In this regard, Ann Roge (2017, p. 3) points to an important notion of Kristeva’s: that the abject is both “terrifying and alluring”, an interesting dichotomy which applies directly to Melisandre from *Game of Thrones*.

In her research, Roge (2017, p. 2) alludes to the work of Rina Arya (2014) who explains that “The abject...has the propensity to shatter the unity of the self, yet...it defines our identity” (2014, p. 6 in Roge 2017, p. 2). Underlining Creed’s point, Roge (2017, p. 3) thus adds that “fear of the other has consistently driven (patriarchal) social order” which suggests that “it is often a fear of the other-within that has historically informed the religiosities, fears and cultural markers of difference in human societies”. As Roge (2017, p. 4) elucidates “[the] theoretical idea of abjection anxiety made manifest in culture is at the heart of why Kristeva’s work can be so useful in analysing film texts”. Because of humanity’s fascination with that which both horrifies and allures, spectators are both attracted and repulsed by what they see on screen. The witch is therefore a perfect example of a fictional character which can neither be fully rejected nor fully loved. This character, especially in the modern era, has become so complex a character that she demands further interaction and contention – the participation of an active viewership.

As a result of the allure of the witch as trope, this dissertation looks at the portrayal of all the ‘abjectly cast’ female roles (not only the witches) in *Game of Thrones*. The suggested finding about the function of witches in film is that females are cast as monsters because their gender is tied to notions of abjection as projected onto women by patriarchy. Kramer’s and Sprenger’s *Malleus* or ‘Hammer of Witches’ (1487 in Rodker 1948), the notorious treatise on witchcraft written in the late 15th Century, can be considered an example of the cultural manifestation of Freudian angst (Creed 1993, p. 74) which is rooted in castration anxiety. The reasoning behind using HBO’s *Game of Thrones* specifically as a source for filmic portrayals of witches is its very popularity. Melisandre, from this acclaimed series, is also not simply a stereotypical witch.

She elicits both fear and attraction from her audience, making her the perfect example of the abject, the feminine monster who threatens and attracts, the modern Medusa (1993, p. 110), whose severed head symbolizes the terrifying *vagina dentata* and also the mother goddess in her ‘devouring aspect’ who feeds men and children to the flames after luring them with her beautiful countenance. HBO’s *Game of Thrones* seems to produce the very epitome of a witch who is so dichotomous that she both serves and leads, endears and terrifies, functions as a mythical element and yet subverts all witch-like functions in her conflation of all known witch stereotypes into one, raising the dead like a female Christ and shape-shifting like the devil beyond the limitations of time. What is interesting to note about the red-haired priestess from HBO’s series is that it is primarily ambitious men who follow, appeal to, and believe in her. If anything, this proves her tremendous influence within the spheres of politics and power as well as their inability to come to terms with her ‘uncontrollability’. Melisandre, as subversive and yet iconic witch, “speaks to all those who seek power” (Alcindor & Hartocollis 2017, para. 1) and it is therefore very important to uncover why some of today’s feminists, having long fought their struggle against gender-based discrimination without her, have suddenly decided to don her garb. Could it be that history and science have erased much of the mystery surrounding the true nature of this terrifying stereotype? Or that, even today, the process of ‘othering’ has simply continued in the Western political and social sphere, with ‘uncompliant’ and strong-voiced woman being called out as witches for their opposition against patriarchal agendas? There is undoubtedly something about the stereotypes of the witch which, despite women’s own effort, remains terrifying and illusive.

By illustrating how the character of the witch in visual texts represents a part of our own individual consciousness which needs to be ordered and suppressed, this fearful element of the witch can be explored. As an element of the subconscious, working in close relation to the functions of ‘heroism’ and maturation, she helps her audience develop an integrated ego. Despite this and yet, as a very result of it, our fear of her is inseparable from our strange and inescapable fascination with magick and the unknown. Magick is primarily the realm of the female because, central to the idea of witchcraft, to its efficacy and our wariness of it, is the idea that life and death are integral parts of the female condition (c.46–125 AD, p. 47). Magick, just like woman, is abjected, feared, regarded as repulsive and impossible to be understood or controlled (Creed 1993, p.4). The Roman Catholic Church did its part in the Middle Ages to



associate females with the notion of ‘impurity’, fallenness and uncleanness. In this regard, Julia Kristeva (1982, p. 93) points out that it is the superego of religious individuals which demands purity, which desires sacrifice of the baser instincts in service to the spiritual nature. The superego functions as an “ideal form of the ego” for the viewer of film (Mulvey 1999, p. 836), granting satisfaction to the subject through identification with that which is unattainable and infinitely more perfect than itself (the active/male protagonist in the story). For attendants of religion (1999, p. 12) this attempt to gratify their ‘ideal ego’ is done by emulating religious icons (such as Moses in the Old Testament) through religious action. The suppression of the abject, the shunning and avoidance of anything related to it, would have constituted the acts which, being necessarily performed daily, could alone afford early believers their soul’s (superego’s) redemption. Medieval passion plays (like *Mary of Nemegen* and Danté’s *Inferno*) attest to this fact and to the urgency with which religious acts such as confession and tithing were performed by medieval Christians.



arly plays and Lays, just like modern films (Deb 2019), became the melting pot of cultural beliefs, offering up evidence of their societies’ biases and ideologies. The problem with an analysis of such texts is that dramatic and/or literary representation can never be separated from ideological, political or even religious intent. Though producers of politically sanctioned texts about witches had and still have their own agendas, the literal capturing and purging of witches during the trials would have represented, in a very immediate and gratifying way, the capturing and purging of ‘abject’, impure aspects within the subconscious of the individual members of the witnessing public (consider the fervency with which self-flagellation is carried out by certain religious sects to this day). The burning of heretics would have afforded its witnesses a strange satisfaction, a sense of successful repression and destruction of ‘seemingly outward’ elements of the psyche which modern audiences can doubtless scarcely grasp but through the protective and yet distancing veil of the screen. It is an ancient and unconquerable force that has populations call out “burn the witch!” as they once did “hang him!” when the justification seemed righteous. This force stems from within, where one aspect of the individual is at odds with another, fighting for dominance and balance within the accepted cultural norms of behaviour to which he/she struggles to conform.

An audience member who watches a trial play out on screen can in some ways be compared to a member of the general public who is present at that same trial, experiencing the emotions of the involved parties from within a more personal field of reference. Why justice is carried out publicly and why uninvolved parties are drawn to witness such events are interesting questions, which can no doubt be explained by studies in the field of psychology. Laura Mulvey is a film analyst who investigates the reasons why the public enjoys watching films, particularly emotionally affective films. In her analysis of “the fascination of film” and its reinforcement by “pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded them”, Mulvey (1999, p. 833) addresses the representation of the abject and monstrous in film in an attempt to discover the way films “reflect, reveal and play’ on “established interpretations of sexual difference which control(s) images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle”. Using psychoanalytic theory, and quoting both Freud’s theory of scopophilia and Lacan’s theory of the formation of consciousness through the mirror stage, Mulvey endeavours to “advance (our) understanding of the status quo...the patriarchal order in which we are caught” (1999, p. 845) when we view film texts, which were created for and which use patriarchy’s unconscious language. As aforementioned, the texts which are scrutinized from the Middle Ages to date were written and are being interpreted from different theoretical perspectives. Patriarchy probably did not comprehend itself in the way more gender-neutral theories posit it today. The same can be said of the literary and filmic creations from the different eras in Western history. The extent to which certain negatively posited patriarchal tendencies were intended versus our understanding of their use in the modern era may be incomparable. Though Creed and Kristeva, de Beauvoir and Mulvey inform the voice of my interpretation of HBO’s *Game of Thrones*, I cannot apply these theories to the analysis of the Inquisitorial *Hammer*, nor can I view the fairy tales and myths which dated from the medieval era through their lens without distorting many of the original facts and intentions.

Theorists like Kathleen Biddick (1995, p. 24) pose the theory that the Inquisitorial manual, “Hammer of witches”, was written in such a way that it ‘constructed’ Inquisitorial authority as well as “determinations of what counts for evidence” by the creation of a unique ‘ethnos’, “producing...a people” in its writing ‘space’, “a surface on which to produce new objects of knowledge”. By positing herself within the authors’ minds, Biddick’s analysis of the mechanisms of language used within the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487 in Rodker 1948) reveal

that the authors ‘create’ an “Inquisitorial cartography in which the Inquisitor himself eats the first-person of the located narrative in order to set himself in this place”, producing thereby “the Inquisitor as the guarantee of a mapping exercise that defies meaning” by which he can declare truth and evidence as he pleases (1995, p. 27). The authors ‘use’ the devil as “an optical device that makes the Inquisitor’s counter-economy visible and therefore something that can be *counted as evidence*”, which “enables the Inquisitor to gaze at and see, make legible an invisible world of the ethnos he is conjuring”, the use of this device “offering a special kind of insight” into the witch’s actions (1995, p. 29).

Films and other types of dramatic portrayal, presented from the perspective of a third-person, omniscient narrator, function in the same way to create a ‘truth’ that is both validated by the spacial orientation of the narrator and by the narrator’s interjection of the viewer into the otherwise ‘private spaces’ of the characters it views, providing the “illusion of looking in on a private world” (1999, p. 836). This would have been a valuable tool for an Inquisitor who was attempting to “put himself in the shoes of” a witch or even the devil in order to find her and understand her mysterious actions. Both Biddick and Mulvey hint at the use of patriarchal language in their respective texts and Mulvey especially attempts to ‘attack’ the use of “erotic pleasure in film, its meaning, and in particular the central place of the image of woman”; she posits that the “paradox of phallocentrism”, which underlies voyeuristic desires in film viewers, are dependent on the “function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious” (as already cited). Mulvey (1999, p. 843) also explains that in the dual “pleasure and unpleasure offered by traditional narrative film”, the dual purpose of the ‘gaze’ functions to produce 1. scopophilic instinct “the pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object” and 2. ego libido “forming identification processes”. Based on Mulvey’s description of voyeuristic desires in the viewers of visual texts, it can be assumed that medieval witch hunters probably drew pleasure from imagining themselves within the private sphere of the witch’s private sphere of operation.

The trouble with the female character in a patriarchal text, Mulvey (1999, p. 840) tells us, and the reason she is both a ‘sexual object’ who satisfies the primordial erotic phantasies of man and a source of contention, is the fact that the same “paradox of phallocentrism” which makes of her an object of voyeuristic eroticism, also awakens in the male viewer the “threat” posed by “her real absence of a penis” – “the castration complex (is) essential for the organisation of

entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father”, which was mentioned in reference to the work of Julia Kristeva. Woman can only play a central role in the pleasurable act of looking, if indeed she were an object of contention who both excites and alarms the man for whom she becomes a determining object outside of himself. It is this unspoken ‘desire’ that drives audiences to watch films. Perhaps, to some extent, it was also this inexplicable combination of attraction and repulsion which inspired Inquisitor after Inquisitor to take up arms in the search of hapless witches, drawing crowds for the public executions in the same way. As Roge (2017, p. 9–10) and Mulvey tell us, it is the witch’s desirability which keeps audiences in their seats. Stemming from her sexuality, woman’s desirability would have made her even more threatening to religious man, who was constantly reminded of the allure of the original sinful Eve, the manipulative seductress who had caused the fall of man by mechanizing her allure to ensnare him. Kramer and Sprenger went to great lengths to warn their readers (Inquisitors) that witches were not to be shown any sympathy, their emotions were to be ignored and should be shrugged off as the charms of the devil who was at all times attempting to lure them into sin. Witches’ exhibits of pain and anguish therefore also became a one-sided indulgence, a spectacle to be enjoyed by the inflictor of pain (or audience or mob member) and at the same time a religious test to be passed in satisfaction of the spiritual nature (higher ego).

It was woman’s emotional nature, her very nurturing and encompassing role as officiant over the different stages of life and death (Plutarch c.46–125 AD) which both invited the creation of and provided the canvas on which the scene of the witch trials could be painted. Not only does woman invite inscription as mechanism for observation and receptacle of the protagonist’s action (by being the object of desire within a literal as well as a fictional text), but she also mysteriously established the setting of the events which invite her persecution by being positioned within a cultural milieu that does not favour female social advancement in society. Mulvey (1999, p. 844) tells us that woman functions to create the “satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the ‘invisible guest’” in a film theatre. Biddick (1995, p. 26) explains that woman in general also often shares the ‘frame’ of the witch (and the wolf) in which her *maleficia* can be worked topographically. The spaces within this frame, according to the *Hammer*, are her realms of operation: “the interior of the womb, the infant’s cradle, the local climatic region, the juridical space of arrest, court and torture, roadways and bridges, inter-regional travel, even the space of the future and the invisible” (ibid.). Her association with nature, with mystery and

magick, in other words, her association with that which is abject in relation to the symbolic, enables her to claim these realms of operation for herself. The clever interpolation of different types of evidence, relayed from different perspectives at certain topographic ‘places’ within the *Malleus*, allowed the authors of the *Hammer* to create and prove their own truth by merely referencing the ‘frame’ (ethnos) within which they had found the witch and ‘other’ deviants to be operating. According to Kramer and Sprenger (1995, p. 25), witches’ sodomy (associated symbolically with Jews’ usury because of its ‘uncleanness’) was their most fundamental and threatening aspect, creating in opposition to the traditionally sanctified, procreative sex of marriage a binary alliance consisting of the kind of sexual act that “produced its own offspring” while preying on “the reproductive processes of married, procreative sex”. According to Inquisitors, witches “ate children, the product of alliance” (Biddick 1995, p. 25), they could also “induce sterility in men and undo sacramental, procreative sex”. In Western Europe of the Middle Ages the threat of the population of “unmarried women and men” growing beyond that of ‘married folk’ was an imminent one. Kramer and Sprenger identified this threat and argued that witches’ sin (that of sodomy) was “even greater than original sin, greater than the sin of Adam and Eve”, the demonic pact being far more criminal than activities involving the ‘Christianitas’ binary ‘Others’, the “Jews” and “Turks” (1995, p. 25) because their actions threatened to ‘bring the world to utter confusion’. Within this representation of accepted and unaccepted behaviour for Christian women (and, to a lesser extent, men), readers of the *Hammer* can see the technique of dichotomous portrayal which was evident in Breton Lays from the Middle Ages, namely the interpolation of good and evil women in the same text in the attempt to socialize communities’ female population in their proper familial and social roles (Lawton 2016, p. 12).



itches functioned holistically to represent the opposite kind of behaviour to lawful, pure and obedient Christian women in both texts (such as actual books, news clippings and plays) and the public eye (public executions and trials). Women who did not successfully fulfil their duties as socialized wives were in danger of being tried for heresy (crimes which could be counted under heresy included such acts as carrying bundles of purportedly witchy herbs or cross-dressing). There were some women (as Purkiss’s study shows in the following chapters), who embraced this deemed ‘deviance’ and confessed to the crime of heresy out of exasperation. Indeed, if women

were not presented with socially accepted alternatives to living the life of witchcraft (political and religious deviance), their fate would have been sealed purely by virtue of their sexuality. This mode of representation – that of juxtaposing acceptable female roles with unacceptable ones within the same text – is identifiable in films as well, though post-modern audiences are much more sensitive to the possibility of a text having chauvinistic undertones thanks to feminism (Freedman 2001, p. 21). In the post-modern era the association of women with that which is abject and monstrous has become loosened and social movements have begun to challenge the notion that gender is necessarily tied to identity (2001, p. 5). This assumption, which was automatic in many medieval texts, is very interestingly presented in many Breton Lays (Lawton 2016, p. 10).

In an attempt to understand why the monstrous and abject Lady Melisandre is presented as she is by Jeremy Podeswa in his HBO rendition, relating not only to her intersectionally structured character (Azmitia & Thomas 2015), but also to her function in terms of medieval society and role as subverter of traditional witch stereotypes, this dissertation focusses on the portrayal of this powerful woman as well as that of other ‘abjectly cast’ females in *Game of Thrones*. The suggested findings regarding the function of abjection and the monstrous feminine in this film series are that females (in texts from previous eras) were cast as monsters because their gender was tied to notions of abjection as projected onto them by patriarchy. This means that vestiges of medieval power roles combined in modern witch portrayals to potentially create witches that are even more powerful than the original notions that inspired the witch persecutions of Western Europe. The question this analysis poses is: “to what end is this conflation of medieval and modern notions of witches being carried out and how does this affect modern societies in which the ‘trope’ is being appropriated for political purposes?” Though the witch existed prior to the Middle Ages in the lore of almost every culture on earth, her primary means of portrayal in the media today consists of the stereotypical characteristics which she received as a member of the medieval public. The following chapter discusses her heavily inscribed person as medieval woman, living under the rule of patriarchy and subject to religious discrimination based on Christian canonical law (Adu-Gyamfi 2016, introduction). Not only did the myths and fairy tales of the past ages, inherited from former pagan religions, inform and inscribe her character, but they also informed the roles she still plays in the modern stories that feature her. The writings of Diane Purkiss (1996) and Caitlín Matthews (1989) are utilized to contextualize

the witch's multi-faceted appearance as it became inscribed with meaning within the period of the first great witch trials in Medieval Europe.

### Chapter III: The Evolution of the Witch – Middle Ages to Modernity



Texts like Sprenger and Kramer's *Malleus* (1487 in Rodker 1948) are vestiges of a particularly tumultuous era in Western European history that was characterized by religious militancy and suspicion. This era can be described as apocalyptic based on Hamonic's (2017) analysis of the portrayal of the functions of apocalyptic cinema in American film. As Biddick (1995) illustrated in her text, Inquisitors were constantly searching out deviants and projecting themselves into the private spaces of ordinary individuals to discover their secret beliefs. In doing so they were using the devil as a type of 'optical device' which could render visible any necessary insights into witches' lives. In this sense, the *Malleus* itself was a type of apocalyptic text, focussing on the witch as an antagonist in the 'apocalyptic Christian narrative involve(ing) the rise of the Anti-Christ (2017, p. 24). Hamonic (2017, p. 25) explains that the meaning of such a text is often related to the function of "scaring spectators into the Kingdom of God" by "traumatizing young 'viewers', manipulating them into altar call conversions" like the "seminal apocalyptic classic *A Thief in the Night* (1972)". A text like this dissertation is also a lens through which the past (and present) is scrutinized. In order to project readers into an objective 'cartography' of witchcraft texts without allowing prejudices and biases to cloud their vision along the way, this lens must be fine-tuned and focused towards specific information, the kind that might offer a relatively broad yet in-depth understanding of the salient historical, religious and social nuances surrounding the portrayal of witches, with particular attention drawn to how these nuances helped to create a witches' person in the Middle Ages and still affect and inform their textual portrayal today.

Early texts and horror iconography from the West abound with the images of witches cavorting with devils, committing lurid acts of adultery and breaking innumerable biblical laws. However, the origins of many of their symbolic associations are much older even than Christianity. Originating in pagan myth, the witch in Western society continues to be a symbol which inspires fear because of her embodiment of a powerful feminine identity which claims freedom from masculine authority. Her enduring ability to reflect as well as challenge patriarchal notions of gender and sexuality have made her an icon so enduring that modern activists employ her in their rallies and campaigns. World-famous authors like Shakespeare



warned their audiences about witches in numerous of his plays, yet modern authors – like Pratchett and Rowling – attempt to endear her to their readers by appealing to the complexity of the nature of witches. There are those authors and producers who simultaneously warn us about and attempt to warm us toward the image of the witch, creating literary and filmic witches that are so dichotomous that their origins and literary legitimacy are questionable at best. This chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the various contexts which contribute towards the current ‘image’ of the witch and to an exploration of how beliefs regarding her, stemming from the Middle Ages and before, have altered and/or remain the same.

In order to do this, examples from HBO’s iconic *Game of Thrones* series will be juxtaposed with earlier events and cultural phenomena which fed and continue to feed the witch’s fearful façade in the modern era with references to other film series and texts which contain modern portrayals of witches. Several literary sources which allude to the witch’s ‘image’ are consulted, including the mythologies of the ancient Celts, the Palgrave historiography (Barry & Davies 2007) and Mortimer (2009), as well as psychoanalytical theories by Fulford and Jackson (1997). Modern studies in genetics and psychology (Raymo 2005) as well as esoteric teachings such as the system of the universal Kabbalah (Knight 2001) will help to explain the nature of the symbolism that is related specifically to female witches and which may inform further interpretations of her association with the Abject and Monstrous in the following chapters.

This chapter therefore discusses the background influences that inform the person of the witch, including some of the salient historical events that culminated in the first witch hunts in Europe, with the purpose of mapping out her evolution from the Middle Ages to modernity. In order to do this, the following themes are explored: fear as a mechanism for the perpetuation of the persecutions, mystics and the language of polytheism (Assmann 2004), the theologization of justice, the *Malleus Maleficarum* and ‘gendered’ female roles in medieval society, occult sciences and the symbolism behind woman and magick (Andrew 2004) and the nature of magick versus miracles (Wagner 2018).

## 1. Fear as a mechanism for the perpetuation of persecutions

The image of the witch is one which Diane Purkiss (1996) suggests should be approached with caution as it is much more complex than dramatic portrayals and literary texts may suggest. Apart from being fictional, the witch's existence is also very real, unlike many of her fellow horror tropes in literature and film. Commenting on male-centred historiography (Barry & Davies 2007) as well as post-modern feminist mythology, Purkiss (1996, pp. 7–29) notes how both these fields have wrongly adapted the image of the witch, as well as their own gender-based biases, to wrongly present the persecuted magician of the Middle Ages for their own benefit. Purkiss's demystifying reworking of feminist theories regarding feminist writers' unscholarly approach to using the myth of the witch as a metaphor for all female victims of patriarchy and/or chauvinism, offers an important critique of post-modern texts' use of the witch as adopted 'persona'. There can be little doubt that modern feminists have donned the witch's robes for the sake of associating themselves with the witch's anti-political nature (Guadagnino 2018, *The witch...as feminist symbol*), but the extent to which modern authors and film producers perpetuate this persona begs the question "who are Western film producers serving in the act of modifying and perpetuating the stereotype of the witch and to what extent does patriarchy and/or feminism play a role in this?" Whatever the answer, the truth remains that the image of the witch is one that is imbued with the ability to inspire fear and intimidate her enemies (2018, para.1). Sheilagh O'Brien (2015, 'Subverting our preconceptions') notes that the person of Lady Melisandre manages to subvert the witch trope whilst perpetuating it. Whereas modern film texts containing the figure of the witch are becoming progressively more dichotomous, medieval treatises on witchcraft seemed to have been primarily concerned with associating her façade with all that inspires fear.

Literary and film texts which allude to witches have in common that they utilize fear to influence and inform the public's opinion about witches. Barry and Davies (2007, p. 17) explain that the writers of treatises about witchcraft all have two things in common, namely: "a personal agenda in reaction to immediate or looming events" as well as "a sense of anxiety caused by the proximity, real or apparent, of those same events". These 'events' translate to a perceived demonic or 'unseen' threat, seeking to overthrow the ruling authority. In some cases, the authors of witchcraft treatises had literally experienced an attempt upon their life which,

understandably, left them suspicious and untrusting. The ‘agreed upon’ existence of threatening ‘unseen’ powers and the notions that certain individuals within Western medieval communities were able to organize and control them, led to mass paranoia and the shared fear of the unknown. Mysteries and miracles alike were feared and revered in the Middle Ages. In the introduction to *Witchcraft in Europe 1100–1700*, Alan Kors and Edward Peters (1972, p. 3) elucidate that:

...men, fearful and helpless before the awesome forces of the visible world, traditionally have sought to reach forces beyond that world to increase their meagre human powers and their abilities to control their own destinies. Men then assign to other men or acknowledge in them the extra-ordinary role of causing events not normally within the province of human determination. We see the beliefs, rites, and institutions of such “magic” as purposeful, whatever our views of their legitimacy and efficacy, and we speculate freely on the psychological, social, and explanatory functions which they serve. We understand, with varying degrees of satisfaction, why it is that the recognized holders of such magical powers – the witches, sorcerers, and shamans...should be among the most feared and revered members of any society and why men's behaviour towards them should take intensely particular and peculiar forms. Our orderings and explanations of magic may seem to us still inchoate or insufficient, but on the whole, we preserve a sense of the final comprehensibility and clarity of such phenomena.

The dogma of the Roman Catholic Church excluded ordinary members of society from learning and understanding religious texts like the bible and, for this reason, unfounded superstitious beliefs could run rampant throughout this era. At the eighth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, held in October of A.D. 869, it was agreed upon that all personal and ‘individual’ experiences of God should be shunned in favour of pure intellectual interaction with the sanctioned biblical canon. This, as Assmann (2007, p. 17) reveals later on in this chapter, meant that religious followers of the church were expected to surrender their preference for empirical evidence in favour of the memorization of biblical data as presented to them by their religious leaders. Instead of divining answers about the future through magickal means and resorting to astrology and other forms of occult sciences for answers (as numerous members of the medieval public were purported to have resorted to on a regular

basis), it became impressed upon the general population to resort to the church for their 'succour' and 'salvation'.

Ecclesiastic scholars from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century on banned all magick practices situated outside of the Roman Catholic Church's dogma. Before this time in Europe's history, 'magick' practices had included all manner of occult sciences, including divination, healing arts and rites of passage. The Medieval church could not trust the public to discern for itself what was suitable and what was not, and so all occult practices became synonymous with acts of witchcraft, whether or not they were considered 'maleficia' (harmful). Using fear as a tool, the ecclesiastical writers of the Middle Ages thus defined a very limiting understanding of what constituted magick to frighten the population away from participation in it. The easiest way to do this was to equate magick practices with devil worship, setting magick practitioners up as the enemies of Christians – as heretics (Lovelace & Jury 2020). This association between magick practices and heresy was not established in the East of Europe. In Russia for example, witches were not considered apostates, but were merely persecuted in civil court. The crime of heresy was dependent on the belief in the existence of the devil (Kivelson 2013, *Witchcraft Trials in Russia*).

In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries, religious debates began to debunk the growing number of 'official' practitioners of ritual or ceremonial magick (Levack 1996, p. 36), many of which had spent their lives serving in papal and royal courts as advisers, diviners and the like. The translation of Greek and Islamic books on magick resulted in a growing interest in the 'hidden' sciences among the learned masses and the magick most prevalent at that time was that of necromancy (in HBO's series, Melisandre's summoning of a demonic spirit using sex magick, is an example of necromancy and of its potency). Necromancy, as described by Brian P. Levack (1996, p. 36–37), was a process by which a specific method was used to entrap the spirit of a deceased person (or a demon) in a container and then commanding it to perform marvellous feats. This form of magick was extremely dangerous and could be used to terrible effect. And, it was gaining popularity. Out of desperation, ecclesiastical writers from this era tried to warn the public against it by theorizing that it should be avoided at all costs. They managed this by sporting the idea (one that originated as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> Century) that demons would not perform miraculous feats unless they gained something in return.

The logic in this argument is distorted, seeing as the primary basis for the success of necromancy is the notion that a trapped spirit would be willing to accomplish any miraculous feat in exchange for freedom from the necromancer's trap. Those unfamiliar with the nature of this type of magick would not have known this and, seeing as the nature of the devil as well as his assumed power was also undergoing a theoretical transformation at this time, a belief in the growing looming threat of the actions of demons was enough to turn the public against anyone who dared resort to this type of witchcraft. Levack (1996, p. 36) writes that *"during the fifteenth century...the figure of the Devil began to undergo a significant transformation. Throughout the Middle Ages the Devil had been described as the enemy and anti-type of Christ, teaching hatred rather than love. Now, however, he was increasingly depicted as the anti-type of God the Father, the source and object of idolatry and false religion."* The demonic pact therefore became the root of all sin of the witch in the Middle Ages. Levack elucidates (1996, p. 37) that:

A witch was a person who not only performed harmful magic but who also made a pact with the Devil and paid some sort of homage to him. Witchcraft was...diabolism, the worship of the Devil. The two types of activity that witches were accused of – magic and diabolism – were closely related...at this time it was widely believed that a witch acquired her powers to harm people magically by making a pact with the Devil. The alleged connection between magic and diabolism derived from the writings of theologians, who ever since the fourth century had argued that magic could only be performed by demonic power...The emergence of the belief that witches were not merely magicians but also Devil-worshippers changed the nature of the crime of witchcraft. It made witches not simply felons, similar to murderers and thieves, but heretics and apostates, intrinsically evil individuals who had rejected their Christian faith and had decided instead to serve God's enemy, the Devil.



hockingly the actual 'pact with the Devil' was never recorded to have been witnessed by any accusers of witches. It was always 'assumed' to have occurred but could never be substantiated by eye-witness accounts or other forms of empirical evidence than extracted confessions. Any witches who confessed to such a pact were among those who were tortured. Writers like Josef Klaitz (1985, p. 8) bring attention to the fact that not a single shred of evidence was provided for any of the

outlandish claims that were laid against witches in any of the European courts during the Witch Trials. This is a striking irregularity if it can be proven accurate. This train of thought establishes the belief that all magicians were 'dealing' with the Devil, relegating all spirits, including the gods and heroes from previous religions which had not been absorbed into the church's hierarchy of martyrs, saints, angels and archangels, into the category of demon. Needless to add, this focused attention on the first commandment condemning all worship of idols and 'false gods.' Witches, along with pagans of all stripes, were therefore considered to have been interacting with the Devil in the process of performing their various types of religious acts and magickal rituals, making them by definition heretics in the eyes of the church and state. The secular court became responsible for stamping out heresy in 1022 A.D., when Robert the Pious, King of France, began to order "unrepentant heretics to the flames". After this, the burning of heretics spread as far as Milan (c. 1028) and Cologne (1143).

Pope Lucius III issued his *Decree Against Heretics* in 1184, arming the secular courts to mete out justice against 'unrepentant heretics' or 'relapsing heretics'. From the early medieval era, therefore, magick practitioners under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church in the West were often branded as heretics in order that they could be prosecuted by the State. GRR Martin (1996) portrays this series of medieval events – the 'rooting out of heretics' – very controversially when he sets up the most powerful figure in his series, Cersei Lannister, as the greatest heretic in Westeros. In *Game of Thrones*, the 'Faith Militant', a religious group loosely based on early Christian fundamentalists, are in many ways comparable to a religious mob (*George RR Martin on the Lord of Light* 2018). They serve the 'Lord of Light' and strive towards high spiritual ideals, such as love for all people and true humility. This seems like the usual manifestation of religious fervour in a religion and incorporates the psychological satisfaction of the super-ego identified by Jung, described in the literature review of this dissertation. This cult-like mob extends its reach to the life of the queen herself, causing the Queen of Thorns (Cersei), who had initially turned to the High Sparrow in order to win favour with the general population, to realize her error when she herself is publicly humiliated in repentance for her 'religious transgressions'. In a vengeful rampage, she meticulously orchestrates the murder of the High Sparrow and his guards, proving that where politics and religion are unified, there is no true freedom – not even for the most powerful person in authority.

The events which unfold in season 5 of *Game of Thrones* are a very apt portrayal of the actions of medieval political leaders, seeing as these monarchs had themselves been subject to the laws of the church and had not always possessed the nerve or courage to attempt to alter these laws. Several of them, like King Henry VIII, (1491 – 1547) the founder of the Anglican Church, had attempted to do so. Those who were unsuccessful, were often themselves persecuted or were forced to migrate to or to create their own branch of Christianity. As in the case of the burnings in Germany – with specific reference to the Town of Trier (1581 – 1593), for example – no one was spared the blade of the over-zealous Inquisitor; peasant and professor alike were persecuted, a total of 368 victims were interrogated, drowned, hanged or set alight (McCarthy 2019, para. 2). A very controversial reference to the ‘burning’ of heretics in *Game of Thrones* is the Red Priestess’s frequent fire sacrifices. What is controversial about her ritual burnings is the fact that she herself is the most witch-like icon in the series, though she is the person who lights the pyres. In an interview with Martin (*George RR Martin on the Lord of Light* 2018) the author relates Melisandre’s religion to the heretical religion of the Cathars and Zoroastrians.

By the time the Inquisition started (1227–1231 A.D.), the burning of heretics at the stake was “ingrained in Medieval culture”. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 also saw to the codification by canon law of the confiscation of property from heretics for use by the Church. This meant that accused witches’ property could be seized by the Church to be dealt out to such persons as it pleased them to do. Famous Inquisitors and returning crusaders often benefited from such transactions, widowed women for the most part falling victim to this practice. Mob action was actively employed by these Inquisitors and enforcers because individuals who feared persecution were more likely to cooperate with them than to risk the same fate as the accused. The Decree of Pope Lucius (Summers 1948, p. xx) condemned anyone who “shielded, succoured, defended, entertained, favoured, comforted, gave countenance towards or strengthened” heretics in any way (Schaff 1997).

The persecution of witches followed a similar route to the Inquisition against the Cathars. The Cathars harboured a few fundamentally divergent ideas from that of the Roman Catholic Church. They believed, for one, that God was the ruler of the spiritual world while Satan ruled the mundane realm (Hume 1757, p.17). This belief that Satan could somehow challenge the authority of God seemed heretical to the Roman Catholic Church and, in their opinion, doomed

believers in this doctrine to hell. MSN News (McCarthy 2019) claims that “16,474 people were put on trial for witchcraft in Germany and close to 7,000 were put to death” in the church’s attempt to root out heresy (2019, para. 2). According to Roman Catholic doctrine, the physical body – equitable with the ego – was not considered to be important, especially after the repugnance it gained at the Eighth Ecumenical Council in A.D. 869; the burning of the body for the sake of the soul’s salvation therefore gained symbolic significance. The Crusades (the nine crusades having taken place from 1096 to 1272) as well as the Bubonic plague (raging at its worst between 1337 and 1349) had left early Medieval Europe in a state of devastation, desperation and outrage, not to mention the Crusades in their very nature had justified religious militancy and provided a logical argument for the murder (‘judgement’) of opposers to Christianity. Superstition, partnered with an idealistic view of religious fervour, rendered the public even more susceptible to feelings of paranoia and fear.

## **2. Mystics and the language of Polytheism**

Not only was the public in the Middle Ages exposed to the mortifying effects of the bubonic plague and the perceived ‘immediate’ threat of innumerable demons constantly vying for control over the souls of human beings, but Christian aesthetics were also open to a different kind of spiritual experience (Fulford & Jackson 1997, p. 27), which they attempted to promulgate and to proclaim to the public. McGinn (2001, p. 157) explains that mystics, from as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. (such as Gregory of Nyssa, Origen, St Augustine of Hippo and Gregory the Great) experienced ‘spirituality’ in a different way and that they attempted to develop a specific kind of language which would allow them to communicate their ‘uncommunicable’ experiences to others. This language was perfected into an art by the early Middle Ages, culminating in the literary works of such mystics as Bernard of Clairvaux and Hadewijch of Atwerp. Described as ‘Affective Intentionality’ or *amor ipse intellectus est*, this language attempted to fuse feeling and knowing in such a way that spiritual experience could be logically communicated, and arguments made for and against its validity (2001, p. 160). This study and documentation of the nature of spiritual experiences often claimed the lives and sanity of iconic individuals such as Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, who were both ridiculed and revered by different factions within their highly superstitious communities.





argery Kempe (c. 1373 – after 1438) was the first woman to dictate an autobiography in the English language. Just like Dame Julian of Norwich (c. 1342), who produced the first novel in English detailing one of her near-death experiences, she had been a mystic whose insights and beliefs often contradicted the accepted Christian canon. Bachrach, Carey and Kroll (2002, p. 85) describe the myriad of different strands of Medieval mysticism and explain the difficulty, in terms of modern psychoanalysis, of “differentiating between its more extreme forms and such unstable conditions as hysteria, schizophrenia, epilepsy...manic-depressive illness, anorexia nervosa, obsessively and borderline personality disorder”. Many medieval mystics are described as having been ‘hysterical’ or ‘schizophrenic’ (Fulford & Jackson 1997, p. 22).

The percentage of the medieval population attending monasteries and nunneries was also much higher than it is today and the interest in matters of religion and spirituality was higher than it is today, though sentiments towards its practitioners still oscillate between admiration and scepticism as it did back then. This is because mystics were themselves in danger of being branded heretics (Margery Kempe was frequently tried for heresy). This is because the mystics often challenged the Church’s doctrine in their writings. Several of the beliefs that they championed seemed to have been adopted from earlier pagan religions, such as the belief in God being both male and female (2001, p. 156–171). Jen Galicinski tells us in her blog post (2010, para. 2) that “God accommodated...14th century medieval notions of motherhood and medical physiology...she is generative, that is, the fetus is created by her and is made of her very matter” (2010, para. 3) In a similar way, Julian believed that we are created by Jesus and are made up of the same substance as him. Galicinski (2010, para. 6) writes, “And so Jesus is our true Mother in nature by our first creation, and he is our true Mother in grace by his taking our created nature.” Sentiments such as these were dangerous to express in the Middle Ages, hence Julian’s text was meticulously preserved and copied by scribes until it could safely be published in the modern era.

The predominant druidic traditions and cults in pre-Christian Europe had been matriarchal. We read in *Celtic Mythology* (Geddes & Grosset 2003, p. 24–25) that: “We have certain proof of two distinct human stocks in the British islands at the time of the Roman Conquest. The earliest

of these two races would seem to have (been)...aboriginal...until the coming of the Celts.” Both the Iberians (stemming from aboriginal stock) and the Celts had been polytheists, with their concept of the ruling power being modelled on a pantheon structure. Jan Assmann (2004, p. 17) writes that “although polytheistic religions include a concept of divine unity, these religions...worship a plethora of gods...the structure and coherence of the divine world...is not just an accumulation of deities, but a structured whole, a pantheon”. Several notorious witchcraft historiographers trace the origins of the witch trials back to the disparity between polytheism and monotheism, especially because polytheism recognizes so many gods, the worship of whom gradually became synonymous with heresy. The Christian religion is a form of “negative or counter religion”, which defines not what ‘divinity’ *is* and how to worship it, but which defines what divinity or God is *not* and *how not to worship it*. Assmann (2004, p. 28) points out that the advent of this form of monotheism constituted a ‘radical break’ with previous religious beliefs:

Polytheistic or “primary” religions generally are not concerned with questions of what to believe, but how to act. Not the truth of the beliefs but the correctness of the ritual performances and recitations is what matters: orthopraxy instead of orthodoxy. No primary religion is concerned with the danger of worshipping “false” gods; their concern is, rather, not to neglect any gods requiring worship. The first to establish a revolutionary monotheism was Akhenaten of Egypt (ca. 1360–1340 BCE). Here, the negative energy of monotheism manifested itself not in explicit prohibitions (“No other gods! No images!”), but in practical destruction. The temples were closed, the cults abolished, the images destroyed, the names erased. Akhenaten's monotheism was based on a physical discovery: the sun was found to generate not only light and warmth, but also time. Light and time were held to be sufficient principles to explain the whole phenomenology of existence; the traditional pantheon was simply deemed superfluous. Its abolition was the logical consequence of a new cosmology. Akhenaten's monotheism was a matter not of revelation but of natural evidence. In this respect, it is closer to polytheism and to evolutionary monotheism than to revolutionary monotheism in its biblical and postbiblical manifestations. Biblical monotheism is based not on evidence but on revelation. It is not a matter of cognition but of commitment. It requires adherents to make a conscious decision to accept revealed truth and reject deceitful evidence. Natural evidence is debunked as seduction, as luring people away from revealed truth into the traps and pitfalls of false gods, that is, the world. The distinction

between true and false refers, in its ultimate meaning, to the distinction between god and world. Revolutionary monotheism worships an extramundane or transcendent god, whereas the deities of both polytheism and evolutionary monotheism create and animate the world from within and constitute its life.

Jonathan Black (2010, p. 343) concurs with Assmann on this point, explaining that it was during the Eighth Ecumenical Council of 869 AD that the distinction between soul (one's animal nature) and spirit (one's vegetative nature) was abolished. What this meant for Christianity was that individual humans, especially priests and other representatives of God on earth, were no longer deemed fit to have personal experiences of God, seeing as said experiences were believed to manifest themselves through the more 'fallen' vegetative body' which is comprised of the chakras and aura. This meant that any mystics or magicians who were claiming to experience 'god' or some notion of 'god' were indirectly opposing Church doctrine, because it implied the use of the 'occult' or taboo practices. As Assman elucidates (2004, p. 29–30):

Revealed truth that cannot be reexperienced in any natural way must be codified in order to be transmittable to future generations. Revolutionary monotheism appeals to memory and transmission rather than to observation, attention, divination, and diligent maintenance. In order to transmit its revolutionary message beyond the first generations of founders and followers, it must develop a body of highly normative and canonized scripture. This applies to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as to Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and other religions of the East, all of which are based on a canon...The appeal to memory and the prohibition of forgetting usually assume the form of reading, learning, and interpreting. Remembering means a form of reactualization of the normative impulses as they are laid down in the canon. The texts have not only to be learned by heart, but they have to be understood and followed. This implies both believing in the truth of what the texts say and the determination to organize the collective culture and the individual lifestyle according to the codified rules, laws, and norms of scripture...In consequence of its determination to distinguish between true and false, revolutionary monotheism constructs the outside world of former and foreign religions as paganism, a concept completely alien to primary religions...The distinction between true and false religion has not only a

cognitive, but also a moral meaning. In the early stage of monotheism, the “false gods” are conceived of as fully existent and powerful beings who constitute a constant temptation and lure the human heart into the pitfalls of idolatry. Idolatry is seen not only as an error but also as infidelity and immorality. Without the existence of other gods, the commandment to be faithful to the one god would have little meaning. The gods of polytheistic religions, in their need of social bonds, formed constellations within their own sphere and were not dependent on humanity. The god of the Bible is a “jealous god,” having to count on the love and loyalty of his chosen people, which inevitably fails in fulfilling his expectations. Thus, together with counter religion, the concept of “sin” is born as the awareness of having failed in requiting God’s love and of having given in to the temptations of the false gods.

From 869 AD onward Christianity was to be practised by strict adherence to dogma. This is known as the theologization of history, as is mentioned earlier on in this chapter. In no other fashion could access be gained to the ‘divine’. This was, of course, fundamentally opposed to paganism, which focussed on individual experience of a ‘higher power’ in a ritual structure which requires participation. There are other elements of biblical monotheism, for example *canonization, idolatry, sin and the biblical construction of paganism* which contributed towards the fierce antagonism between the church and paganism in Europe.

### **3. The Theologization of Justice**

The religious leaders in Europe considered it their responsibility to establish justice in their areas of operation, which meant obedience to Christian doctrine and to the representatives of God on earth, namely the Pope and the King. This is a characteristic of revolutionary monotheism – which is what Christianity can be described as. Assmann (2007, p. 30–31) points out that revolutionary monotheism is “a religion in which the idea of justice holds the central position... Whereas in polytheistic religions such as in Egypt, the spheres of cult and justice are carefully separated (justice is for humans, and cult is for the gods and the dead), in the Bible they are emphatically connected”. The process of integrating the functions of justice into religion based on notions of divine authority can be described as the theologization of justice. This process, illustrated by Cersei Lannister in the 5<sup>th</sup> Season of *Game of Thrones*, does not

bode well for those who are not adherents of the ruling religion (heathens). According to Assmann (2007, p. 30–31):

God does not want sacrifice, but justice. Justice becomes the most prominent way of fulfilling the will of God. This led to the still widespread conviction that justice and morals are brought into the world only by monotheism and could not be maintained without it. The construction of paganism implies the idea of lawlessness and immorality. This is, of course, a polemical distortion. The gods, above all the sun-gods (Shamash in Mesopotamia, Re in Egypt), watched over the keeping of the laws and acted as judges. In Egypt, moreover, there is the idea of a general judgment of the dead, which constitutes a first step towards a theologization of justice. But it is true that no god other than YHWH or Allah ever acted as legislator. The idea of justice is divine, but the formulation and promulgation of specific laws is [sic] the task of the king. In Egypt, the laws were never codified, and Mesopotamia had law books but no law codes. Every new king was free to promulgate his own laws and was not bound to an existing legislation. The Torah was the first attempt at creating a real law code not to be superseded by any future legislation. This was a revolutionary step by which the law – and with it religion itself, whose centre the law constituted – became independent of any political government. The ideas of divine legislation, and not only codification but also revelation and canonization, are closely connected. The law formed the content of the Sinai revelation, and its codification in the various law codes in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy formed the core of the evolving canon.



he carnal sin of a witch, pagan and heretic was, according to theological arguments of the time, heresy. Heresy was one of the most grievous sins against the Church, because it constituted a refusal to accept and believe in canonized biblical truth, or a rejection of the authority of that truth. The Dutch Professor, Cornelius Loos, whose peer Johannes Linden had written of the terrible atrocities that occurred at Trier (Burr 2001, section 2), was forced to recant statements he had made against the inquisition and the witch trials in his book. Having attempted to rationalize the many errors made by Inquisitors and clerics during the trials, Loos argued for the end of the burnings based in his method of scientific observation, which seemed heretical at the time

because it questioned the validity of several of the outlandish claims made against and about witches, including their ability to fly on brooms. Before it could be published in Cologne in 1593, Loos and the printer were seized, and the Professor was summoned before the court to recant everything that he had written, earning him his freedom. Loos was forced to assert in court (2001, section 2, bullet 1): “1. In the first place, I revoke, condemn, reject, and censure the idea (which both in words and writing I have often and before many persons pertinaciously asserted, and which I wished to be the head and front of this my disputation) that the things which are written about the bodily transportation or translation of witches, male and female, are altogether fanciful and must be reckoned the figments of an empty superstition; [and this I recant] both because it smacks of rank heresy and because this opinion partakes of sedition and hence savours of the crime of treason.” (Appendix i).

What is ironic about this recantation is that Professor Loos was inadvertently forced to concede that witches could indeed fly, among other things. This is a humorous yet appalling example of the effects of this process of the theologization of justice, which requires religious adherents to blindly believe what is considered to be part of the ‘accepted’ religious canon, even if that includes the acceptance of such irrational (and delusional) beliefs as the existence of the devil and demonic entities or the ability of witches to shape-shift or fly. These beliefs, however, are foundationally requisite for the contrary beliefs in, for example the power of the one Christian God, to be justifiable. This is how revolutionary monotheism works and it requires for its success the wilful cooperation of the entire religious population, in this case participation in the belief in the true and real power of witches and in their ‘purported’ supernatural abilities. Hence the need for the promulgation of popular and ‘accepted’ beliefs regarding witches during this time, which was aided by the development of the printing press and the resultant publication and distribution of dogmatic texts and manuals relating to witches (like the *Malleus Maleficarum*).

#### **4. The *Malleus Maleficarum* and ‘gendered’ female roles in medieval society**

Many manuals relating to witches were written by biblical scholars, Inquisitors and the like who were trying to prove their religious fervour by aiding the fight against the ‘looming’

demonic threat in Europe. Thirty thousand copies of the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*) were believed to have been in circulation throughout Europe between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Even though this manual which contains three sections, namely a philosophical explanation of ‘the witches’ existence, the clergy’s guide “to recognize a witch”, and “a legal manual for accusation, persecution, and death penalty for witchcraft”, was first banned after its publication in 1487. It later became a part of the religious canon which helped to put to death around 60 000 witches (some sources postulate). The *Malleus* did not leave room for contestation with regard to witches’ gender. This off-putting Inquisitor’s guide based much of its condemnation of witches on its misguided beliefs regarding the female sex even though the concept of gender difference was probably not yet perceived and theorized about until the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

As Ian Mortimer (2009, p. 53–58) postulates in *Timetraveller’s Guide to Medieval England*, women were blamed for committing the original sin that caused the ‘fall of man’ and they therefore fell victim to ‘gender’ prejudice in Christianized societies. Several beliefs regarding the nature of women were underscored by the writings of such “leading medical lights at Oxford” as John Gaddesden (Mortimer 2009, p. 53) who wrote that “women suffering from a superfluity of lust should find a man and marry him quickly...if this is not possible, they should travel, exercise frequently and take medicines”. Medieval society was also fascinated by the new printing press and became influenced by the writings of early scholars like Galen, a third-century author on women. Galen (Mortimer 2009, p. 55) writes that “women’s wombs are ‘cold’... (needing) constant warming by ‘hot’ male sperm. In addition, if women do not regularly copulate, their ‘seed’...might coagulate and suffocate their wombs, thereby damaging their health”. This led to one of many popular yet misconstrued beliefs that women needed to have sex regularly.

The Christian societies of the Middle Ages grappled with such issues as sexual desire. Women were considered “physical manifestations of lust”; due to this symbolic association they were also considered the primal agents of evil in society who were always threatening to lead men to sin. John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is a good example of the literary portrayal of this misconception (1674 in PoetryFoundation.org 2021). Sexual intercourse itself was misunderstood also, as were the processes of death, and birth – themes which had been much

more ingrained into the lives of the peasantry prior to the advent of Christianity. In the Celtic tradition mothers were treated with awe due to superstitions that credited a mother's word with magickal and prophetic powers and equated her curse with inescapably bad fortune. Many of the perceived 'magickal' and healing roles which women occupied in paganism persevered into Christian times, which meant that these were often associated with older religions. Women's roles in society were otherwise limited under the patriarchal rule of Christianity and so they excelled in such roles as they were already used to embodying.



Women's proclivity to become midwives meant that they often seemed to possess knowledge about and power over life and death. They could help women who had been raped to induce miscarriages. This, according to Christian doctrine, was considered to directly oppose the authority of God because it challenged his power over life and death. This aspect is highlighted in chapter five. It was also believed, for example, due to the writings of Galen, that women could only conceive if they had had an orgasm. Therefore, a woman who was raped so brutally that she did not experience an orgasm, would not have been believed in court if she produced the child that resulted from it. In such cases, midwives who helped induce miscarriages were, for this reason, not only helping their female counterparts conceal their alleged shame and guilt, but they were also acting inadvertently against the court of law, which could be considered perjury. Furthermore, these knowledgeable women could offer their advice about general folk remedies and medicinal tonics to others, extending their realm of authority beyond the scope of their own homes. This often gave them a measure of status in society, which opposed the authority of the Roman Catholic Church because of their gender.

Mortimer (2009, p. 57) also tells us that "A surprising number of townswomen (were) literate" as "Nunneries ...(were) keen on their schools, and they educate(d) as many girls as boys". To crown it all, women of a ripe old age were much more respected than their male counterparts. Old age, at least in the case of medieval women, was a sign of wisdom, whereas old age in men was shameful seeing as men were supposed to be strong and athletic and not infirm and weak. In many aspects then, despite their shame with regard to the original sin in the Bible, women were figures of authority in Medieval society. They were the living, breathing manifestation of



the Goddess of the old, pagan religions. Their functions within society concealed their level of autonomy.

According to Alexander (2014, p. 17), the following descriptions of witchcraft and magick are applicable to an understanding of witches: “A witch is someone who uses his or her power along with the natural laws of the universe to shape reality in accordance with his/her purpose. Witchcraft is the practice of manipulating energy through various means to produce a desired result. Magick is the transformation that occurs when a witch/magician bends or shapes energy using paranormal techniques”. Individuals who were for some reason believed to have been able to perform extraordinary magickal feats, or who possessed a little too much knowledge about the medicinal arts or any other taboo lore, were in the greatest danger of being accused of witchcraft. However, as Kramer and Sprenger’s notorious manual tells us, all women were to be primary subjects of witchcraft interrogations. In this regard refer to the section in the literature review on framing techniques in the *Malleus Maleficarum*. This practice is not only due to common misconceptions regarding women, but it was also informed, especially in the case of the more literate of the ecclesiastical scholars of the Middle Ages, by symbolic associations relating to women compiled in such prolific occult manuals as the kabbalah (Andrews 2004, p. 7–10) a philosophical text which was also gaining popularity during this time in mystical and occult circles.

## **5. Occult sciences and the symbolism behind woman and magick**

The Kabbalah, a mystical system whose teachings also became widespread in Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries, associates woman with the kind of imagery prevalent in her stereotypical portrayal as witch (Fortune 1998, p. 51). To describe the relationship between the Creator of the Universe and the Microcosm, which is man, the Kabbalah is a system of mystical teachings which claims to supersede and inform many religious and spiritual systems and which was incorporated into the Jewish religion. Within this system, the third sphere of manifestation, also considered the third step in the creation process of all life, is that of ‘Binah’, the Great Mother who has two aspects which are considered to be two poles of the same being. Gareth Knight (2001, p. 76–100) explains that these aspects are that of Ama, the dark sterile

Mother and Aima, the bright fertile Mother. Her colour of association is black, symbolised by the Great Sea and, because she symbolizes the womb, all things are hidden within her and she is the originator of primordial form which must restrict and contain the Great Father's active, unbridled force if anything in creation is to assume a physical shape.

The Great Mother also sits at the apex of the pillar of severity and is illustrated by the image of a weeping mother, mourning over the suffering which man must endure to master life. The Great Father, a bearded and sexually mature male, must have a well-established and fully functioning relationship with his female counterpart to attain his great mythical stature. The notion of balance and the existence of equal and opposite forces within each sphere of 'life' are central to Kabbalistic teachings. However, the Kabbalah itself filtered through into canonical Christian literature only in diluted form owing to its adoption by the Jewish religion and the biases which the Christian Church fostered towards Judaism for the crucifixion of Christ. The Christian bible, containing the Jewish Old testament in its original form, contained a great deal more Jewish philosophical teachings than it does today, and an understanding of the Kabbalistic system is necessary for a complete interpretation of this text. Sadly, because of the association of the Jewish religion with other taboo practices and religions, the watered-down symbolic associations which originated in this system became misconstrued and have led to the distortion and separation of males' and females' symbolic roles in society (women became associated with all that is on the dark, evil and 'wrong' whereas men became associated with that which is right, light, good and morally 'right'). A failure by the religious elite to grasp the true nature and workings of these ancient teachings led to the crude misinterpretation of the bible, of which the true purpose should be to empower Christ's followers and not to enslave them. In fact, all references to the practical (Kabbalistic) religious rituals and behaviours were very cleverly sanctioned and removed from the bible by the ecclesiastic leaders and scholars in the Middle Ages (Black 2010, p. 343), who still used these themselves, along with all manner of unsanctioned magickal practices for personal gain.

The use of any traditionally 'taboo' crafts in the modern era is still considered heresy by the Roman Catholic Church, although Vatican City protects and collects kilometres of manuscripts on the occult sciences (Blakemore 2017, *Step into the Vatican's Secret Archives*), "officially

forbidden” forms of magickal practices and the ‘hidden’ knowledge of former religious societies. The notion that religious followers are often kept uninformed in order that religious authorities may have more control over their habits and thoughts is no secret in the modern era, yet there are still Christian institutions which refuse to acknowledge the banned modern misconceptions about magick practices (Catholic Answers 2008, section 5) and their true affiliation towards said practices. The separation of church and state in the court of law is a step in the right direction which only a few countries have officially taken to date. Black informs us (2007, p. 235–238) that the Egyptian ruler Akhenaten was one of the first Pharos to rule both state and priesthood, however his revolutionary religious reforms offended the Egyptian priesthood so much that they murdered him and enshrined his son instead. His reforms had been strikingly monotheistic in that they shunned the worship of all other gods than the sun god. Religions which sanction the worship of certain deities in favour of others often need to employ sanctions to stunt the growth of counter religions, just as the Roman Catholic Church attempted with the Inquisition. The sanctioning of individuals’ private thoughts, however, has lifted with the onset of democracy, where laws regarding freedom of speech and religion have opened an avenue for modern witches to inform the public of what magick really is what they actually believe.

According to many modern commercial grimoires, magick can be defined in terms of two premises, namely: morality and sophistication. Alexander (2014, p. 32) tells us that “Magick is ethically neutral... (it) can be used to help or to harm”. Generally, it is accepted that interference with a person’s free will crosses the boundary between neutral and bad magick. Brian P. Levack (1996, p. 4–6) also describes magick in terms of the morality of the magician: “In its purest sense magick is a power that is activated and controlled by man himself. The power is very much the magician’s power, which he uses to produce readily observable, empirical results in the world. He almost always uses this power in critical situations and he usually acts secretly and individually. The assumption of the magician is that if he practices his art correctly, it will automatically bring about the desired result. If he fails, he concludes that he has not performed his art properly”. Conversely, according to Levack, a religious layman would attempt to ‘exercise control’ over some kind of ‘power’ by supplicating a god, a magician operates from the assumption that it is the correctness of the technique that is being used which will bring about the desired success of this actions.

Soraya, author of the *Book of Spells*, (2015, p. 13) writes that: “Magik is the art of...making things happen, as you would wish them to...simply the manipulation of energy...the truth is there is no black, evil, good or white magik – it’s all the same. There are, however, good people and evil people...The first rule of magik is: An it harm none so be it”. It is, however, rather difficult to discern magick practices from religious types of ritual (1995, p. 5). Very often the similarities between religious rituals and acts of witchcraft are so striking that their moral intent offers the only distinction between them (Willeford 1984, p. 343). In season 6 of *Game of Thrones* Bran, the second youngest son of Ned and Caitlin Stark, becomes the ‘three-eyed Raven’. This is a spiritual ‘position’ which ‘chooses him’. He gains the ability to see into the past and future. This kind of spiritual ability, studies suggest, is distributed among the human population in a bell-shaped curve and is much more common than is popularly reported and it has become fashionable (Redden 2005) in the modern era to claim to have some sort of “supernatural ability”. Levack (1996, p. 4–7) describes the term ‘witchcraft’ and some of the understandings about it which stem from the Middle Ages:

Witchcraft... almost always refers(red) to either or both of two types of activity. The first was the practice of harmful, black or maleficent magick, the performance of harmful deeds by means of some sort of extraordinary, mysterious, occult, preternatural or supernatural power. This type of magick would include the killing of a person by piercing a doll made in his image, inflicting sickness on a child by reciting a spell, bringing down hail on crops by burning enchanted substances, starting a fire by leaving a hexed sword in a room, and causing impotence in a bridegroom by tying knots in a piece of leather and leaving it in his proximity. These acts were usually referred to in Latin as *malificia* and in English were sometimes called witchcrafts. The agents of these deeds were usually referred to as *malifici* or *malifical*, the Latin words that were commonly used to identify witches...The second characteristic of *malificia* is that they are by distinction harmful, not beneficial. They are intended to bring about bodily injury, disease, death, poverty or some sort of misfortune. They are to be contrasted, therefore, with acts of white magick, the purpose of which is to bring about some benefit to oneself or another. White magick can be productive, in the sense of helping crops to grow or women to bear children; it can be curative, in the sense of healing a person who

is ill; or it can be protective, in the sense of preventing some misfortune from occurring or warding off some evil spirit or witch.

Although 'malificia' was often clearly distinguishable from other acts of magick in the Middle Ages, the term 'witchcraft' was used interchangeably to refer to both beneficial and harmful types of magick or specifically to refer to witches in general, making it a dangerous umbrella term. The term 'witch' also came to imply the use of harmful magick and not just magick in general, making it inherently negative. With the advent of the Trials it also came to apply to all practitioners of magickal arts, regardless of the type of magick or ritual that was being performed, be it sophisticated or no, high or low magick. Levack elucidates (1996, p. 6–7):

Our concept of malificium comes very close to, but nevertheless cannot be equated with, that of sorcery...the practice of magick by some sort of mechanical, manipulative process. Sorcery is an acquired skill. It might involve the destruction of an image of a person in order to bring him harm, the pronunciation of a spell, or the use of a potion. Sorcery can be distinguished from malificium on two possible grounds. The first is that in the view of some scholars, sorcery can be beneficial as well as harmful. In that sense it is a broader category. The second is that some maleficent acts do not involve the use of any particular technique, substance or paraphernalia. Malificium can be the result of a witch's general power to inflict harm rather than her practice of any particular art... magick, whether beneficial or harmful, can be classified as either high or low. Once again the distinction is not always clear, but high magick is a sophisticated and speculative art which requires a certain amount of education. The most common forms of high magick are alchemy, which is the changing of base metals into precious ones, and divination (also known as conjuring) which is the use of various means to acquire secret or otherwise unknown knowledge. Astrology, the use of the position of the stars to obtain such knowledge, and necromancy, the use of the spirits of the dead for similar purposes, are the most commonly known methods of divination, but more than a hundred different methods including scapulomancy (divination by examining animals' shoulders) and dactyliomancy (by means of a finger-ring) and oneiroscopy (by the interpretation of dreams) have been employed by various societies. Low magick requires little if no formal education and can be learned by oral transmission, apprenticeship or even individual experimentation. It usually takes the form of simple charms and spells. Most of the malificia ascribed to witches in the early modern period

fall into this category of low magick, both because the overwhelming majority of witches came from the lower levels of society and also because most high magick is white. It is important to note, however, that practitioners of high magick did occasionally incur accusations of witchcraft and that the practice of divination was specifically prohibited by many witchcraft laws.

As Levack states, in spite of the many definitions of and distinctions between different kinds of magick practices, the communities in Europe around the time of the Witch Trials (A.D. 1450–1750) often prosecuted any alleged witch, without considering the distinctions between different types of magick or the intent of the practitioner using it and the circumstances leading up to its use. By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century witches' alleged worship of the Devil became such an organized and deliberate perceived threat to society that many individuals who were accused of witchcraft were not even accused of performing *malificia*. Their only crime was the alleged worship of the Devil. This is where the belief in the witches' sabbath comes from, as well as the belief in the witch's ability to fly to gatherings (of Devil-worshippers) on broomsticks. European beliefs regarding such unusual witch practices are unique because of the European (more specifically Roman Catholic) belief in the Devil.

## **6. The nature of magick versus miracles**

Even though many of the beliefs which were forced upon religious individuals in the Middle Ages and before there were rationalizations from ecclesiastical debates about the importance of certain biblical rules over others, there are also other beliefs which confirm, if only by opposition to it, the existence of magick and the threat that magick and witchcraft truly pose. These beliefs are based in faith and, because of their assumed origin in some religion or other, they are referred to as miracles. Christianity recognizes several mysteries as miraculous, including Marian apparitions (Wagner 2018, *Marian Apparitions*), encounters of angels, stigmata, bleeding icons and accurate papal prophecies (unusually accurate predictions of popes, such as that of Saint Malachy, who predicted the reign of every known pope from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century). These phenomena are associated with the Christian faith, though every religion has its own recorded miracles and 'divine' phenomena. What is important to note is that science

cannot, in most cases, describe the workings of such phenomena. New advances in technology are beginning to offer explanations for them based in the field of quantum physics, yet there are ‘mysteries’ which science cannot explain and which would have seemed equally if not more terrifying to the masses during the Middle Ages.



Some psychologists argue that the desire to believe in miracles, to participate in worship and to aspire towards something more than mundane refers to spiritual ‘DNA’ which lies dormant within all human beings and which is associated with a spiritual or ‘higher’ nature. This ‘spiritual’ nature is contrary to a lower, mundane or ‘human’ nature. Suffice it to say that this train of thought harkens back to the esoteric belief in the vegetative and spiritual bodies which was removed from Christian canonical thought at the Eighth Ecumenical Council in 869 AD. Participation in religious or spiritual activities has been proven to stimulate areas in the brain which are exclusively active in individuals who participate in such ritualistic activities as religious worship or spiritual training. Dr Chet Raymo (2005, section 2) writes:

Hamer administered the self-transcendence test to a thousand random subjects. He also sequenced DNA samples from the same individuals, looking specifically at nine genes known to code for chemicals involved in brain activity. One variation of one gene showed a statistically significant correlation with high scores on the self-transcendence inventory...Self-transcendent people tend to see everything, including themselves, as part of one great totality. They have a strong sense of “at-oneness” with people, places and things. They are likely to be environmentalists, or active in the fight against poverty, racism and war. Self-transcendent individuals are mystical. They are fascinated with things that cannot be explained by science. They are creative but may also be prone to psychosis. In short, they are spiritual and inclined to belief in God. The gene codes for a protein called a monoamine transporter, one of a family of chemicals that controls crucial signalling in the brain.

If we accept Dr Raymo’s deliberations on humankind’s innate capacity to perceive and share in spiritual experiences, then we should consider that all human beings possess, to varying degrees, the potential not only to engage in but also to perform the kind of phenomena religious

believers would describe as miracles or sceptics would view as acts of magick (2015, section 3). This implies that only individuals belonging to the Roman Catholic tradition, in Western Europe of the Middle Ages, were safe from the witch hunters. Those individuals who were less 'self-transcendent' or who managed to suppress their spiritual inclinations, were undoubtedly safer. Bachrach, Carey and Kroll (2002, pp. 83–98) explain that the Medieval Mystics may simply have been considered what Raymo (2015, section 4) may call 'self-transcendent' individuals who were attempting to alter their own or others' circumstances.

The desire to alter one's circumstances or to bring about an alteration in the circumstances of another (such as the prevention of pregnancy, the restoration of health or the destruction of a desired foe's possessions) is characteristic of human nature. Many witches were persecuted for performing such acts which were driven, as 'purposeful' (Kors & Peters 1972, p. 3). Rituals which were remnants of pre-Christian religions in Europe would also have resembled acts of treason, such as gathering to celebrate the solstices or making sacrifices to deities other than the Christian God. Mere spiritual, self-transcendent acts could have been coined as witchcraft, making it hard for non-magicians who were not adherent to Christianity to escape the arm of the Inquisitor. A factor which complicated the differentiation between acts of pagan ritual and the rituals of the Church was the fact that the church had adopted many of the rituals, saints, traditions and practices of its pagan predecessors, making many of its traditions, rituals and beliefs undifferentiable from those of other religions. It was often found to be the case that the only difference between the religious ritual of a pre-Christian tradition and that of the Church, was the officiant's affiliation with the associated deity/deities that were evoked. Kors and Peters (1972, p. 3) explain, with regard to the trials, that "Celtic and Germanic folklore, biblical and patristic speculation on the nature of evil, Neoplatonism and the related philosophical spiritualism of late antiquity, and even the possible survival of "underground" ancient pre-Christian cults and covens have all been identified by one school or another as major contributors. From 1100 on, however, indistinct and often idiosyncratic strains of belief were systematized into a coherent and generally uniform system of theological and juridical dogma, the logical implications of which were the obligations of the Church and the secular courts actively to seek out and extirpate the witches and their defenders".



In seasons 6 and 7 of *Game of Thrones*, Bran Stark uses the technique known to Druids from the Celtic tradition as ‘borrowing’. Bran enters an ancient cave where roots of an ancient tree form a type of portal. Here he learns the art of astral projection. Using the minds of animals and even other humans, he learns about events from both the future and past and can see what other beings and animals see. Bran regularly ‘visits’ other places and times to report on the whereabouts of the undead, but he seems to gradually lose an element of his humanity in the process. In Episode 4 of the 7<sup>th</sup> Season, “The Spoils of War”, Meera, the girl who had been aiding Bran after he had become separated from his family, remarks to him that “a part of him died in that cave”. Indeed, a warning is issued to most shamans or druids when they first learn to ‘borrow’ that they are in danger of losing their own minds; a mocking example of this is the warning Granny Weatherwax offers to her apprentice, Esk, in Terry Pratchett’s *Equal Rights*.

This type of magick, namely ‘borrowing’, is barely definable as either high or low, black or white. Bran’s intent also seems unclear and so, on the scale from light to dark, a shade of morality can also not be associated with it. This uncertainty (Catholic Answers 2008, section 1) is perhaps what made the persecutions during the witch trials so difficult and yet so extensive (spanning over 300 years from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the Salem Witch Trials in 1692). Almost any culprit could be potentially framed as guilty for resorting to magick in some form or another. Magick’s indefinability, its mysterious nature, classifies it as completely abject and mysterious. The fact that certain practitioners of white magick (helpful magick) were tried and that some of them were released is hopeful and offers proof that, at least in some cases, prudence prevailed over zeal. The fact remains, however, that maleficia or harmful magick, does in fact exist and that knowledge about it and about how to use it is being distributed on bookshelves across the globe at a tremendous rate, much as in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The state of different global countries’ laws on and about witchcraft and its persecution will perhaps need to be scrutinized in this era, where the resurgence of occult sciences in popular literature and film is unmistakable, with such popular film series as *Harry Potter* (2001–2011), *The Lord of The Rings* (1999–2004) and *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) flooding the media with the portrayal of witches, different types of magicians and their craft.

This chapter discussed the various contexts which contributed towards the ‘image’ of the witch and which informed many of the beliefs regarding her image, stemming from the Middle Ages and before and evolving into the different portrayals of filmic witches we find in today’s film. Examples from HBO’s iconic *Game of Thrones* have helped to illustrate how many of these beliefs have been identified and portrayed, however the extent to which the Red Priestess champions the beliefs of modern witches has not yet been explored and will follow in the next few chapters. The specific gendered association of women with witchcraft has been introduced, and the next few chapters will delve into the witch’s stereotypical portrayal in more depth (Chapter IV: Sovereignty), followed by a discussion of the culmination of the different symbolic associations which inform the Monstrous and Abject aspects of the modern, filmic witch as described by Laura Mulvey.

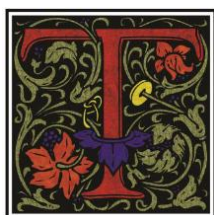
After said discussion, the conflation of these medieval and modern portrayals reveals the image of the witch as she is portrayed in popular film series today, as both an alluring and terrifying, functional and subversive figure, personified in the figure of Melisandre from HBO’s *Game of Thrones*. As Lewis (ThoughtCo.com 2019, *A Timeline of Witch Hunts in Europe*) summarizes:

“Although men were also accused of witchcraft, about 75–80 percent of those executed during the witch hunts were women...the idea of women’s weakness was tied to Eve’s temptation by the Devil in the Bible, but that story itself cannot be blamed for the proportion of women accused. Even in other cultures, witchcraft accusations have been more likely to be directed at women. Some writers have also argued, with significant evidence, that many of those accused were single women or widows whose very existence delayed the full inheritance of property by male heirs. Dower rights, intended to protect widows, gave women in such circumstances power over property that they usually could not exercise. Witchcraft accusations were easy ways to remove the obstacle. It was also true that most of those accused and executed were among the poorest, most marginal in society. Women’s marginality compared to men added to their susceptibility to accusations”.

In the next chapter, an in-depth look into the relationship between woman and Magick, as well as her relation to the Abject will cast more light on particularly woman’s association with witchcraft.



#### Chapter IV: Sovereign of Britain – the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone



he previous chapter discussed the various influences that informed the person of the witch, ranging from historical events to the different themes that inscribed meaning on her complex character. Most importantly, the theme of fear as a mechanism for the perpetuation of the witch persecutions was analysed and it was discovered that fear was used most effectively to colour witches' moral character. This was mostly done by the Inquisitors and religious leaders who spearheaded the witch hunts in Europe because of their misinformed beliefs about women and their sexuality, as well as women's presumed relation to magick and to the fall of man. Many of the elements that contributed to witches' fearful façade include her proclivity to challenge different kinds of political and religious authorities, although her original role in the myths of pagan Europe was less politically involved.

This chapter situates the witch, as mythical character, within the 'folk' belief systems of the Middle Ages to draw a correlation between her original character in myth and her modern representations in film. In doing so, this chapter sheds light on why so many kinds of women so readily accrued witchcraft accusations during the Middle Ages, not only based on fear or on their gender per se, but as a result of earlier stereotypes of women's power which are locked up in the triadic image of the Sovereign Goddess of Britain (which lingered on in the memories of the formerly pagan communities after the Christianization of Europe). What is interesting is that neither the witch's gender nor her association with traditionally established female roles in European society was originally negative. It is for this reason that the insertion of this chapter is necessary to this study. The stereotype of the witch certainly became inscribed with gender based discrimination and a fear of female's sexuality in the early Middle Ages, but, if one considers the gender roles related to her within texts from the period, one finds that this wasn't originally the case. Textual witches were at first remarkably similar to the Sovereign Goddess of earlier pagan religions in Britain, so much so that Sovereignty's three aspects have become stereotypes of witches in the modern West. These stereotypes function within a very deep subconscious level and continue to perform their role in the socialization of the public, even though they have been removed from their original context (Glăveanu 2007, *Stereotypes Revised*).

Clarissa Pinkola Estés' (2008) iconic text on the function of myths in societies' subconscious draws attention to the fact that cultural beliefs and folk tales function on a very deep psychological level and, seeing as social beliefs influence individuals and their behaviour, it is very important that cultural myths, perpetuated today by the film industry, need to be re-explored in terms of their influence on popular thought. With regard to the witch's stereotype this is particularly so because she has inherited mythical attributes from pagan thought.

Paganism had a more democratic view of the role of women in society. In myth women embody powerful stereotypes which are represented by goddesses who are, as a result of their lineage within the Celtic pantheon, on par with the Christian God. The goddesses (and gods) played a functional role in society and helped to structure human behaviour. A brief overview of the basic tenets of polytheism will elucidate this point more fully. Assmann (2004, p. 18–24) tells us that polytheism recognizes divine presence as being found in all four realms of existence, namely: the cosmos, the organization of religious cults and the political sphere, the realm of myth as well as the realm of history. The gods, presiding in the cosmos or nature, were responsible for “creating and maintaining the world”. They also presided over the sphere of humans. They were active in the cultic organization of religious practices, as rulers of towns, geographical dimensions and bigger political dimensions, each appointed god taking his or her place in the hierarchy. The third dimension of divine presence in polytheism was that of myth. For pre-Christian civilizations, myths served an educational purpose which was the profusion of knowledge and moral lessons through practical examples. This is quite a recent view; according to Jonathan Black (2010, pp. 19–20), mythological stories were at the time literally true, but the modern brain has altered to such a degree that it can no longer understand their initial frame of reference, assigning to them a ‘mythological’ nature.

Myths were not just orally transmitted stories, but they were practical examples of how to “live, act and display personalities and characters in interaction, not only or even primarily with...one another, but also in relation to (the) gods, in ‘constellations’ that find their expression in myths, genealogies, epithets, names – in short, in everything that can be said about a deity” (2010, p. 20). The last realm of divine presence was that of history. The concept of the gods being

involved in the outcomes of human lives and interactions, one which gradually developed over time, originating in Egypt. Myths, as the place of origin of many stories about witches, were not mere stories; they were educational – they presented modes of living. The characters in the myths, often a combination of gods, goddesses, heroes and heroines were stereotypes of how to live (McFarlane 2014) and so the use of these stories literally formed part of a tradition of teaching and learning. Though myths seem outdated in terms of modern behaviours and mannerisms, the basic principles which they teach – such as, for example: not falsely crying for help (*The Boy who Cried Wolf*), not travelling through a forest by yourself (*Little Red Riding Hood*), not forgetting to honour all the ancestors (*Sleeping Beauty*) – are still applicable today. For this reason, fairy tales and myths are constantly being retold, with slight adaptations helping to situate them within a modern context. Not to mention, as Yakubov (2017, p. 5) tells us, “the horror film shares many of the same concerns as fairy tales, specifically that both serve to re-establish a culture’s negotiated boundaries with the taboo, marginal, and other”. Just like Breton Lays from the Medieval period then, modern myths and fairy tales like *Game of Thrones* represent the adaptations of cultural beliefs, practices and strictures of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Lesley Lawton (2016, p. 3) explains that in Medieval romances stereotypes become an ‘inevitable consequence’ because they “provide an instantly recognisable shorthand for certain categories of behaviour and narrative possibility”. She draws attention to the function of the foundational stereotypes that operate in Medieval romance in general, explaining that “the female narrative trajectory reflects the different gender expectations of (their) original audiences”. These would have been used to establish appropriate gender roles within societies, especially within those which were preoccupied with social integration based on family structures (the previous chapter also alludes to the importance of the fulfilment of certain fixed cultural stereotypes). If one considers the use of the media and film today and its culturally ‘determining’ role, then that much is still applicable to modern Western society. Leading figures of authority also had a hand in the establishment of traditional female roles and in the retelling of old stories. The Christianisation of many inherited pagan fairy tales saw the alteration of the original pagan characters’ roles into more suited Christian ones. Women inhabiting seemingly powerless roles as damsels in distress were turned into pure virgins awaiting their valiant husbands-to-be, the epitome of sanctioned female behaviour within the patriarchal system. This study does not offer space for a full discussion on the mechanisms

behind the alteration of British myths as one would discover through the study of gyanpedia (the study of fairy tales), but suffice it to say that Lays and fairy tales, just like modern films, are representations of the communities for whom they were written. They can be interpreted as remnants of the culture and milieu of their time. Several behavioural roles can be read from them, some of which reveal a pattern.

Within Breton Lays from the Middle Ages several accepted social identities can be read. The admirable, quietly composed virgin Mary figure is one who stems from this time and who, at the time, was considered the ultimate benchmark for acceptable female behaviour (2016, pp. 8–9). Lawton also suggests that female roles in Lays, as in the fairy tales that inspired them, were not initially gender-determined but that they had been intended to be purely functional. The stereotypes contained within the notion of Britain's Sovereign (pre-Christian) Goddess prevailed in European fairy tales. They filtered down into stories which contained witches, who became the inheritors of many of the Goddess's attributes. To understand the symbolism locked up in the tripartite archetypes of Sovereignty, it becomes necessary to understand where the different aspects of these and the witch's stereotype come from. Lawton (2016, pp. 7–8) points to the Celtic undertones evident in many Breton Lays from the Middle Ages.

The canon of Celtic (mainly Welsh) myths known as the *Mabinogion* informed the literatures and oral traditions of pre-Christian Britain. These archetypal stories, like the myth on which is based Thomas Malory's *Morte de Arthur* (released after Malory's death in 1471) is a romantic retelling of the life and feats of King Arthur and his 'knights' which originally centred on the life of a feudal, Celtic chieftain (Stone 1976 (trans.)). The story took on Christianized form because of its popularity within the oral canon. Within this story several powerful women take the stage as representatives of the Goddess of Britain (Lupack 2010). Their goal in the story is to challenge the king and to bring him to maturity. Caitlín Matthews (1989, p. 22–26) describes what she terms "the shape of Sovereignty", an expression of the "Divine Feminine", the archetypal 'spirit' or 'being' known as the pre-Romano-British Goddess who was worshipped in pagan Europe and who was also known as the "spirit of the land", the consort of the worthy king especially in ancient Welsh and Irish traditions.

Matthews's study focusses mainly on the presentation and role of 'Sovereignty' in the *Mabinogion*, the entirety of which had to be studied to obtain the rank of 'bard' in early-Medieval Wales. Matthews (1989, p. 13) writes that the *Mabinogion* is a primary document in the Matter of Britain. It draws on the earliest mythic archetypes of both pseudo-history and the cross-fertilization of stories from the British oral tradition with French romances. Each one of the stories discussed in this book shows a hero or champion who is battling for sovereignty of some kind. The popularity of the tales in this canon make them an apt example of texts from within the oral (folk) tradition of the time. In her book, Matthews describes the process through which the hero (usually male: Lludd, Macsen Wledig, Rhonabwy, Owain, Gereint, Peredur, Arthur) seeks to overcome conflicts within his own nature, which are paralleled by outward scourges in the land, in order to become deserving consorts of the female representative of the 'Goddess'. An analysis of Matthews's understanding of the roles of the women who 'played' the Sovereign Goddess's representatives in this early British canon will help to situate the original roots of the witch's stereotypes.

"In order to understand the nature and complexity of Sovereignty's relationship with the king," Matthews (1989, p. 14) explains "we must examine the basis of Celtic kingship" which retained a "magickal and mystical significance (even) in our own times." An aspiring Celtic king had to participate in specific sacred rituals order to become 'wedded' with the representative of the Sovereign Goddess. This chosen woman was always understood to represent the 'spirit' of the land. Myths and stories about such sacred unions were usually based on historical accounts of the actual ritual, giving them more credence. Ancient Irish records refer to this ritual as *banais rigi*, "wedding of the kingship" and the ritual often literally involved the aspiring king being "mystically conjoined" with the land by "stepping into the sacred footprint on the inauguration stone (which was symbolic of the land)" or drawing a sword from an 'anvil' as Arthur did (1989, p. 15). This ritual could also entail the king mating with a white mare in front of an assembly of people (white mares literally represented the archetypal Goddess Rhiannon or Epona, who is associated with Ireland, Eiru). In India a similar ritual exists which is called the *Ashvamedha*, "in which a queen symbolically mates with a (dead) stallion" (1989, p. 16). These traditions that predated Christianity in Europe were matriarchally orientated; women of royal



stature were usually considered to be representatives of the Goddess, but it did at times occur that other fitting vassals were found from among the general population. This is because women were revered and worshipped in pagan societies. They were honoured primarily because of their gender and their ability to bear children, bearing fruits with their wombs as the land does with its dark caves and fertile soil. Dark ages European men then, and especially the most exalted among them who desired to rule the land, needed to prove that they were deserving of being conjoined with this mystical and spiritually exalted gender.

Matthews describes the Goddess within the stories from the *Mabinogion* (1989, p. 23) as “Eriu – Ireland herself...the Goddess of the *Land* (awaiting) a worthy consort” (2003, p. 99). In these cultural stories the different female aspects of this Goddess usually appear to test, challenge or reward the predestined king. Without her intervention, the male hero cannot mature enough to claim lordship over his desired realm. As Lesley Lawton states (2016, p. 5) “female experience precedes and prepares for that of the hero. The prerequisite of the hero’s quest is the mother’s own adventure that led to his conception”. This rings true of many British myths in which a miraculous or strange birth of a hero is the result of the mother’s adventure and often her procurement by an Otherworldly force. For the purpose of the description of the dynamics between the three opposing aspects of the same primal force, Matthews’s table entitled *The Shape of Sovereignty*, **Figure I.I** (1989, p. 26), is included here:

<i>Aspect</i>	<b>Maiden</b>	<b>Mother/Foster-mother</b>	<b>Hag/Cailleach</b>
<i>Aspect of royal rule</i>	Princess	Queen	Queen Mother
<i>Appearance</i>	Beautiful Maiden	Royal Woman	Ugly Hag or the Black Maiden
<i>Symbolic Colour</i>	White (sometimes red)	Red (sometimes white)	Black
<i>Function</i>	She invites	She empowers	She guides and warns
<i>Empowering Drink</i>	The red drink of lordship	The milk of fostering	The dark drink of forgetfulness
<i>Title in the Grail legends</i>	Grail Maiden/-bearer	Queen of the Hallows	Grail Messenger
<i>Other Titles</i>	Sovereignty, Flower Bride	Sovereignty	Loathly Lady, Dark Woman of Knowledge

Matthews writes (1989, p. 26) that “There is nothing immovable about this schema: as we will see Sovereignty...may use more than three aspects in which to reveal herself, as she indeed does in *Peredur*. There is a case for her appearing in four aspects, especially if one considers the evidence of the Arthurian legends, where the admonitory Black Maiden, who shares all the features of the *Cailleach* except age, is a transitional figure between the hag and maiden aspects...the Goddess passes into many [other] guises...the guise of the land itself personified...the *genius loci*, the spirit of the earth beneath us, who in many different countries assumes a localized appearance and a set of symbols appropriate to her cult. The first localized cults of the Blessed Virgin were built upon this understanding” (1989, p. 21). The hag or Crone plays the same role on one European continent as on the next, as does the Mother aspect.

These aspects are, in a sense, akin to Jung’s archetypes, because they permeate all the European myths about kingship and are functionally interchangeable from one story to the next. Owing to the stereotypical nature of the portrayal of the female characters in these fairy tales, their underlying archetypal similarities across the European continent come to light. What this analysis aims to illustrate is that there is a pattern of portrayal in European fairy tales (not just in the different tales from the *Mabinogion*) which points to the similarities in attributes and behaviours of fairy tale women; their most general associations and symbols are depicted in the above table. The general relationship between the three stereotypes of Sovereignty is that the maiden aspect of Sovereignty is abandoned by her mother (or challenged by her stepmother); she faces off with an aspect of the Dark Mother (or witch or crone) in order to become the consort– the Mother. The successful union of Sovereignty’s representative and the male protagonist can be described as the ‘happy ever after’ ending. Lawton (2012, p. 6) describes the maturation process of the male protagonist as a ‘coming of age’ in relation to the female characters in the story. The different aspects of Sovereignty are in truth just phases within the life of an individual woman; all three aspects of Sovereignty are truly one. In this sense, woman is magickal (Lupack 2010) she contains within her all the attributes gained by the natural cycles of her life and the potential for complete transformation is held up in her ability to give birth to the next generation. This is the reason women were venerated in matriarchal societies; it also relates to the understanding that women’s association with magick and witchcraft in the West stemmed in part from their perceived roles within pagan societies.

Let us consider more closely the three stereotypes for the phases of a woman's life as portrayed in 'the matter of Britain'.



f the three aspects of Sovereignty, the Maiden was the youngest, most alluring guise of the witch, especially so because she embodies the most innocent aspect of the Goddess, one that yet must mature. Described as the "fairest in the land", the one with the rosiest cheeks and the reddest of lips, she was the epitome of purity. In this sense, virginity symbolized the highest level of potential and fecundity. As De Beauvoir colourfully illustrates in her chapter *Dreams, Fears, Idols*, (1997, pp. 184–185) in *The Second Sex*, "male's hesitation between fear and desire...is strikingly reflected in the myth of Virginité..." for "the true motives underlying...widespread customs of defloration are mystical. Certain peoples imagine that there is a serpent in the vagina which would bite the husband just as the hymen is broken; some ascribe frightful powers to virginal blood, related to menstrual blood and likewise capable of ruining the man's vigour. Through such imagery is expressed the idea that the feminine principle has the more strength, is more menacing, when it is intact...thence comes the strength in combat attributed to virgins: for example, the Valkyries and the Maid of Orléans". The Maiden was the ultimate prize – the princess that is to be wed after the prince's successful conquest of the physical land and of his inner nature. Her symbolic colours: white or red, are often the most notable aspects of her appearance. An example of this is the German figure of *Snow White (Sneewittchen)*, who was revered for her beauty and whose innocence and splendour inspired the jealousy of her evil stepmother.

The Maiden aspect is usually at odds with her counterpart, the Crone, who is in a certain sense her opposite. Matthews (1989, p. 27) describes this competition between the Maiden and Crone as the inevitable struggle between darkness and light which the earth undergoes yearly, and she posits that "The Black Maiden battles hard to bring her protégé to self-knowledge and responsible action; in many ways she is an active champion of Sovereignty and corresponds to the male figure...the Provoker of Strife, an archetype". The battle between the two represents the interplay between the cycles of nature and the defeat of winter by spring, which was celebrated in pagan societies by the Yule Celebrations (12 days of festivals to celebrate the rebirth of the sun). The Maiden aspect of the Goddess, the symbolic portrayal of 'spring' must

battle with the forces of darkness, symbolic of 'winter', in the person of the Crone or 'Black Maiden', in order to restore order to the land. She does this in the unconscious plane. The Maiden usually represents the Goddess at the outset of the journey; she is the beginning, and myths featuring the Goddess usually feature her in this state before any other. As soon as her condition is adequately described, the male protagonist sets off on his journey in the conscious realm.

The female protagonist's is a psychic journey the likes of which is described in Estés's *Women who Run with the Wolves* (2008, p. 26). She faces her dark, unconscious aspects, usually after falling into a slumber (like that of 'Sleeping Beauty') or entering the Otherworld. While the princess sleeps, she is protected (like in *Snow White* for example, in which the dwarves who stand guard by her side are also symbolically the protectors of the Earth element – according to Rosicrucian lore). The prince awakens the princess with the kiss of love (a symbol of his surrendering to love) and she can re-enter the mortal world where she must take her place as rightful queen. This action is symbolic of the consciousness bringing to light the subconscious in order that true maturity might be attained. Male and female, in the case of fairy tales, represent the active and passive elements of the psyche.

Interestingly the male protagonist's role in fairy tales is just as important, but no more important than that of the Sovereign representative; the male and female characters represent the subconscious and conscious aspects of the personality. Estés (2008) discusses in more depth the psychological processes involved in the slumber of a princess and of her awakening with the help of the ego (the male protagonist). The successful transformation of both male and female protagonists in myth is the goal of the story. The battles which take place in the conscious and subconscious realms are merely secondary, they mechanise the action in the story, but that is it. Morality is also not actually an issue, in the sense that transformation resulting in maturity is the desired outcome of this model of myth. A maiden who can move into her next phase of life, that of motherhood, has successfully completed the first stage of her development. The male protagonist usually grows in character before he can successfully claim the maiden for his wife (note that, in many fairy tales, the number of suitors for a single princess's hand are many, the bulk of whom fail). The characteristics of the Maiden aspect of

the Goddess are her youth, her beauty, her talents and her personality; every fairy tale princess has her own special attributes; however, she is often considered to possess at least good manners and compassion. Maidens seem not to be eligible for this position by choice but by some magickal means – their birth, upbringing, inherent qualities, a special prophecy made about them or the like. The symbolic colours that are usually associated with the Maiden (1989, p. 26), “derived from a number of textual sources, which comprise a familiar set of details corresponding to the aspects outlined (in figure 1.1)” are usually white and/or red, sometimes black as well.

The Mother aspect of the Goddess is complex. She represents the ruling Goddess though she may test and challenge the male members of her husband’s (the king’s) court throughout his reign if she finds that they are not embodying their proper roles within the story. In the tale of *Geraint son of Erbin*, taken from the *Mabinogion*, and the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century poem, we find a triple-imposition of three other fairy tales: *Geraint son of Erbin* (BBC.co.uk 2014), Chrétien de Troye’s *Eric and Enid* (c. 1170 in Comfort WWC (trans.) 1999) and the traditional *Sons of Daire*. In this tale, the mother aspect of the Goddess features thrice, and, in every manifestation, she tests the hero on a different level. A summary of this story from *The Mabinogion* (Guest (trans.) 1838–1849, pp. 67–177) will elucidate her function:

“The tale ...is a love story between Geraint and Enid...the pair marry and settle down, but rumours spread that Geraint has lost his fighting edge. Beset by sorrow, Enid cries that she is not a true wife for keeping her husband from his chivalric duties. Geraint misunderstands her comments, thinking she means she has committed adultery. He takes her on a long and dangerous trip, forbidding her from speaking to him. However, several times she warns her husband of danger. In the adventures that follow, Enid proves her love and Geraint asserts his fighting ability. The couple is happily reconciled in the end, with Geraint taking control over his father’s kingdom.”

In *Geraint son of Erbin* the Mother aspect of Sovereignty is represented by three separate women: Enid, Gwenhwyfar and the Orchard Woman. Enid is Sovereignty’s representative because of her symbolic role as Gwenhwyfar’s replacement, the Maiden for whom Geraint wins the “Joust of the Sparrowhawk” when he first sets out to avenge his queen; she also plays

the role of the patient, insistent consort of this immature knight as he struggles to prove his strength to her after their marriage. The Mother's role up to this point has been to maintain the king's place on his throne and to make sure that he remains worthy of his title. Gwenhwyfar is championed successfully by Geraint and he successfully avenges her and wins the hand of Enid.

Geraint successfully completes the first journey, marrying a representative of Sovereignty (Enid) and becoming a ruler of his own portion of land; sadly, he is still immature. For this reason, his test must begin again and his wife, who is almost in the role of Mother, must move into another role. In this part of the story her appearance and health physically deteriorate as she struggles to continue showing support to a mean and immature husband. She takes on the role of the "Dark Woman of Knowledge" – the black maiden. On their perilous journey, in which Geraint continually puts them both in danger, he is defeated due to his recklessness by a knight who wants to obtain Enid. Enid's cries for help wake Geraint from death and he kills his opponent, realizing with a shock the results of his immaturity. He begs Enid's forgiveness for his role in her deterioration and he is reconciled with her, taking up his new life as a more mature king who respects his queen.

The last aspect of the Sovereign Mother shown in this tale is that of the Orchard Woman, who tests Geraint when he participates in the "Enchanted Games", the "Joy of the Court". After having gained his maturity through his journey with Enid, Geraint enters the games (which symbolise an Otherworldly journey) and he sits daringly on the "Siege Perilous" (the golden chair of Sovereignty beside the Orchard Woman in which none but the worthy king may sit). This is symbolic of his submission to love, which had already successfully gained him his first two transformations. When he is challenged by the Orchard Woman's champion, he defeats him and dispels the magick mist, ending the Enchanted Games and bringing joy to the court. In this sense the Orchard Woman had been acting as custodian of the Otherworldly throne, challenging the protagonist on a deeper level to overcome his insecurities. Having featured as champion of all three of the representatives of Sovereignty in this story, Geraint steps into his rightful place as lord of his own lands. Enid, as Sovereignty's representative, as well as Gwenhwyfar and the Orchard woman, prove his suitability for this position on a worldly, as well as otherworldly level. Geraint had won the "Games of Sovereignty" twice – once by

winning the “Joust of the Sparrowhawk” (to obtain Enid’s hand) and again by defeating the guardian of the Orchard Woman in the Enchanted Games. Had Enid not set him on his perilous journey after their marriage, he might have made a rather ineffective king. Watching him, nurturing him and forcing him to improve himself are the three women who take on the position of the Motherly Goddess in the story; they are each in a position of royalty though neither of them is literally a mother. They represent the phase in a woman’s life after she is married during which she may become a mother.

In the Celtic tradition mothers were especially venerated; their word was often considered prophetic and their curse detrimental. This differs greatly from patriarchally orientated Greek texts. Another aspect of the Mother aspect of Sovereignty is that of the stepmother, who usually asserts itself in opposition to the Maiden, testing her in a similar way to the male protagonist. The ‘evil’ stepmother is a popular fairy tale character who is often set up as the antagonist primarily because of her proclivity to put the protagonists (male and female) in danger. This is not because she is inherently evil, but because her actions are supposed to set in motion the events of their respective stories. The stepmother is often described as rivalling the good mother or the Maiden in terms of beauty. However, her personality is not suited to the position of ruler. She is often described as being jealous or vengeful, character traits which are not befitting a vassal of Sovereignty. She often manipulates the king and tries to intimidate the Maiden while she is still young. All this grooms the Maiden for her entry into the wider world, for which she is not ready. The action of fairy tales often starts therefore at the point when the Maiden comes of age and she can start to challenge the power of the stepmother.

The stepmother is usually openly described as a witch in fairy tales because of her seemingly evil character. She can usually turn into a witch without effort. This reminds us of the transformation which Lady Melisandre undergoes when she removes her necklace. However, her actions cannot be equated with the actions of evil stepmothers, disqualifying her for this role. Looking at *Game of Thrones*’ representative of Sovereignty, Daenerys, Melisandre appears in more of a Motherly, “Dark Woman of Knowledge” aspect. Queen Cersei, on the one hand, acts as an evil stepmother to Aya and Sansa Stark as well as to Margaery Tyrell, all of whom did not even manage to challenge her power directly before they are either killed or forced to flee (Margaery burns in the fire which killed the High Sparrow and his men and Sansa

and Aya successfully escape King's Landing at different intervals). When the time comes, Cersei also challenges Daenerys Targaryen. This is characteristic of the evil stepmother's role: she jealously protects her own interests and targets all the women around her who might challenge her power. The successful defeat of Cersei, who is not the true representative of Westeros, is the chosen Maiden's main purpose within the series (that is, considered within the context of an understanding of their role from a Sovereign perspective). The stereotype of witches which most closely correlates with that of the Mother and stepmother aspect is that of a (usually widowed) mature woman possessing some level of efficacy and knowledge in her society; this could apply to midwives and teachers, but also to wealthy women who use their sexuality and their economic position to obtain good marriage partners. Medieval women who weren't married, but who were of the proper age for marrying or who had been widowed, posed a threat to the married population (as the *Hammer of Witches* explains) because they threatened to overthrow the social order. The aspect of the Mother was therefore a common stereotype associated with witches in the Middle Ages.

The Crone is the aspect of the Triune Goddess which has perhaps most often been associated with witches. The association of the witch with old, decrepit, wise women worked so easily in the rest of Europe because this hag-like aspect of women seemed most appealing to those who were categorizing them as servants of the devil. Death comes after old age and there is something dark and mysterious about this phase of a woman's life, especially seeing as women tend to live to an older age than men. As Levack (1996, p. 17–20) states in his work on witches, many widows of a ripe old age who were destitute would have been desperate enough to make pacts with the devil. The image of the Crone was also most readily adopted by elderly women in Europe because of their status as 'wise' women. And so this aspect of the Goddess was the most immediate and fearsome witch stereotype in the Medieval era, especially because she is the most unattractive of the three aspects of the Goddess. What is interesting is that the Crone, however, is often more helpful than harmful. In *Vasalisa*, a Russian fairy tale from the Middle Ages, we find a stepmother acting out of jealousy and rage who sends the Maiden out into the woods to Baba-Yaga. Instead of eating her, as the stepmother had hoped, the Baba-Yaga arms her with magickal fire and sends her home to scorch her stepmother and stepsister to death.



The Baba-Yaga, who seems to outwardly resemble the stereotype of the Crone, is not the evil character in Vasalisa's story. Similarly, Martin's Maggy the Frog in *Game of Thrones* is also only deemed evil after her darkly prophetic words to the young Cersei come true, though she had warned the young Lannister princess not to bother her and had prophecied those words under protest. In *Geraint son of Erbin*, the hag aspect of Enid (which refers to her deteriorated state) is helpful because it reminds the knight of his own shortcomings and of his part in her deterioration. In the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* (Lit2Go 1917, *Sleeping Beauty*) we see the Crone taking on the shape of an 'old fairy', Maleficent. This old fairy prophecies the princess' doom on her sixteenth birthday. Aurora, Sleeping Beauty, the Maiden aspect of Sovereignty, is put to sleep in order that she may overcome her inner darkness. Once again this reveals the function of the Crone aspect of Sovereignty, which is to nudge the male or female protagonist in the right direction and to arm them to overcome the evils in their lives. Estés (2008, p. 264) contextualizes the events of the female protagonists' descent into their own darkness: The development of knowing...begins with suffering. This progresses from first being unaware, then tricked in one way or another, and thence finding one's way to power again, and more so, to depth. The theme of a fateful catching that tests consciousness and ends in a deep knowing is a timeless one in fairy tales with female protagonists. Such tales carry dense instruction...about what our work is if and when we are captured, and how to come back from it with the ability *pasar através del bosque como una loba*, to slip through the forest like a wolf, *con un ojo agudo*, with a shrewd eye."

It is this Crone aspect of the Goddess which tricks, pushes, endangers and otherwise creates the unbearable circumstances which lead to the Maiden's awakening. In this sense she is often described as a terrifying character because she must be feared; if she were not terrifying enough to be taken seriously, then none of the action in fairy tales would take place. She takes the shot for the sake of the development of the plot. Estés concurs with the functionality of the female characters in fairy tales and in myth. Though it is often evident that the old fairy, the evil one, acts out of vengeance and vehemence, her doing so enables the princess to undergo a necessary transformation into becoming worthy of Sovereignty's title. She is therefore malevolent, but she brings about the princess's transformation. The Baba-Yaga in *Vasalisa* trains Vasalisa to become more than what she was; she strengthens her in order that she may overcome her circumstances (the Crone aspect usually does this for male protagonists as well). For the

princess/prince to prevail, they must overcome their own darkness; a symbolic death is required, a passing through the abyss of the subconscious followed by a resurrection into their new power, as in the case of Geraint, who must conquer the throne of his inner country as well as that of the outer world.

Lady Melisandre, in HBO's *Game of Thrones*, undoubtedly attempts to guide this kind of transformation in the lives of the chosen princes and princesses of Westeros, which makes her a very apt presentation of the Crone aspect – one which is visually uncovered when she removes her enchanted jewellery to reveal her age. What is notable is the fact that she does not focus on the lives of women who are not apt Sovereign Maidens. She does not interfere with the lives of the Starks nor does she interest herself with the Lannisters. She does, however, interfere with Daenerys Targaryen when the time is right. If one considers these actions to be prophetic, then that signifies Daenerys' suitedness to the throne of Westeros. Melisandre even raises from the dead (the symbolic journey) the knight who is to champion Daenerys, namely Jon Snow. After a successful victory on the inner plane he is set up for his victory in the outer realm, where Daenerys is being prepared for her role in that victory as well. Martin's series seems to follow the recipe of the portrayal of the Sovereign roles of women as they were interpreted by Matthews in the context of the stories in the *Mabinogion* (Guest (trans.) in Rhys 1913). For this reason, Matthews's analysis is an apt tool for the interpretation of the roles of the female characters in Martin's series.



airy tales understood in the light of their function (as educational tools) imply that women are powerful and complex, officiating over the lives of men in a way that threatens religious and political authority. All the elements of Medieval society which threatened the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in the Medieval era were dealt with simultaneously during the witch hunts. Paganism, along with heresy, was demonised as was the Triune Goddess, who became a metaphoric association for condemned women. De Beauvoir writes (1997, pp. 171–229): that “In most popular representations Death is a woman, and it is for women to bewail the dead because death is their work...the Woman-Mother has a face of shadows: she is the chaos whence all have come and whither all must one day return; she is Nothingness....if germination is always

associated with death, so is death with fecundity. Hated death appears as a new birth, and then it becomes blessed. The dead hero is resurrected...each spring, and he is regenerated by a new birth.” Ancient societies recognized that time was circular and that life was cyclic, requiring constant death and rebirth; this is why the Celts and other matriarchal societies which predated Christianity, worshipped women for the reasons De Beauvoir poses – femininity was associated with the Goddess, with the source of life and with her natural cycles. The dark, cold earth was associated with woman (consider the symbolic associations between woman and darkness from the Kabbalah); the Crone or hag officiated over death, weeping over the dead as Isis over Osiris in early Egyptian lore (c.46–125 AD, p. 44), protecting the mysteries of the soul. Spring and rebirth were associated with woman as the Maiden who overcomes the darkness every year. Fecundity, prosperity and the blessing of the harvest were associated with woman too as the Mother of all beings (c.46–125 AD, p. 45). The roles of the Maiden, the Mother and Crone articulate not only a cyclic life view but also help to define the different phases in the development of individuals’ lives. In *Game of Thrones* Lady Melisandre officiates over the lives of Stannis Baratheon and John Snow in the same way, putting on the different masks of Sovereignty, which are after all interchangeable, to push these heroes towards their maturation.

This chapter has traced the witch’s textual appearance during the Middle Ages and from before then by looking at stories from the ‘matter of Britain’ like *Geraint and Enid* (BBC.co.uk 2014), which were collected into the Welsh canon of folklore texts, the *Mabinogion* (Rhys 1913). The three (or four) stereotypical portrayals of the female ‘Sovereignty’ of Britain were illustrated and were applied to characters from HBO’s *Game of Thrones* for the purpose of elucidation of their application to modern texts. Many of the stereotypical portrayals of witches in modern film can be traced back to an association with the three phases in the life of a woman (youth, maturity and old age), the personification of which hails back to texts containing the manifestations of the Sovereignty of Britain. Caitlín Matthews (1989) explores the relationship between Britain’s kings and Sovereignty and, in this process, she describes the functions of every aspect of the portrayal of this deity. What remains to be done is to illustrate also how these aspects of the Goddess have merged with ideas of the abject and monstrous feminine to create current witch stereotypes in film, such as the Red Priestess from HBO’s series, which is a conflation of the stereotypes of Sovereignty with these notions of abjection and monstrosity.

Melisandre, as a filmic witch who inhabits the three different roles of Sovereignty: Maiden, Mother and Crone is a multi-faceted witch-priestess who subverts well-known tropes by embodying them, combining them and then transforming them into a new type of witch altogether – one who is above the rule of the law and who brings together beliefs about witches from all the different ages. It is important to remember when applying Matthews’s method of analysis of the roles of Sovereignty, that all the aspects of the Goddess focus on one set of rulers at a time: the protagonists of the main plot of the story, seeing as the chosen Sovereign Maiden usually represents the country (or dominion) on whose throne she will one day sit. Though there can be other queens and kings (in whose lives the Goddess might have had an influence leading up to their union and beyond), the roles of the Goddess are usually applied to one particular pair of protagonists at a time for the sake of clarity. In terms of *Game of Thrones* then, a single throne guides the analysis of Sovereignty’s roles. In this research, that throne is the throne of dominion over Westeros which is greater than all the others, namely: the throne at King’s Landing over which the evil stepmother form of the Goddess, in the person of Cersei Lannister, sits up to Season 7 in the series.

In relation to the throne of King’s Landing in *Game of Thrones*, the Red Priestess Melisandre can be considered to embody all three aspects of the Sovereign Goddess owing to her appearance as a sexually appealing Maiden – she appears young, she wears the colour red and has white skin with dark eyes representing the symbolic colours of Sovereignty, the Mother – who becomes the sexual consort of her chosen king when necessary as in the case of Stannis Baratheon as well as the Crone – she removes her necklace to return to her aged, hag-like appearance with a pointy nose and scanty hair. She fulfils the role of tester of kings and queens and she is instrumental in guiding their lives in the right direction. This is evident in her resurrection of Jon Snow, her orchestration of Stannis’s battles against Cersei and her appearance to the Sovereign Maiden of the series – Daenerys Targaryen – when it is time for her to take up arms against the scourge of Westeros, the white walkers. The following chapter will discuss the theories of Kristeva and Creed and will uncover the relation between the Monstrous Feminine, the Abject and the witches in the western world from the time of the early Middle Ages to the modern era.

## Chapter V: The Monstrous Feminine and Magick



The previous chapter explored the different stereotypes which witches inhabit and the origins of those stereotypes in fairy tales, the witch trials and earlier myths dating back to the Celtic era. As this chapter uncovered, neither the witches' gender nor their association with traditionally established female roles in European society was originally negative although the association of the female sex with witchcraft has endured into the post-modern era. The first and most well-known witch stereotypes (the triadic Maiden, Mother and Crone) hailed from sources such as mythologies and goddess-centred cults which predated Christianity in Western Europe. Yesterday's witch stereotypes, although they are still infused with much of the fear and taboo that became attached to them during the persecutions, have transformed into the monstrous tropes that populate horror films while at the same time adopting new, appealing characteristics which seem to undermine their heretical heritage. This chapter discusses how the triadic stereotypes of the Western European witch have altered in the current era due to developments in the realms of politics, cultural theory and the media. Modern film theory will highlight the filmic witch's characteristics while Kristeva's theory of the *Monstrous Feminine* will shed light on the continued association of the monstrous witch with the female sex.

Modern film theory has identified the figure of the Monstrous Feminine as an embodiment of patriarchal values inscribed onto the passive bodies of on-screen females to promote and influence certain gendered identities related to women. Mulvey writes (1999, p. 834) that:

Cinema has changed over the last few decades. It is no longer the monolithic system based on large capital investment exemplified at its best by Hollywood in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's. Technological advances (16mm, etc.) have changed the economic conditions of cinematic production, which can now be artisanal as well as capitalist... Hollywood...always restricted itself to a formal mise-en-scène reflecting the dominant ideological concept of the cinema. The alternative cinema provides a space for a cinema to be born which is radical in both a political and an aesthetic sense and challenges the basic assumptions of the mainstream film. This is not to reject the latter moralistically, but to highlight the ways in which its formal preoccupations reflect the psychical

obsessions of the society which produced it, and, further, to stress that the alternative cinema must start specifically by reacting against these obsessions and assumptions. A politically and aesthetically avant-garde cinema is now possible, but it can still only exist as a counterpoint. The magick of the Hollywood style at its best...arose...from its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure. Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order.

Mulvey (1999, p. 843) explains that in the dual “pleasure and unpleasure offered by traditional narrative film” the dual purpose of the ‘gaze’ functions to produce scopophilic instinct – “the pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object” – and ego libido “forming identification processes.” On the one hand, the scopophilic gaze objectifies “other people as objects”, in this case the passive/female characters in the visual text, by “subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (1999, p. 835–6) which satisfies their “primordial wish for pleasurable looking”. The viewer in this sense is interjected into the private space of the female object, while at the same time experiencing the “illusion of voyeuristic separation” due to the fact that the object is displayed fragmentarily (by camera shots of parts of her body). On the other hand, the function of the ‘gaze’ is to satisfy the viewers’ need to temporarily ‘lose’ their sense of ego (while at the same time experiencing its reinforcement) by virtue of their recognition of the active/male characters in the film as an articulation of themselves, similar to the process which occurs during Lacan’s (in Johnston (ed.) 2018, *The Mirror Stage, the Ego, and the Subject*) mirror phase, where the initial “love affair/despair between image and self-image” is born (836), the language of which is images.

The trouble with the female character, Mulvey (1999, p. 840) tells us, and the reason she is both a ‘sexual object’ who satisfies the primordial erotic phantasies of man and a source of contention, is the fact that the same “paradox of phallogentrism” which makes of her an object of voyeuristic eroticism also awakens in the male viewer the “threat” posed by “her real absence of a penis” – “the castration complex (is) essential for the organisation of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father”. Woman can only play a central role in the pleasurable act of looking, if indeed she were an object of contention that both excites and alarms the man for whom she becomes a determining object outside of himself. It is this unspoken ‘desire’ that drives audiences to watch films. This offers a direct reply to the question

of why women are more often cast as witches than men: the witch as stereotype is both alluring and terrifying. And yet, although post-modern feminists speak out against the chauvinistic treatment of stock female characters in film by the male protagonists, women today embrace this stereotype instead of rejecting it as they would the well-known Bond-girls or Charlie's Angels (Deb 2019). Perhaps this is because the physically alluring, rebellious young woman who uses her magick to protect the innocent (like the three sisters in *Charmed*, 1998–2006) is appealing to women even more than to men because it both offers an alternative role to that of obedience (towards patriarchal law) as well as empowering her with a forbidden and mysterious strength that functions outside of the norms of society.

Needless to say, the figure of the witch has been allowed to endure into post-modern times not only by permission of her male authors, producers and filmmakers (Pierce 2016), but also by her female fans and followers. Biddick's analysis of the language mechanisms used within the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1995, p. 27) reveals that the authors 'create' an "Inquisitorial cartography in which the Inquisitor himself eats the first-person of the located narrative in order to set himself in this place", producing thereby "the Inquisitor as the guarantee of a mapping exercise that defies meaning" by which he can declare truth and evidence as he pleases. The authors (1995, p. 29) 'use' the devil as "an optical device that makes the Inquisitor's counter-economy visible and therefore something that can be *counted as evidence*", which "enables the Inquisitor to gaze at and see, make legible an invisible world of the ethnos he is conjuring", the use of this device "offering a special kind of insight" into the witch's actions. This 'optical device' is almost like the producer's camera – functioning as a tool to hide and reveal details of the producer's/author's choosing. Biddick (1995, p. 31) thus brings attention to the fact that what is revealed in a text (just like in a film) is just as important as what is left out. For example, during the creation of the *Hammer* text, the traditional 'Others' or outsiders of the sanctified Christian congregation were considered to be the Jews, the likes of whom were both "dropping out of sight in the fifteenth century" as well as "becoming more visible as a group ordered under sumptuary law to mark themselves with signs such as yellow badges". They were systematically being expelled from European countries, such as England, in 1290, France in 1306, the Rhineland in the 1420s and 30s as well as Spain in 1492, with the result that the Inquisitors needed another iconic 'other' against whom to determine their own identity.

What Biddick (1995, p. 31) calls “Anti-Semitic tropes of the exterior”, namely “usury and its sterility” according to Catholic doctrine, “could be shifted and at the same time doubled by the engendering of witches as a corporeal exteriority”; witches’ ability to participate in the act of ‘transporting semen’ was a functional replacement for the ‘sterile practice’ of usury practised by the Jews. This kind of “shifting of exteriorities” takes place in the mechanism employed by Kramer and Sprenger in the writing of their treatise, in the same way that film texts are embedded with meaning as newly inscribed ways of seeing; in Biddick’s (1995, p. 23) words this is “a re-articulation of the ‘sign’ in which cultural identities may be inscribed”. Using perspective (the gaze), the creators of texts can mechanize antagonists and protagonists to engender moralistic views, challenge them or redefine them as they see fit, based on their authority as omniscient creators (the devil in the case of the ‘Malleus’ and the filmmaker in the case of the film/series). And, as we have just read, the favourite objects of observation are the alluring/arousing females that tempt and challenge the ego by their very presence within the text or on the screen.

It makes sense that women, as the favourite visual currency within texts, would be continually cast in alluring roles to ramp up the appeal of those texts. For this reason, the feats of mysterious and alluring witch-like women in texts were often embellished to increase their popularity and readability (or watchability). All three of the premises for witch persecution, the demonic pact, attendance of the witch’s sabbath and the ability to fly on a broom, were implicitly female activities with sexual and/or orgiastic undertones. Women’s bodies, their sexual perceived ‘nature’ as well as their associated daily activities within the social sphere became linked to their implicit guilt in this manner. Biddick (1995, p. 29) tells us that so terrified were the Inquisitors of witches’ ability to exercise “power...against the God-ordained procreative economy” that they took pains to argue that incubi, though they are known for their “lusting after women” according to the Bible, are not subject to the vices of nature, meaning that it is witches whose guilt was implied in the act of copulation with them. According to said Inquisitors, women’s sexuality, the nature of their sexual difference, lay in their ‘nature’ and was the root of their proclivity to act against the rule of God/man (reason and order). The incubi, then, were innocent in the act of copulating with witches and not the other way around. This is why female witches were often described in trial texts as sexually alluring ‘temptresses’; consider Melisandre’s sexually alluring appearance when she finds herself in a social context.



Another aspect of the witch trials which has endured into modern film is the witch's pact with the devil. This pact was of course implicitly sexual and usually required a forbidden 'kiss' in a sultry place on the body. The intrusive nature of many witch trials, along with their associated torture sessions to extract evidence and the resulting public shaming of persecuted individuals, is evidence of the perceived justification of the exposure of the female body to the public gaze, which is similar to the way in which the female form is displayed on screen in many 'objectifying' horror films.

Women's association with the role of the witch goes deeper than mere visual and erotic pleasure. Her association with magick, as De Beauvoir tells us (1997, p. 196) is tied to her gender in a more intimate way. Her fearfully alluring body, in combination with her weaker, more susceptible nature, makes for a perfect embodiment of the abject. De Beauvoir explains "men have always regarded woman as the immanence of what is given; if she produces harvests and children, it is not by an act of her will; she is not subject, transcendence, creative power, but an object charged with fluids...in (the) societies where man worships these mysteries, woman, on account of these powers, is associated with religion and venerated as priestess; but when man struggles to make society triumph over nature, reason over life, and the will over the inert given nature of things, then woman is regarded as sorceress. Melisandre's powers and zealotry might be read in the light of them being a mere manifestation of the powers of her beloved Lord of Light. Her audience might wonder as to whether she is not just a mere "immanence of what is given", in De Beauvoir's terms. Kristeva (1982, p. 4) tells us that 'abjection' is "that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules", that which "disturbs identity, system and order". She looks at psychoanalysis and literature and attempts to discover how abjection functions within societies, separating that which is inhuman from the human and that which is the partially formed subject from the fully constituted subject, positing ritual as the means by which the lines between these demarcations are established and which allows these societies to both make contact with and exclude the abject in order to enforce those demarcations.

The witch herself is the abject, the subject who represents the impossible come to life and who, by her very existence, represents the presence of a 'sublimating discourse' which is 'mystical' and 'witchy' (Creed 1993, p. 10). The 'abject' (Kristeva 1982, p. 1) lies within the "violent,

dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable”, that which “cannot be assimilated”. Just like the ‘object’, it is in opposition to the subject, the ‘I’, that which attempts to ‘extricate itself’ by avoiding the very border that the abject represents (1982, p. 3). It is the function of the abject to unceasingly “challenge its master...beseech(ing) a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out. To each ego its object, to each superego its abject”. The superego, as that part of an individual’s mind that acts as a self-critical conscience, reminds us in this case of would-be king, Stannis Baratheon. He observes from an exalted position the actions of Melisandre who is a personification of the abject elements of society; she does what needs doing, sentencing to death those who oppose or whose deaths would engender Stannis’s (or the Lord of Light’s) rule. Her beautiful appearance also allows her to be objectified by her chosen ‘ego’-relation (the king of her/her Lord’s choice), which means that Melisandre is constantly performing or provoking the ‘dirty’ deeds which are attributed to the abject.

This visual representation of the individual’s reaction towards the abject aspects of himself/herself is vivid and upsetting and accounts for the reactions of viewers of horror films during the screening of such films and filmic series. Kristeva (1982, p. 58–59) also tells us that women in the Western Europe of the Middle Ages were commonly associated with the more taboo of the seven deadly sins (which include envy, gluttony, greed or avarice, lust, pride, sloth and wrath), namely: envy, lust and pride. Women’s beauty was associated with their pride and an innate ability to beguile and fool man (qualities possessed by the greatest beguiler of all time – the devil himself). The Medieval mind saw woman as a tool to be used by Satan. After all, he had orchestrated the fall of man using the weaker-willed woman. Therefore, it was woman who was central to the social anomaly of the witch trials because her mysterious and monstrous nature both invited invasion and threatened it, dancing with the devil while attracting weaker men into her trap (pun intended). For example, Melisandre seduces Stannis into sleeping with her to birth a demonic force that can carry out her (the Lord of Light’s) will; she also convinces him to burn his daughter as a sacrifice, proving that she is both seductive and dangerous (Roge 2017, p. 11). Of course the immediate threat of magick also added to the witch’s façade and whatever knowledge of occult sciences women may have possessed prior to the trials in Europe quickly became associated with the more lurid forms of witchcraft (take Melisandre’s ability to resurrect the dead as an example of the extent of her occult knowledge).

Most modern-day films that portray witchcraft contain some reference to evil, necromancy, sorcery or straightforward demon worship. Dominic Sena's *Season of the Witch* suggests outright that the devil himself was behind the persecution of some witches when, after a condemned witch is delivered to a remote abbey where her powers (she is accused of bringing about the Black Plague) are to be destroyed, she is shown to be an innocent girl who is in fact possessed by a demon. A more recent film, *The Witch*, which plays off in modern-day England, contains outright necromancy and the bodily possession of humans for an individual to become all-powerful. *The Witch* displays the interesting social dynamics which existed in very religiously oppressive communities which considered anything unusual to be a threat. In this film, the eldest daughter of a radical religious family ends up calling upon the devil – or 'black phillip'. Desperate after the destruction of her entire family, this girl realizes that she will be blamed for her family's deaths (her mother had been suspecting her from the outset because of her superior beauty and kindly nature); she relinquishes all hope of being given a fair trial and beseeches the devil to save her. As Jex Blackmore, the spokesperson for the Satanic Temple, says (Pierce 2016, '\*The Witch\*'s 'Satanic Uprising)'), "While the patriarchy makes witches of only the most socially vulnerable members of society, Eggers' film refuses to construct a victim narrative. Instead it features a declaration of feminine independence."

Melisandre is an example of this; she seems to be able to detach herself from a political leader if and when she chooses (the extent to which her choices are solely religiously motivated remains to be explored, though she is not shown to be under the control of some external authority, as in the case of priests/priestesses belonging to an organized religion today). Blackmore warns that "on one hand... (it is) wrong to reclaim anything witch-related" because, "witch wasn't really created by anyone besides the dominant power structure at the same time...stories like *The Witch* need to be told to question idealized notions of the values of early America." (ibid.) Thomasin, (*The Witch* 2015), chooses the path herself. As Pierce (2016, 'The Evolving Concept of the Witch') tells us, "Thomasin isn't suspected of being a witch because she rides a broom or wears a pointy hat, she (is) suspected of being one because her family's farm is unproductive and its believed some curse of her burgeoning womanhood is to blame." Without trying to push a feminist agenda, Eggers manages to portray the important shift from object to subject which many modern witches claim has given them new-found authority.

Women's ability to plead, to subvert and to beguile certainly contributes towards their textual and filmic personas. Even the most harmless forms of magick, the study of herblore and medicine for example, became tainted when these practices became attributed to women in the Middle Ages. This is because woman's inherently 'abject' nature seemed to imply an evil intent. Like the terrifying Medusa who turns her assailants to stone, many witches were portrayed as acting out of malice; it was her appearance and not her actions (or even the motivations behind them) that elicited a response from authorities first. Dark forms of magick were automatically ascribed to Medieval witches. More recent portrayals of witches have attempted to challenge this association in favour of the investigation of the individual's motives (which can be attributed to the development of laws that govern the rights of human beings as free and autonomous individuals). Thomasin from *The Witch* is an example of this. Modern witches are evil because they chose to be. It is their right. The polarized portrayal of good and evil witches bares testimony to the fact that witches' evil nature became separated from her gender with the advent of equal rights for males and females in the West. Witches in the post-modern era are self-elected, making them all the more 'deviant' and evil in terms of their opposition to ruling authorities, precisely because of their autonomy.



Barbara Creed, in the *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* elaborates on Kristeva's observations/theories by discussing how the "monstrous in...modern horror [is] grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection – particularly in relation to the following religious 'abominations': sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest". "These forms of abjection", she tells us, "are...central to the construction of the monstrous in the modern horror film" (1993, p. 9). References to witches as "she who cavorts with the devil" are merely one way of identifying her as the author of chaos, the enemy of all that is orderly, safe, whole and healthy, in other words, all that is symbolically tied up in the being of the male. A dichotomous understanding of life vs death, good vs evil, light vs dark and all that is positive pitted against all that is negative was symbolically tied up in the relationship between male and female in the Medieval mind. Feminist texts like J. S. Knight's *Feminist mysticism and images of God* (2011) and the profusion of formerly suppressed literature which advocates the duality

of God, as Father and Mother, originating from long before the Middle Ages have contested this dichotomy, with little success.

The Medieval understanding of the nature of the stereotypical 'Father God' and 'fallen Eve' remain (Christianity has changed considerably over the past 400 years, but with little development in terms of its gendered roles based in Biblical dogma), though associations with these and other religious roles have shifted with the influx of gender confusion in the West. God, who was considered the author of life, light and good, was masculine and the very essence of his 'godliness' was tied up in the notion of his gender. The Virgin Mary was redeemed by her virtuous virgin conception, but mostly all other women were the spawn of the fallen Eve who had led Adam into temptation and damned humanity. Julia Kristeva (1982, p. 93) points out that, in the last few years of the 1st century A.D., impurity became a 'metaphor for idolatry, sexuality, and immorality' and, in the Middle Ages, these three qualities became interwoven with the image of the witch, allowing her to be branded as a heretical sinner. Kristeva (1982, p. 93) also tells us that the abject has "a weight of meaninglessness", that it straddles "the edge of non-existence and hallucination", like Biddick's (1995, p. 25) notion that the demonic pact, as a 'requisite' in binary opposition to sacramental marriage, becomes the "vanishing point" beyond which "witches recede from infidels (f. 36v), bad angels (f. 36r) and the first parents (f. 36r)...beyond the Others ("Jews" and "Turks") of *Christianitas* (f. 36v)...beyond any heavenly topography, and beyond salvation history".

Just like the witch, who is an apostate, the abject looms ominously, representing an 'invisible', yet perceived threat, which terrifies not only because it approaches from the outside, but also because its vestiges dwell uncannily within. Abjection in the context of this dissertation may be described not as the witch herself, or the impurity or disorderliness of her actions, but as the 'wanting' after her, the yearning after the forbidden, on which "any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (1982, p. 5), which results in her punishment and suppression. Kristeva (1982, p. 5) tells us that "one always passes too quickly over this word, 'want,' and today psychoanalysts are finally taking into account its more or less fetishized product, the "object of want." But if one imagines (and imagine one must, for it is the working of imagination whose foundations are being laid here) the experience of *want* itself as logically preliminary to being

and object – to the being of the object – then one understands that abjection, and even more so abjection of self, is its only signified. Its signifier, then, is none other but literature”.

Mulvey (1999, p. 840) similarly notes that “the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it (castration anxiety) originally signified”, which is “the re-enactment of the original trauma...or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish”. In the case of Western Europe, it was women, most notably those who presumably failed to follow prescribed religious patterns of behaviour, who became the fetish of Christian society. The ‘screen’ of Mulvey’s analysis can here be substituted by Biddick’s “anthropophagic frame” (1995, p. 26), a shared imaginary ‘engendered cartography’ created and maintained by Inquisitors in which their “anxieties about wandering semen, disappeared penises, dismembered crucifixes, body parts pierced by magickal archers, and cooked babies” (1995, p. 28) could be performed ad libitum by their chosen villains.

The written literature of Medieval texts and 21st-Century visual texts all display workings of the nature of abjection, albeit unknowingly. It is abjection which endears the witch to the Inquisitor, with whom he may not sympathize lest she ‘confuse(s)’ him (Biddick 1995, p. 24) and whom he simultaneously ‘metaphorically’ devours in order to “mark the abject and the unspeakable”, speaking thereafter through ‘theoretical abstraction’. This ‘abstraction’ is none other than an abject perspective, that is, the optical perspective of the devil himself (1995, p. 28), the referral to which must therefore be hidden and protected by that very same language which is then used to describe the devil and his demons as ‘heterosexual’, positing therefore that these ‘evils’ bare no threat to himself as they do to the female witch. The abject, as a ‘frontier’, becomes a “*land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered” because the subject can never cease attempting to ‘separate’ from it (1982, p. 8–9), placing him in “perpetual danger”.

What can be more dangerous than that which threatens precisely because it is known? From necessary bodily excretions to more abstract figures looming ominously in the background of dreams, symbols of the abject are the common, yet unspoken vestiges of suppressed thoughts

and behaviours; these vestiges drape themselves like garments upon the undefinable yet commonplace figure of the witch, whose power comes not directly from these things but instead from her ability to absorb them: the places, names, powers and fears engendering 'spaces', 'frames', 'stereotypes' and 'objects' associated with her. Her ability to come across as nothing more than a work-a-day woman, a lowly female, makes the witch then so much more treacherous, owing to the fact that such simple feminine features as a crooked nose or mole became assimilated into the 'witchy' stereotype by these craftsmen of language, the Inquisitors, who saw in woman the projection of their own dichotomous use of language and power.

Locked up in woman's nature was all that opposed goodness and 'holiness' and, in the Medieval mind, this posed a constant threat to society. Women who did not live a decidedly holy life by following church doctrine were at risk of being used by the enemy to bring about man's downfall. At all times and in all places, good and evil were waging war over human souls. It seemed logical that the weaker sex, the more manipulative and susceptible gender, would fall prey to the Devil. The scarier part was that the Devil could then employ her to impregnate the male with evil, doubts and fears, especially if the male loved the female and was prone to give in to her will, like poor Adam. A warning was issued to Inquisitors and witch hunters for this very reason: that they should show alleged witches no mercy, should look for no 'humanity' in their eyes, because they would try to use any and all possible means to manipulate men into pardoning them. This fearful warning brings home the sombre realization that even the innocent women were dealt with cruelly during torture, pleas for help and honest cries for mercy were ignored and utter brutality could rule. Such cruelty and inhumanity were exhibited during the trials that it can be considered a fact that Inquisitors and witch hunters honestly believed they were dealing with something much more frightening and abject than mere human transgressors. This brings us yet again to the realization that Medieval women were deemed slightly monstrous in nature, a little more aberrant than their enlightened counterparts, men.

It was a common belief in the Middle Ages, for example, that women's wombs were cold and needed to be heated by hot, male sperm for them to survive suffocation (Mortimer 2009, p. 55). Women in the Middle Ages could more easily be used as whores and needed constant sexual

satiation lest the seed in their cold wombs suffocate them. Sexual intercourse with women and even their rape was therefore considered curative, making it socially acceptable. Women were intricately related to all “polluting objects which fall into two categories: excremental and menstrual” which, as Kristeva (1982, p. 70) tells us, “gives woman a special relationship to the abject”. Moreover, it was her task and unfortunate place to mourn the dead whom she had lost, the husbands and sons who had gone off to the Crusades, making her the officiant over the souls of the dead, the representative of the inevitable approach of death and the return of the body to the soil of the earth. Not to mention that woman’s physical body was a symbolic representative of the ‘archaic mother’, who mechanizes the decay of dead bodies after they are returned to the tomb of her dark womb.

Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Creed tells us, is “primarily concerned with the pre-Oedipal mother...who is responsible for the early socialization of the child” (1993, p. 26). In referring to mythological narratives, Creed posits that the archaic mother figure, “the ‘Mother-Goddess’ who alone created the heavens and earth” is much more than simply an inherited deity from different ancient cultures, but also refers to a “matriarchal period in human history”. As Creed (1993, p. 25) explains, “the fertile female body is constructed as an ‘abject’ to keep the subject separate from the phantasmatic power of the mother, a power which threatens to obliterate the subject. An opposition is drawn between the impure fertile (female) body and the pure speech associated with the symbolic (male) body”. The trouble with this primordial mother figure is that she does not only represent that which is unstructured, fecund and ‘dirty’, but that she “is outside morality and the law” (ibid.) because her association with the earth and pagan matriarchal beliefs predates human civilization (Kristeva 1982, p. 17). The boundary which separates these symbolic demarcations is the only means by which a ‘clean and proper order’ can be maintained and she proposes to extend far beyond the boundaries in both space and time.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (1997, pp. 198) theorizes why women, throughout the ages, have been relegated to the realm of myth because of their association with dreams, fears and idols. She claims that “[h]istory has shown us...men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers...and thus ‘woman’ has been definitely established as the Other” (1997, p. 171). Man’s ability to “rise above the conflict” which inherently wants to posit anything outside



of the self as alien and other is, according to Creed, “man’s highest achievement” which would allow him to recognize woman as his equal. Instead of accomplishing this, man becomes like a negative monotheism to polytheism, a rationalizing force which must describe himself in terms of the other to possess a seemingly valid agency. De Beauvoir (1997, p. 195) posits that “in woman is incarnated in positive form the lack that the existent carries in his heart, and it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization”.

Man’s need for woman to exist causes ambivalence. She is ambiguous, Other and evil – the origin of the abject. She is a myth in herself which “cannot be grasped or encompassed...so various, so contradictory that at first its unity is not discerned: Delilah and Judith, Aspasia and Lucretia, Pandora and Athena – woman is at once Eve and the Virgin Mary. She is idol, a servant, a source of life, a power of darkness; she is the elemental silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip, and falsehood; she is healing presence and sorceress; she is man’s prey, his downfall, she is everything that he is not and that he longs for, his negation and his *raison d’être*”. It is precisely her changeability, her inability to be defined, grasped and possessed which makes her akin to Nature itself, cyclic and predictable like nature and yet unbearably wild. Woman’s nature is as untameable as nature itself, “now ally, now enemy, she appears as the dark chaos from whence life wells up, as this life itself, and as the over-yonder towards which life tends. Woman sums up nature as Mother, Wife and Idea; these forms now mingle and now conflict, and each of them wears a double visage.” (1997, p. 176). It must be terrible to imagine that there exists such a force which cannot be tamed by a religion, especially by “the most powerful religion of all” in Medieval Europe – Christianity. What terrible fear such thoughts could have conjured in Medieval man. Which is why, no doubt, without having acted upon this vicarious nature, woman was already a witch to the cleric, before she opened her mouth. Like Isis of the pagans, she is ‘fecund nature’, able to commune with the divine physically as her body undergoes changes which the One God alone engenders. Having such a strong vegetative presence, her experience of the spiritual must have seemed magnificent.

As in Jung tells us (Dawson & Young-Eisendrath (eds.) 1997, p. 263), not only is woman the dark waters of death, but she is also the destroyer, the one who regenerates and nourishes before giving birth to a resurrected king. This is what the Celtic ceremonies tried to re-enact with the slaying of the horse, whose blood nourishes the king, whose body feeds the people

and whose death brings new life to the land, but only after the king has sacrificed himself to her. Religious spheres which valued the experiences of the soul (one's vegetative being) venerated women and, after AD 869 her value was rationalized away by a dogmatic respelling of her associations with darkness and death (Black 2010, p. 343). Woman's association with the lunar cycle became dramatized in the imagined activities of demonic cult gatherings. De Beauvoir (1997, p. 175) describes the tension in man's desire for and repulsion towards women, "woman is at once...everything that he is not and that he longs for, his negation and his *raison d'être*", a theme which Kristeva and other film critics have elucidated: "woman is her husband's prey, his possession."

The male's hesitation between fear and desire, between the fear of being in the power of uncontrollable forces and the wish to win them over, is strikingly reflected in the myth of Virginité. Now feared by the male, now desired or even demanded, the virgin would seem to represent the most consummate form of the feminine mystery; she is therefore its most disturbing and at the same time its most fascinating aspect." (1997, p. 184). There can therefore be no doubt that women inhabit more than one stereotype at once: now the innocent virgin, now the terrifying witch, the damsel who turns into a medusa, turning her victims to stone in retribution. The witch, because of her varying and innumerable aspects, from shaman to healer to advisor and midwife, is none other than the active role of Nature in man's life – the cycles of Mother Nature incarnate. Though Medieval witch hunters and Inquisitors focused on her negative aspects, emphasizing her associations with darkness, death and evil, this is only one part of the cycle which her circular life pattern inhabits. Practitioners of white magick, healers and sophisticated seers for example were also widespread in Western European societies. In almost all cases, there were two sides to the witch's story, though the evil associations of her gender were enough to get her tried for witchcraft. Even in this 'aspect', taking on the role of the accused, the 'black maiden', the terrifying monstrous aspect of the feminine, woman tests the metal of man and attempts to reconnect him to his 'raised' and divine nature. The key to this role lies in an understanding of the association of the witch with all three aspects of the Sovereignty of Britain (who, by extension, represents a global and not a local goddess).

The law, the rigid, enforceable rule which attempts to control – though it can never fully encompass – human life, is an ‘arguably’ male construct which attempts to tame that which is wild, unstructured and essentially female. Before women could be called ‘witches’, they were already women. They represented the realm of abjection and all that is dangerous, threatening men by their very existence, and reminding them of a sordid, pagan past when they were even more powerful, as servants of the ancient Mother-Goddess. The three stages of Sovereignty, the Goddess’s life, Her Maidenhood, Motherhood and Cronehood, represented the very real phases in the earth’s life cycle – spring, harvest and winter. To control the forces of the female body was to control, at least on an intellectual level, the forces of Nature. Witches, especially those who depended on nature for their survival because of their economic circumstances, were even more intimately married to the Goddess than others and control over their lives seemed synonymous with gaining some form of control over the Earth, whether directly or implied. Creed (1993, p. 29) points out that Lacan argues “that the self, because it is constructed on an illusion, is always in danger of regressing”, a danger which is actively posed by the transformative symbolism of the female’s presence and all that she represents. Creed (1993, p. 29) then continues by exploring the “screen-spectator relationship”, detailing why the process of viewing elements of horror – abjection in its different forms – is both infatuating and repulsive, placing the viewer or the ‘self’ in a state of conflict:

Confronted by the sight of the monstrous, the viewing subject is put into crisis – boundaries, designed to keep the abject at bay, threaten to disintegrate, collapse. According to Lacan, the self is constituted in a process which he called the ‘mirror-phase’ in which the child perceives its own body as a unified whole in an image it receives from outside itself. Identity is an imaginary construct, formed in a state of alienation, grounded in misrecognition.

The witch is not the only ‘monstrous’ element in horror films. The same notions of abjection which construct her terrifying constitution, construct the other monsters in horror films. The form of the abject which is, in a biblical context, most utterly abject, is the corpse: the “soul-less body” in the form of the vampire, the ‘living corpse’ in the form of the zombie or the corpse-devouring ghoul, the soul-less robot or android. The witch was often accused of using corpses for her ritual or for slaying infants. The devouring of human flesh is also a particularly

popular form of abjection in horror forms, as is the collapse of the boundary between man and beast, in the form of were-wolves. Other abject beings who have become the representatives of that which challenges the boundaries of the unknown, include the alien and the psychopaths and liars who test the integrity and stability of human law. Martin's series includes several of the latter abject characters, from soul-less bodies (Kahl Drogo), living corpses (the 'white walkers'), to liars (the ruling families in the South) and witches (Mirri Maz Dur, all the red priestesses and the Forest Witch). It is in the mechanization of their roles opposite other characters that the 'integrity', stability and wholeness of the imaginary world and, by extension, that of the audience, are tested. Creed (1993, p. 28) tells us that this process of watching horror films, which can probably be equated with the process of witnessing the trials of witches or their burnings or hangings, allows the voyeur to come face to face with the abject, in order to reject it. Coming face to face with the abject then, is the only means of identifying oneself as integrated.

The Inquisitors, judges, priests and witch-hunters of the Middle Ages were not necessarily aware of the fact that they were affirming their own integrity and wholeness by sentencing an apparent evil to death. However, if their cause did not seem just, then why did so many go to such terrible lengths to not only punish witches, but those who would pardon them as well? Academics and scholars who contested the validity of the Trials were judged just as harshly as the witches, but there were those who were brave enough to persist. Were these individuals less afraid of the abject, or did they realize that the abject without resembles the even more terrifying abject which resides within all of humanity? This then is an important lesson which the all-forgiving, all-encompassing Mother alone can fully teach, seeing as she operates beyond the boundaries of despair and shame. The abject aspect of the Goddess-Mother is the Crone Witch, the ancient, knowledgeable-about-all-things archetype which is unapologetically cruel. In myths and fairy tales, her role is exclusively to test the hero, to threaten and challenge, so that wholeness and strength can triumph. In the end, goodness is expected to win over evil. However, without the existence of evil, good does not even recognize itself as such. The ancient peoples across the globe understood that, and they utilized it in its proper role, in the training of the 'self'. Jung (in Dawson & Young-Eisendrath 1997, p. 102) understood that the collective archetypes functioned in union with one another, in their distinct and varying roles, to form shards of one, unified personality in every individual. Without the 'trickster', the hero never

matures and vice versa. Without the crone, the hero never overcomes his deepest fears. The Roman Catholic Church could not know that, in trying to destroy the Crone within external society, they were giving the inner Crone free reign to mutilate their morality. Instead of hunting for the witch in the woods, the more productive hunt is in the inner woodland of the psyche, in the dark place all must embrace to find the light.

According to Creed (1993, p. 73), although earlier horror films mostly depicted women as victims (with castration anxiety, which points to females' a priori castration, strengthening this notion), more recent horror films have begun to re-evaluate her role in this context. Susan Lurie (1981, p. 2) argues against such theorists as Neale that "the notion of the castrated woman is a phantasy intended to ameliorate man's real fear of what woman might do to him" because women are "*not* castrated", but are instead whole, "intact and in possession of all her sexual powers" (1993, p. 6). Linda Williams (1984, p. 89) echoes this position and states that a woman's power lies in her 'power-in-difference' and that the affinity between woman and monsters – due to their "similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing" – presents her as 'fearful and threatening' because she poses a threat to male authority and not due to her sexuality per se. What this implies is that female spectators can identify with not only the women in films, but also with the monsters, seeing as she is similarly a 'biological freak' in relation to man. To this end, female viewers of film can adopt the persona of any type of monster in order to bolster her frightening façade, though Creed tells us, citing Gérard Lenne (1979, p. 35), that of the five 'faces' of the monstrous feminine which she examines (the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire and the possessed woman), the witch is "the only indisputably active role in the fantastic that is 'exclusively female'". All other female monsters, Lenne claims, are merely female counterparts of existing male monsters. The same cannot be said of monsters and witches originating in the East and in eastern lore and myth.

This chapter has served to elucidate how, despite woman's emancipation from patriarchal law, her association with the abject, archaic and monstrous is somehow still made by members of her own gender and others who write her into their texts and discourses for whatever purpose. Women's ability to own and subvert the witch's stereotypes will be scrutinized in order that post-modern filmic witches' true efficacy can come to light. The next chapter will explore post-modern portrayals of witches in the context of film. Special attention will be paid to Lady

Melisandre from HBO's *Game of Thrones* in order to discuss and analyse the different elements of her portrayal in terms of the theories of Creed and Kristeva with regard to earlier origins of the stereotypes of witches, as discussed in the fourth chapter of this research.

## Chapter VI: Witch Stereotypes Illustrated



As mentioned in the previous chapter, despite woman's emancipation from patriarchal law her association with the abject, archaic and monstrous has been a constant in films and texts which contain her witch-like stereotypes as one of the tropes in the horror genre. In the post-modern era, woman's proclivity to own and subvert these witch stereotypes is being questioned by social movements like feminism, resulting in research being done about the witch's efficacy as image of power and subversion. In this dissertation, for example, Lady Melisandre from HBO's *Game of Thrones* is analysed as an example of how the female witch is often portrayed in western media and of the power she resultantly wields. In this chapter, reference is made to several post-modern portrayals of witches in films and film series as well as to earlier sources which contain salient portrayals of this stereotype. In order to scrutinize the different elements of witches' portrayals in terms of the theories of Creed and Kristeva and with regard to earlier origins of these stereotypes as discussed in the fourth chapter, the different aspects of witches' textual portrayal are discussed and analysed. Firstly, mention needs to be made of some of the most prevalent aspects of Western witches' stereotypical 'image' as presented to the public from the Middle Ages to the present day.

Thuras (2014 *Sex, drugs & broomsticks*, para. 2) explains that the witch's broom, along with her notoriously suspect sexual conduct and horrifying appearance, was often the key element used to identify her with the forbidden craft of magick in the Middle Ages. The requisite demonic pact was implied and the broom, as vehicle of transportation to suspected orgies and witch gatherings, was the symbol most easily associated with witches' suspicious behaviour. It is rather easy to identify a connection between the rigid wooden vehicle and the phallus around which were centred so many patriarchal fears regarding female sexuality. Not to mention that the broom, as Thuras tells us, was usually placed between the witch's legs during flight. In fact, the application of hallucinatory ointments to the female sexual organs was possibly part of the known process through which flight was attained (an overtly sexual process, which undermines the witch's need for a male partner). Antoine Rose, the Witch of Savoy who was convicted in 1477, confessed, under torture, to achieving flight in this manner.

Thuras (2014, para. 10) quotes her confession: “the Devil, whose name was Robinet, was a dark man who spoke in a hoarse voice. Kissing Robinet’s foot in homage, (I) renounced God and the Christian faith. He put his mark on (me), on the little finger of (my) left hand, and gave (me) a stick, 18 inches long, and a pot of ointment. (I) used to smear the ointment on the stick, put it between (my) legs and say ‘Go, in the name of the Devil, go!’”. Thuras (2014, para. 2) writes that the experience of flying may in fact have been induced by hallucinogenic drugs, the description of which might have seemed like the workings of magick:

The first known reference to witches flying on broomsticks was confessed by a suspected male witch, Guillaume Edelin of Saint-Germain-en-Laye near Paris, while he was being tortured in 1453...around the same time...mention (was made) of "flying ointments." The use of hallucinogenic plants for shamanic purposes goes back to prehistory. In Medieval Europe there were a number of hallucinogenic plants in fairly easy supply. First among these was the rye mold containing ergot fungi. With effects on humans similar to LSD, ergot was a powerful hallucinogen. Among other readily accessible hallucinogenic plants were henbane, deadly nightshade, mandrake, and, according to Johann Weyer in his 1563 *Praestigiis Daemonum*, these were all principal ingredients in any witch’s “flying ointment”.

Thuras (2014, para. 4) continues by explaining that, as far as the actual flying goes, the ointments that were used to induce hallucinations were often too dangerous to drink. This led to them being introduced to the system in other ways: “...among the...ways to ingest a hallucinogenic drug besides swallowing it is through the mucous membranes, such as under the armpits, through the anus, or for women, through the mucous membranes of their vaginas. And how might such an ointment be best applied to those delicate mucous membranes?” From the 15th century records of Jordanes de Bergamo (15<sup>th</sup> Cent. in Thuras 2014, para. 8), we read: “the vulgar believe, and the witches confess, that on certain days or nights they anoint a staff and ride on it to the appointed place or anoint themselves under the arms and in other hairy places.” The effect of the application of these hallucinogenic drugs was very potent, potent enough for those who had used them to believe that they had truly flown. “Brewed up from such things as deadly nightshade, wolfsbane, henbane, and hemlock, often in a base of animal fat, the ingredients would have been potent indeed.



And the effect of this brew, this tropane alkaloid (due to the nightshade and henbane) hallucinogen? As relayed in a 1966 description by Gustav Schenk: “Each part of my body seemed to be going off on its own, and I was seized with the fear that I was falling apart. At the same time I experienced an intoxicating sensation of flying. [...] I soared where my hallucinations — the clouds, the lowering sky, herds of beasts, falling leaves [...] billowing streamers of steam and rivers of molten metal — were swirling along.”

This account of witches achieving flight, not only with the help of the devil but also through the re-enactment of an overtly sexualized ritual, in which the devil’s tricks and tools replaced ordinary male participants, is proof of the overt sexualization of the Western witch. The witch’s broom was an outward sign of her participation in sexually deviant activities, without which her abilities could only be guessed at. Other household artefacts such as cauldrons, bushels of herbs and animal parts were also stigmatized to further incriminate the gender which was most likely to possess and frequently make use of said artefacts. The possession of items as commonplace as cooking pots and brooms was often the only incriminating evidence that could be found against suspected witches; this is understandable, considering the fact that many of the claims laid against witches consisted of phenomena which were, as yet, inexplicable due to the lack of scientific methods to describe or refute them (like natural phenomena including plagues and storms).

Most women possessed these artefacts and could be tortured into confessing their use for unsavoury purposes, resulting in an endless supply of potential proof of malpractice. In terms of witches’ illustration with a black, pointy hat, it can be argued that such a hat is conical and pointed just like the most basic triangular shape which, when used in illustration, can lead to the creation of a threatening figure as opposed to one consisting of a circular or square shape, which is more solid and/or reassuring. However, a description of witches’ costume can lead to a debate of its own. Thuras (2014, para. 3) suggests that the broom was a symbol of ‘female domesticity’:

For a long time the common answer to the question of why witches flew on broomsticks was relatively straightforward...The broom was a symbol of female domesticity, yet the broom was also phallic, so riding on one was a symbol of female sexuality, thus femininity and domesticity gone wild...There was also once a common pagan fertility ritual where poles, pitchforks, and brooms (basically, phallic objects in general) were

piloted through the fields with people jumping as high as they could to entice the crops to grow to that height (A tradition related to 'the jumping of the broom' wedding traditions.) Reginald Scot's book, *The Discoverie of witchcraft*, published in 1584, described these festivals: At these magickal assemblies, the witches never failed to dance; and in their dance they sing these words, "Har, har, divell divell, dance here dance here, plaie here plaie here, Sabbath, Sabbath." And whiles they sing and dance, ever one hath a broom in her hand, and holdeth it up aloft...Combine pagans, brooms, phallic fertility symbols, and jumping into the air, and you have all the ingredients you need for the myth of the flying witch.

Suffice it to say that the witch's image in the Middle Ages was cleverly imbued with symbols which not only implicated any member of her gender, but which also supported popular misconceptions about the association between women's gendered role in society and their proclivity towards participating in dubious acts of heresy and magick. The 'demonization' of threats to authority is a popular practice among the powerful in the post-modern West (Little 2014, p. 30). Prior to feminism, suffragettes and other rebels against patriarchy were very easily relegated to the realm of 'witch'. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg serves as an excellent example (Scott 2018). This gendered, over sexualized association between women and magick in the West has shifted so that the primary association between women and witchcraft today has become rebellion (Wallace 2018).

The post-modern view of witches has become a very romantic, 'idealized' view, as Diane Purkiss (1996) would describe it. Though many historiographies written on the topic inform our modern perspectives and beliefs regarding witches were written by men, there are those which are not overly concerned with enforcing gender stereotypes. Many feminists deride the work of 20<sup>th</sup> century historiographers who fail to challenge the patriarchal beliefs about women and witchcraft that were championed in the Middle Ages. This debate is too great to delve into within this study, but it is worth mentioning Purkiss's thoughts on the issue in her article *The Myth of the Burning Times* (1996, pp. 7–26) seeing as she is a Fellow and Tutor of English, specializing in Renaissance and women's literature as well as witchcraft. Purkiss (1996, pp. 52–53) warns academics against the role which a 'feminine' perspective on the Witch Trials might have, one which might merely redefine the male, factual and 'rational' perspective by offering a more 'romantic', 'affective' and 'imaginative' view against which to measure it. The very construction of a 'romantic' view of the witch trials does not help to really uncover the

secret threats and desires which are constantly at work within communities, forming, changing and determining social stereotypes. She (1996, p. 52) explains that:

Modern witches' histories of witchcraft represent a much cleaner break with academic values than anything feminist historians have produced or have wished to produce. Far more than Derrida or Foucault, popular history disregards the assumptions which make Enlightenment history possible. Genuine indifference to the boundaries between memory and invention, fact and fancy, truth and fiction must alarm, and some of this alarm is perfectly justified. Nonetheless, it is striking that culturally, the second of each of these pairs tends to be coded as feminine, as is the personal, the therapeutic self-inscription. Given that such coding is itself the outcome of a history in which Romanticism played a key role – given, that is, that the same factors which shaped the figure of the modern witch now oppose her to history by presenting her as 'too soft' on fact – the modern witch's identity as a figure in history and as a maker of history and its rules could come to represent the irruption of 'femininity', with its semiotic uncertainties, its high affect, its lack of interest in empirical scrutiny, into the masculine space of historical empiricism...I am not suggesting that women are incapable of empirical history, or that empirical history is always oppressive...However, this should not rule out exploiting the power of imagination or fantasy about the past.

There are modern filmic portrayals of witches which attempt to endear witches to their audience, and which use this very 'power of imagination or fantasy about the past' to romanticize their portrayals of witches. Take as an example the series *Charmed* (1998–2006) in which three sisters use witchcraft against the forces of evil. These three sisters are young and 'charming', lovely to behold and infinitely innocent, always using their 'book of spells' to protect the innocent. In opposition to such romantic witch portrayals, there are film texts like *The Witch*, which attempt to paint a historically accurate picture of the trials which ravaged the population of communities like Salem.

This film, as a stark example, spares no details in its depiction of the debilitating social tension between different genders, social classes and religious sects in 17<sup>th</sup> century America. Although it could be argued that modern film texts tend to 'romanticize' the image of the witch, these historically orientated portrayals tend to associate the witch with her older, Medieval image. *The Witch* offers a portrayal of the Medieval witch beliefs which people truly harboured during

that time in history. In this film, the antagonist, an old witch who lives in the forest, goes around naked abducting children, shape-shifting and bringing about misfortune where she goes. She is a stereotypical malevolent witch. She is evil. Her presence causes crops to fail, animals to miscarry or to produce blood instead of milk. Her presence heralds the presence of a much stronger, much more malevolent force which is that of the devil himself. In this film, 'Black Phillip' is a rendition of the devil which, in this case, is associated with the horned Celtic fertility god, Cernunnos. Freeing itself from the possible polarity of witch portrayals in film, *Game of Thrones* offers a portrayal of witches which both harkens to older origins and borrows ideas from the modern film industry. The extent to which imagery is borrowed from historical accounts by either type of witch rendition mentioned above is worth investigating.

With regard to the symbol of the broom, *Charmed*'s romanticized witches make no use of brooms. They do not have wands or a stereotypical black cauldron of their own though they do join other witches at séances where there is need of their combined magickal powers. These three sisters cannot fly, though Pru has telekinetic powers which allows her to move objects with her mind. In *The Witch* the protagonist Thomasin begins to levitate out of pure mental trauma and ecstasy; here other witches are also shown littering the air, but no broom is portrayed. The directors of both of these film texts intentionally omitted the broom as symbol, although Thomasin does access a dream-like ecstasy after accepting Black Phillip's help in *The Witch*, which is reminiscent of the hallucinatory experiences Thuras (2014, para. 2) points to in his description of the accounts of 'flying' witches.

With regard to séances (the access to which was usually granted using brooms), the sisters in *Charmed* do meet with other witches in order to combine their powers to thwart evil. The witches' gathering is also depicted in Eggars' *The Witch* (2015) and is portrayed as Thomasin's sanctuary after her escape from her oppressive family and social life. In *Game of Thrones* none of the witches Martin portrays are capable of riding brooms; they are implied to belong to 'categories' of witches (or occult shamans/priests), which suggests that they are not alone in their craft, but they are not shown going off into the wilderness to meet at ritualistic gatherings. So, in this regard, Martin does not seem to entertain much of the symbolism usually associated with witches. The red priests and priestesses, we can assume, are trained in a central place since there are many of them throughout the country. However, Lady Melisandre is shown to be by herself almost all the time, following the trail of the political powers whom she serves. Mirri

Maz Dur mentions her temples, which the Dorthraki had destroyed, and refers to these as if crowds of people would gather there. Her description of the place, as well as the healing works she had performed there, leads audiences to think that she was consulted by people from her community as if she were a trusted doctor and/or advisor. By all accounts, Martin's witches seem to use common modes of transportation to get around. If they gather somewhere, one can assume, it is for training or to practise their magickal arts in the service of the public. The phallic symbol, once so important to the witches' iconic portrayal, is discarded as is the séance, not to mention that neither of these modern texts makes any mention of the witch's wand nor are they hooded and cloaked. This is completely unlike the film series *Harry Potter* (2001 – 2011), which makes use of all the symbols previously associated with witches. There are reasons for this. Whereas *Harry Potter* is a series which is more interested in the creation of a fantasy world in which witches and wizards live double lives with every aspect of their 'magickal' person hidden from the view of 'normal' citizens, the films/series that I would like to mention here for analytical purposes are ones in which witches have no other reality than the one they share with their fellow countrymen and women.

Nowadays, the portrayal of witches says much about the agendas of their authors as there is such a variety of colourful symbolism upon which they can draw. The bulk of the evidence collected against accused witches during the trials was based on the superstitions and the beliefs of disgruntled individuals. Yet, scores of accused witches were put to death in the Middle Ages because the court put so much stock into the accounts of witches' accusers, as if personal experiences within the realm of imagination were just as tangible as common household objects like brooms and cauldrons. This suggests to us how real and immediate individuals' spiritual and seemingly magickal experiences truly were in this era. And it also puts stock into the theory that the witch trials came to an end partly because of the growing role that the development of science played in the banishing of popular misconceptions and superstitions from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onward. In the HBO series, Ser Davos has every reason to fear and hate Melisandre for putting his beloved Shireen to death and he asks Jon Snow to punish her for it at Castle Black in the 6<sup>th</sup> season. This is after he had sought her help in Snow's resurrection. In spite of her transgressions, he had faith in her abilities and even convinced her to perform the resurrection when she had every reason to doubt her own abilities.

All the feats of magick which Melisandre performed for Stannis were witnessed first-hand by Ser Davos. His accounts of Melisandre's abilities are believable for this reason. And honourable men who know and trust Ser Davos, trust his witness. Ironically, honourable men like Jon Snow are not believed in regard to evidence of the white walkers' existence. Jon, the Lord of the Night's Watch, is forced to prove their existence to Queen Cersei just as Samwell Tarley must beg the Arch Maester to believe his claims about this horde of undead marching on the Northern kingdom. These are honourable men, but the news they bring is unbearable. This is proof that people do not want to believe things they prefer not to believe, yet they will believe in the strange and illogical accounts of children who claimed to have been pinched by witches in their dreams, as in the eyewitness accounts at Salem. They will believe that witches can fly on broomsticks, yet they choose to reject logical arguments against the belief. Imagination has power, but it can also evoke fear and inspire denial. People in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century still believe that witches fly on brooms and practise dark magick (Thuras 2014, para. 1). They know them to exist and believe them to look and act and behave just as they did in the Middle Ages. The horror film industry does not necessarily take pains to correct such preconceptions, because they can use fantasy elements to create and sell sensation. Film series like *Charmed*, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Terry Pratchett's various novels do however attempt to challenge preconceptions about witches. The extent to which HBO manages to do this with *Game of Thrones* is the topic of scrutiny in this chapter, particularly because it does manage to do so with great success.

In *Game of Thrones* we see Martin offering audiences an image of the witch which is both Medieval and modern. Lady Melisandre, who is young and beautiful, manages to challenge our notions of witchcraft by not only embodying the roles of priestess and witch, but also by embodying all three aspects of the Goddess. She is the Maiden Witch, the Mother as well as the Crone. This makes her, as O'Brien (2015, 'The Seven and R'hllor') tells us, immensely powerful, not only in the story, but in the fictional field of reference of her audience. As a priestess, she appeals to her audience and to those who sympathize with Stannis Baratheon. She is trying to help him win the throne and it appears she truly does care for him. When Stannis is killed, she seems to doubt her own abilities, yet those who have followed Stannis and have seen her perform her magick, come to her in their need. They have so much faith in her that they beseech her to raise John Snow from the dead because they have empirical evidence of her power. More than that, they have faith in her. Although she does not believe

that she can successfully raise the dead, she is successful in the act. Not only does this challenge our idea of resurrection and the religious context in which it usually happens, but it situates religious practices within the realm of magick.

In his article *Magick and Participating Consciousness*, William Willeford (1984, pp. 343–344) explains that magick can be conceived of as “basically a sub-category of religion” and that, because ‘magick takes place within an animated word’ “the difference between magick and religion in this regard (being) an ideal typical dichotomy between the magickal attitude with a dominant compulsive (or coercive) conduct and the religious attitude with a dominant dependent conduct towards the object of belief.” Is Melisandre in this sense acting as a priestess or witch? There can be no doubt that Stannis’s men come to worship her and that she, in turn, diverts their attention to the service of the ‘Lord of Light’. In this sense, the red priests and red priestesses use magick in a religious sense. At the same time ‘non-magickal’ religion (1982, p. 344) is portrayed by the religious sect in King’s Landing headed by the High Sparrow. His intentions are always to live a morally orientated life and to force others to do the same whatever the cost; this is achieved without the aid of ‘fantastical’ arts or magick and is very restrictive. Its methods include public shaming, imprisonment and torture, reminiscent of the mechanisms employed by the agents of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages.

In HBO’s series, a red priest is said to have raised Beric Dondarrion from the dead six times. He owed his life, as he says, to the ‘Lord of Light’ by whose power his resurrection was made possible and it leads him to believe that his life has some greater purpose. He does not know what it is, however, and he loses large portions of his memory every time he is resurrected, although his rising from the dead makes him a prototypical Christ as it does Jon Snow. These warriors band together to defend Westeros from the Night King. One would assume that they become mythical representations of the warriors of the light facing the forces of death. The warriors of the Night King were animated from death (in what is assumed to be a resurrection brought about by dark magick). This leads us to question the morality of resurrection itself; within the context of the series the act becomes a feat of magick – it is stripped of religious connotation and its meaning is questioned. Its occurrence, however, is certain.

Just as in the Middle Ages, those who see Westeros’s magicians at work have every reason to unfeignedly believe in their capabilities. As a woman of power Melisandre appeals to her

audience because of her beautiful appearance, like the three sisters from *Charmed*. She is a prime example of the highly sexualized, modern female witch, just like Thomasin from *The Witch* and Hermione from the *Harry Potter* series. Unlike the warty, aged, scraggy old crones with whom we associate the Middle Ages' trials, these modern filmic witches are portrayed as the manipulators of men, the daughters of the sexually alluring Eve. O'Brien (2015, 'Not the wicked witch') tells us that:

In Westeros, as in early modern Europe, not all witches resemble the Halloween stereotype of the old witch – an ancient crone covered in warts. Westerosi witches do, however, recall other stereotypes about the power of sex, blood and magick. Medieval and early modern witches had many faces. Francesco Maria Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608) contains images of men and women, young and old, participating in acts of Devil worship – such as *The Obscene Kiss* (1608). Since one of the primary concerns about witches was that the lustful nature of women – especially young women – put them at a greater risk of being tempted into sin by the Devil, it is unsurprising that early demonological works took those fears a step further, into actual sex with the Devil. *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1487), one of the most significant texts for the period of the great European witch-hunt, claimed that witches “persistently engage in the Devil's filthy deeds through carnal acts with incubus and succubus demons”. German printmaker Hans Baldung Grien's 1514 drawing, alongside dramatic works, such as *The Witch* (c.1609–1616) and *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), depicted witches of all ages acting lewdly. In Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, one character declares: *What young man can we wish to pleasure us. But we enjoy him in an incubus?...* Like these witches, Melisandre is highly sexualised. In only her second episode she encourages Stannis to “give himself to the Lord of Light” by sleeping with her, in betrayal of his marriage vows.

Without physical beauty, persuasion and temptation would be difficult. Many fairy tales of European origin contain witches who kidnap and sometimes eat young children and babies. Rev. Montague Summers (in Rodker, J 1948 (reprint), p. 65) writes as a footnote in the *Malleus Maleficarum*'s Part 1, Question 10: 'Whether Witches can by some Glamour Change Men into Beasts' that “during the sixteenth century in France lycanthropy was very prevalent, and numerous trials clearly show that murder and cannibalism were rife in many country districts”. Russia's Baba Yaga was known to eat children (Cereno, B 2020), just as the Brothers Grimm's witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, whose house, like the Yaga's, was specifically equipped to lure



them closer for that purpose. The symbolic meaning of this is interesting, if one considers that the Evil Crone is constantly feeding off the blood (the symbolic essence) of the Maiden; it would explain why the Maiden is ever at war with the Crone in stories modelled on Celtic lore. The Maiden is certainly not a victim in this regard; it is her defeat of darkness which hails Spring, though she is also herself defeated, because the matriarchal cycle is circular, and Spring cannot last forever. In several films and fairy tales we find Evil Crone witches who are desperately in search of the blood of younger candidates to keep themselves young: *Stardust* (2007), *Brothers Grimm* (2005) and *The Witch* (2015) being three prime examples. In fairy tales like *Rapunzel* the Maiden is kidnapped because her beauty keeps an aging old witch young. This could be a remnant of the symbolic Maiden versus Crone battle that is destined to occur annually in the cycle of the Earth, but also in the development of the Sovereign vassal.

The Mother aspect of the Goddess is essentially the aspect of the Goddess who metaphorically represents Summer and the harvest, whereas the Maiden is associated with Spring and the Crone with Winter. If we consider the goal of the general plot of most fairy tales, which is for good to triumph over evil, day over night and light over dark, then for the Maiden to be wedded makes perfect sense as such a union promises to result in the Maiden's transformation: Summer, a time of peace and plenty, a time of harvest and fruition. This aspect of the Goddess can be related to the character of Lady Melisandre in *Game of Thrones* as well. By engaging in intercourse with Stannis, she becomes a mother. And, by extension, the fact that she seems familiar with the rituals involved with this practice, and considering that she is very old, we may infer that she would have performed similar instances of sex magick before. This means that she qualifies as the Mother aspect of the Goddess, as she does that of the Maiden. As we see in season 6 of the series, she is definitely the Crone aspect as well, in fact this is her true aspect. As Stannis's consort, she begins to replace his wife, Selyse Florent. She becomes his sexual consort, his advisor and his equal in terms of authority. When they engage in intercourse, she seals this bond with him, becoming his 'red queen' (this evokes associations with *Alice in Wonderland's* Red Queen). Sadly, however, he is not the destined king and she needs to resort back to her other role, that of the Maiden, in which she can approach other candidates candidly.

Fairy tales, the prototypical stories of how humankind should conduct itself, which parallel on a spiritual level the proper development of the psyche, suggest that stability and peace naturally accompany the reign of the 'rightful' king and queen. In these fairy tales, Sovereignty's vassal

is established first, because in nature, the seed must be produced before it can be inseminated. In Lady Melisandre's case, she is already a priestess and a powerful sorceress who instructs Stannis in terms of what he should do to become king. She becomes paired off with him as the Mother aspect of the Goddess; she challenges him as the Crone, and she remains the Maiden through her magickal abilities. His own wife, however, is unworthy and his betrayal of her deranks him. By inhabiting all three aspects of the Triune Goddess, Melisandre embodies all the aspects of the Goddess, as well as both challenging and establishing the norms with her role as priestess vis-à-vis witch. In this sense, as O'Brien (2015, 'Melisandre: priestess or witch?') explains, she subverts the witch trope. Had her magick been flawless, in other words had Stannis's army won after the sacrificing of his daughter to the Lord of Light, she would probably have become the epitome of the most powerful witch in modern literature and media. However, her magick fails at this point in the story. On the surface, this shows us one of two things: first, that she may have made a mistake in terms of how she performed her magick, which is always a possibility in the practice of sophisticated magick or, second, the possibility that she was failed by her associated deity, the 'Lord of Light', R'hllor, who is the proposed source of her power.

If one reads this text as a pseudo-fairy tale, however, Melisandre's role as Sovereignty's vassal reveals another point. Should she prove suitable as the representative of (the land of) Westeros, at least in terms of Celtic myth, then she must succeed as Maiden and be championed by a suitable male representative. We know that Stannis is not suitable. For this reason, she fails as Maiden. This seems right, seeing as Stannis is already married and she is already far beyond the wooable age of a Maiden by the time they conspire for the throne. The amulet she wears to alter her age only conceals, but does not permanently alter, her being. She seems, rather, to be the Crone in disguise. If this is true, then she, as Crone, is doomed to fail – she is fated to be defeated by the Maiden. Whether this is the case in *Game of Thrones* can be questioned because she successfully guides and leads Daenerys Targaryen, as the true Maiden of Westeros, into the arms of her destined king, although does not challenge her directly as Cersei Lannister does. This means that Melisandre's role as a representation of the Crone aspect of the goddess in the series is transmutable. Even though outward conflict is what can be expected between the Maiden and Crone, neither Melisandre nor Daenerys is the other's nemesis. Like the Baba Yaga, (Cereno 2020, 'The Iconic Look of the Baba Yaga'), her "ambiguity is no accident", it is "tied to her connection to femininity and the natural world, as a sort of earth mother".



Like the spirit of the Land itself, Melisandre can take any necessary form to lead others to their destiny. This is the very role of the spirit of the land – the Sovereign Goddess. As with the transformative role of the goddess in fairy tales (Cereno B 2020, as mentioned above), Melisandre embodies whatever form is necessary to challenge the true Maiden – the female protagonist whose transformation throughout the text is most important. A text which clearly follows the blueprint of Celtic myth and which enthrones a female magician in the role of sovereign goddess would not have survived criticism and censorship fifty years ago. Martin’s series *A Song of Ice and Fire* is for this reason iconic for its time because it portrays the extent to which patriarchy is being challenged in the West today. The HBO series, which is based on his novels, is iconic for many other reasons, but this one is worth consideration, especially if one considers that a mere two hundred years ago the community at Salem were convicting poor women of witchcraft largely based on their social rank, their own superstition beliefs and unchallenged hearsay. The events of Salem’s trials bear testimony to the extent to which witches and their stereotypes had become dislodged from the deeper roles they once inhabited in myth to be flung into the realm of imagination and intrigue.

“In January of 1692, the daughter and niece of Reverend Samuel Parris of Salem Village became ill. When they failed to improve, the village doctor, William Griggs, was called in. His diagnosis of bewitchment put into motion the forces that would ultimately result in the death by hanging of nineteen men and women. In addition, one man was crushed to death; seven others died in prison, and the lives of many were irrevocably changed” (Brooks 2011, *History of the Salem Witch Trials*). The circumstances that had bred the ‘fertile ground for fear and suspicion’ in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Massachusetts (*Witches of Massachusetts* 2003) which led to the trials in Salem, included: ‘a strong belief in the ‘devil’, ‘factions’, “a recent smallpox epidemic” as well as “the threat of attack by warring native tribes”. The images of witches which emerged from this time, greatly as a result of the confessions produced during these trials, were the most unusual in history, flinging witchcraft and the fantasies surrounding witches into even stranger and more obscene fields than they had been before. Director Robert Eggers accurately describes his 2015 film, *The Witch*, as a “New England Fairy Tale”. The 1692 Salem Witch Museum’s website provides the following short summary of the events at Salem which will elucidate some the bizarre contributions which the Salem trials offered to the history of witch trials (2021, ‘The 1692 Salem Witch Trials’):

In June of 1692, the special Court of Oyer (to hear) and Terminer (to decide) sat in Salem to hear the cases of witchcraft. Presided over by Chief Justice William Stoughton, the court was made up of magistrates and jurors. The first to be tried was Bridget Bishop of Salem who was found guilty and was hanged on June 10. Thirteen women and five men from all stations of life followed her to the gallows on three successive hanging days before the court was disbanded by Governor William Phipps in October of that year. The Superior Court of Judicature, formed to replace the "witchcraft" court, did not allow spectral evidence. This belief in the power of the accused to use their invisible shapes or spectres to torture their victims had sealed the fates of those tried by the Court of Oyer and Terminer. The new court released those awaiting trial and pardoned those awaiting execution. In effect, the Salem witch trials were over...As years passed, apologies were offered, and restitution was made to the victims' families...The parallels between the Salem witch trials and more modern examples of "witch hunting" like the McCarthy hearings of the 1950's, are remarkable.

The first witch trials to take place in the Massachusetts Bay Colony were in 1648. However none of these trials produced a confession of witchcraft. When in February of 1692 Tituba (one of three accused witches, including Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn) confessed to being a servant of the devil. This sparked panic in Salem and resulted in the trials of over 200 people (2011, section 5). Brooks (2011, *ibid.*) also tells us that the trials received early opposition and that its critics soon fell victim to witchcraft accusations themselves as a result (such as John Proctor, who was tortured using *piene forte et dure*, a legal tactic from English law which allowed torture to be used to extract a plea from uncooperative witnesses). In the case of Salem, historians have noted that those who were accused of witchcraft were often wealthy (so accusers would benefit from confiscating their estates) and they often held differing religious beliefs from those who made accusations against them.

In the Massachusetts Bay Colony of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the superstition surrounding the active role of the devil in bringing ill fortune and malice into individuals' lives was so immediate, that Tituba's confession of being a witch stirred Salem's community into action. Those individuals who were initially accused of witchcraft had been social outsiders and were easy targets. Also, the evidence that was accepted as damning in the initial Oyer and Terminer hearings was so vague that it was almost impossible for the accused to prove their innocence. Brooks writes: "spectral evidence, evidence based on dreams and visions, wasn't the only

evidence used in court during the Salem Witch Trials, it was the most common evidence and the easiest evidence for accusers to fake...Other evidence used in the trials included confessions of the accused, possession of certain items such as puppets, ointments or books on the occult, as well as the presence of an alleged “witch’s teat”, which was a strange mole or blemish, on the accused person’s body.” (2011, *History of the Salem Witch Trials*, ‘How did the Salem Witch Trials end?’).

It has also been theorized that many of the parents of the “afflicted girls” egged their daughters on to accuse persons of witchcraft with whom they were in civil disagreement. Along with the nineteen hanged individuals and John Proctor, who was squashed to death to extract a plea, were two dogs. In the years following the end of the trials, the town of Salem suffered a few serious afflictions, such as attacks by native tribes, droughts, crop failures and the outbreak of smallpox, which caused the inhabitants to develop a great deal of remorse. January 15, 1667 was to be the Day of Official Humiliation on which everyone in Salem would fast to make amends to God for their misconduct in the trials. Three hundred years after the Salem trials, in August of 1992, Nobel Laureate Eli Wiesel unveiled the Salem Witch Trials Memorial and in 2001, on 31 October, the American state amended the previous apology of 1957 which cleared the names of the remaining victims of the Salem Witch Trials (2011, *History of the Salem Witch Trials*). The memory of the Salem Witch Trials remains as a testimony to the fact that the Western society of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, especially due to its Christian orientation, was very keenly aware of the interference of the divine in everyday life, especially where misfortune and tribulation were involved. The fact that Tituba, Sarah Osburne and Sarah Good had been easy targets for witchcraft accusation, is interesting, however. Tituba’s confession was unusual. Stacy Schiff (2015, *Unraveling the Many Mysteries of Tituba*) points out that Tituba did not fit the bill of a typical victim of witchcraft accusations. As a slave, Schiff argues, her complacency was paramount. Wherever the leading questions went, she followed, even if it meant fabricating the most extravagant details regarding, for example, the devil’s appearance, her entering into a contract with him, his familiars, the orders which he gave her to fulfil, and more. And, with subsequent questioning, her confession altered to include vastly different details and information than that which she initially offered the court.

Schiff suggests that this is because she was complying with the rules of the court. Whatever questions were asked, she took the cues that were given her and answered accordingly. Her

initial denial meant little to the court. Schiff (2015, para. 8) writes: “She (Tituba) could not have expected to be accused. New England witches were traditionally marginals: outliers and deviants, cantankerous scolds and choleric foot-stompers. They were not people of color.” Schiff goes on to explain that many of the confessions of the other accused in Salem were based on Tituba’s (2015, para. 15), precisely because she had been so detailed in her confession (this adds weight to what Levack (1996, p. 16) has written on the matter of confessions that were extracted under torture – one becomes as far-fetched as the next purely because the accused are so desperate to satisfy their torturer’s demands):

Who was it, demanded Hathorne, who tortured the poor girls? “The devil, for all I know,”...She [Tituba] introduced a full, malevolent cast, their animal accomplices and various superpowers. A sort of satanic Scheherazade, she was masterful and gloriously persuasive... More than anyone else, she propelled America’s infamous witch hunt forward, supplying its imagery and determining its shape....She proved a brilliant raconteur, the more compelling for her simple declarative statements... Hers is among the longest of all Salem testimonies. Having fielded no fewer than 39 queries that Tuesday, Tituba proved equally obliging over the next days...She delivered on every one of Hathorne’s leading questions....Tituba’s testimony regarding the devil (here, a 1692 transcript) riveted the courtroom: “I must serve him six years and he would give me many fine things.” While she was hauntingly specific, she was also gloriously vague...At a certain point she found that she could simply not continue....The devil had incapacitated her, furious that Tituba liberally dispensed his secrets. Confessions to witchcraft were rare. Convincing, satisfying and the most kaleidoscopically colourful of the century, Tituba’s changed everything. It assured the authorities they were on the right track. Doubling the number of suspects, it stressed the urgency of the investigation. Once she had testified, diabolical books and witches’ meetings, flights and familiars were everywhere. Others among the accused adopted her imagery, some slavishly... one confessor changed her account to bring it closer in line with Tituba’s.

According to Brooks (2011, ‘Events of the Salem Witch Trials’) Sarah Good certainly did fit the description of a marginalized member of society. She was a beggar and her daughter of four years was accused by the ‘afflicted girls’ as well. Brooks suggests that her marginalization would have made the court prejudiced against her, especially because she had been known to be rather ill-tempered and melancholy, as well as having been followed by all manner of misfortunes wherever she made use of people’s hospitality. She was haggard by appearance

because of her poverty, and a mother. She was becoming more like a Crone every day, with ill-luck pushing her over the edge to give her that abject aura. When one of the ‘afflicted girls’ claimed to have been stabbed by Sarah’s spectre, producing a knife’s broken point as proof, a member of the court-room stood up and revealed his broken knife, proving that she had picked up the broken-off tip in the street and was lying. Surprisingly, the girl was merely asked not to lie in the courtroom again though she could continue providing evidence. Brooks (2011, ‘The Witchcraft Trial of Sarah Good’ ) draws on different sources to describe Sarah Good: “Good was the wife of William Good and, at the time of the Salem witch hysteria, was a poor, pregnant beggar who would often wander door to door asking for handouts while her husband worked as a day labourer. As a result, Good was a prime target for the accusation of witchcraft in the small Puritan-run town where nonconformity was frowned upon. For years before the hysteria even began, Good and her husband had a number of disagreements with other Salem residents that made them very unpopular in the town.” A few of the residents of Salem provided proof of Sarah’s ‘malicious’ nature, claiming that she was able to cause the death of their livestock through her witchcraft. A type of Crone-character, Sarah seems to have been more of a victim of social prejudice than anything else.

Sarah Osborne’s description is strikingly different from that of Tituba and Sarah Good. She was in a marginalized state for different reasons than Sarah Good, though her link with the Putnam family, whose daughter was one of the ‘afflicted girls’, makes her implication as an accused witch rather suspect:

Sarah Warren Prince Osborne (ca. 1643–1692) – One of the first three women to be accused of witchcraft in the Salem witch trials of 1692 (was) sometimes referred to as "Goody Osborne," Goody being short for "Goodwife" and at the time a form of address for old women of lowly social status. Born Sarah Warren in Watertown, Massachusetts in about 1643, she grew up to marry a prominent man by the name of Robert Prince...She moved with her husband to Salem Village in 1662, where Robert owned a 150-acre farm next to Captain John Putnam’s, who was also his brother-in-law. There, the couple would have three children. Unfortunately, Robert Prince died in 1674, leaving Sarah Prince a widow. He left his land entrusted to Sarah with the provision that upon their sons’ coming of age, it be given to them. However, at that time, the two boys, James and Joseph, were only six and two years-old, respectively. Soon after her husband’s death, Sarah hired an indentured Irish immigrant by the name of Alexander

Osborne as a farm hand...paid off his indenture. Rumors quickly spread that Sarah Prince and Alexander Osborne were "living together" and the pair eventually married. Afterwards, Sarah attempted to overtake her children's inheritance and seize control of the estate for herself and her new husband. However, the powerful Putnam family would defend the rights of her sons in an extensive legal battle. The conflict was still ongoing when Sarah Osborne became one of the first three persons accused of witchcraft in February 1692. Sarah was accused by Thomas Putnam, Jr., Edward Putnam...for afflicting Ann Putnam Jr., Elizabeth Parris, Abigail Williams and Elizabeth Hubbard. Unlike the other two women accused with her, Tituba and Sarah Solart Poole Good, Osborne never confessed to witchcraft nor attempted to accuse anyone else...She was the second of the original three to be examined and denied all the accusations against her. In her own defense, she was the first defendant to assert in her defense the theological claim that the devil could take the shape of another person without their compliance – a view that eventually prevailed and brought the Salem trials to a halt. However, the words of Sarah Good's examination were twisted to accompany the "afflicted girls" accusations towards her and later, Tituba would claim that the three of them were indeed working with the Devil. After the examination was over, she was placed in a Boston Jail to await her trial. However, Sarah, who had been ill for some time prior to her arrest would never be tried. She died, shackled in prison on May 10, 1692 at the age of 49.

If we examine Brooks' (2011, *History of the Salem Witch Trials*) claim that the three originally accused witches of the Salem Trials were marginalized individuals, then this certainly makes sense. As stereotypes of traditionally perceived female witches, Tituba and the two Sarahs certainly do represent the different aspects of the Goddess – the Black Maiden and the Crone Witch. Sarah Good, as an unwanted, shunned individual whose financial struggle became a burden to her society and who seemed to have an inexplicable ability to curse those she disliked, resembles the Black Maiden aspect of the Goddess. As a mother her words become even more prophetic, as an inherited superstition from the Goddess cults of pre-Christian Europe was that a woman's words could be prophetic and, even more so, the words of a mother. Being pregnant, she would have inspired her neighbours to have sympathy with her and to take her in. However, her strange disposition usually caused them to throw her out on the street. As Brooks tells us (2011, 'The Witchcraft Trial of Sarah Good'), the trials did not seem to dampen her spirit. She seemed to have been rather 'spirited' despite having to travel between the prison



and the court (a 10-mile journey) daily, whilst being pregnant. She never confessed to having used witchcraft and the only time she seemed to have implicated Sarah Osborne in the act of ‘afflicting’ the girls, was when she was attempting to draw the attention away from herself. What made her death more ominous is the fact that her dying words were indeed prophetic in nature. After being urged to confess a last time, on Gallows Hill, she said to Reverend Nicolas Noyes: “You are a liar. I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life God will give you blood to drink!”...Twenty-five years later, in 1717, Reverend Noyes suffered an internal haemorrhage and died choking on his own blood” (2011, last para.).

In Sarah Osborne’s case, she certainly inhabited the stereotype of the destitute widow, the Black Maiden. As a mother, she was left to fend for her sons, who were set to inherit her husband’s estate in her stead. Her decision to remarry marginalized her, as did her decision to live with Mr Osborne prior to their marriage. She ostracized herself socially by making decisions that would have benefited her as an independent woman. In the puritan community of Salem, this was unheard-of. Her decision to act against her late husband’s will, for one, was a token of her indignation. Tituba, on the other hand, represents something other than merely the Black Maiden as Schiff (2015, para. 15) suggests. She was so utterly submissive in her role as accused, so compliant and subservient to her accusers that she hardly seems to inhabit any stereotypical role at all. A few of the accused throughout the period of the Witch Trails who managed to escape death, did so by inhabiting this role. Tituba, in the instances where she was on trial, was situating herself squarely within the realm of complacency. She altered her evidence to satisfy the judges and she attempted to avoid pain and death. It saved her life, but it condemned nineteen men and women and ruined the lives of countless more. In a certain sense, Tituba represents women as the Roman Catholic Church might have preferred them – submissive, eager to please and complacent. By subverting herself to these strictures, by giving the courtroom what they wanted, Tituba saved her own life. She was not killed, though she was the last prisoner to be released after the trials, and she was taken to an unknown place to live out the rest of her life in shame for what she had confessed. Those who dared deny that they were witches, like Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne, were damned to die.



Tituba represents the abject (Crenshaw 1990, p. 1) – more even than Lady Melisandre. Melisandre can be understood in terms of her political and religious allegiance; she aligns herself with and acts in accordance with her faith. The Crone, and the magick that is traditionally consigned to her stereotype, also seems to inform who she is. Tituba's character cannot be fully understood (Schiff, 2015, para. 15). Her limited education and her utter submissiveness are understandable – she was a slave and she did what she was told. Following orders was the norm for her. Whether she was truly forced to offer the courts some master's version of events during her trial is questionable, but it would make perfect sense. Not only does she hide in the shadows, speaking half-truths and transforming them as she is led, but she manages to confirm her accusers' suspicions. She represents both what they desire and what they reject (1993, p. 78). Both her origin and her demise are uncertain. Her legacy is almost legendary but, to this day, it is unknown whether she was in fact a witch. Did she keep up the act out of fear? Whatever her motivations, Tituba represents a witch who, like Lady Melisandre, is so unusual in her actions that her very association with witchcraft is paradoxical. She both represents and distorts the meaning of witch. One wonders whether her testimony can be cast away as pure nonsense, yet the extent to which her delusions were described struck fear into the hearts of a religious town. Perhaps this is precisely because she had become a spectacle. Having been accused, it was expected of her to deliver on that promise: confess or face the gallows. Perhaps her complacency saved her life. Perhaps she was the most powerful witch of all; perhaps the Devil saved her. The lack of evidence leaves so much room for speculation and fear, as we have read, was what drove the trials since their inception.

Horror films produce a specific kind of condensed fear, a type of fear which becomes associated with sounds and images. Fear is not the only emotion which is promoted by the film and media industry, but it is certainly one of the stronger ones. It is through films and visual media that stereotypes become most rigidly fixed in the public's mind, because these forms of entertainment rely on performativity and an audience's interaction with the screen. In this sense film producers, screen wrights and playwrights have a great responsibility to offer the public entertainment that is as free from bias as possible and that relays accurate and honest information. However, producers are to a large extent obedient to the public's tastes and desires because no film industry can exist without patrons. It is for this reason that the most entertaining, most exhilarating, most emotionally grappling material permeates entertainment

platforms. Like Tituba, the screen gives us what we would like to see and hear, not necessarily what is true and accurate. Sensation sells and, it is precisely as a result of a culmination of cinematographic brilliance, sterling acting, informative and enticing writing as well as a myriad other elements that GRR Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* has become one of the best renowned television series of our age. It has become part of the Western literary canon and is part of the alternative culture which Tolkien started more than 50 years ago with his *Lord of the Rings* series. The different stereotypes of witches that are offered in the series have to some extent become 'truth' in the eyes of the western film audience.

In this chapter reference was made to several post-modern portrayals of witches in films and film series as well as to earlier sources which contain portrayals of this stereotype. Different aspects of witches' textual portrayal were discussed and can now be utilized in the following chapter to analyse Melisandre's character. Although the Red Priestess does not conform to the post-modern notions of a romanticized witch, she certainly does appeal to today's audiences because of her tremendous power and her ability to rebel against authority. The extent of these aspects of her character will be discussed in the following chapter. The next chapter will explore the filmic portrayal of Melisandre in particular, looking at the function within HBO's series as a prototypical myth and exploring her links to the abject and monstrous as explained by Kristeva and Creed.

## Chapter VII: Filmic Portrayal of Melisandre



In the previous chapter, several post-modern portrayals of witches in films and film series were explored. Reference was also made to the unusual albeit salient stereotypical portrayals of witches whose origins hark back to the suspects in the Salem witch trials of the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century (Brooks 2011). The Red Priestess, Melisandre, from HBO's *Game of Thrones*, can be related to several known stereotypes of witches, including those traceable to the Medieval period in Western Europe and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Salem. Based on what has been formulated in the previous chapters about the popularity of certain films and film series in today's visual culture (Arya 2014, pp. 82–117) as well as the function of myths in societal development the world over (Assmann 2004, pp. 17–31), HBO's *Game of Thrones* can be viewed as a prototypical 'modern' myth. For that reason, the different aspects of the stereotypical witches that have been discussed in the previous chapters can be utilized in this chapter to analyse Melisandre and to understand her ability to subvert the witch trope, which currently prevails in the post-modern media of the West. Justine Kemlo explains that, "in different ways and to different extents, both discourse analysis, especially multimodal discourse, and semiotic theories of film collude in strengthening our understanding of film(s) as text(s)" (2008, p. 22). In other words, the study of the different elements of a film or motion picture can result in a deeper understanding of said filmic text. She explains:

Acknowledging the composite nature of this/these discourse(s) allows us to view and analyse its elements separately, as long as we heed the fact that it is the film itself which constitutes a text and that any specific observations (at any rank within a systemic-functional framework, for instance) must eventually be contemplated against the *Gestalt* of the text. Films can then be deconstructed into their constitutive elements (sensorial supports, semiotic systems) and these can offer ground for meaningful comparison with other, more traditional, types of text. In other words, the voice of a film is not one voice but a polyphony of voices, whose melody is heard simultaneously but whose individual tracks can be isolated and compared to others, thus helping us reach a deeper understanding of the tune.

It is this kind of analysis to which Kemlo is referring (2008, pp. 13–24), namely the analysis of the different 'tracks' – the theories that feed the setting of the story, the characters and their

portrayal as well as the production elements of the film series in question – which is being undertaken in this study. In the case of this dissertation, however, the aim is not necessarily to better understand the meaning of HBO's *Game of Thrones*, but to draw attention to the particular portrayal of a portion of its characters, namely its witches. The act of doing so, the isolation and study of the specific 'tracks' which make up this film series' 'tune', will hopefully draw attention to Western audiences' growing need to analyse in greater depth the myriad of multimedia texts which are being produced and sold lest consumers and/or audiences lose sight of what constitutes fact versus what panders mere fiction. Thankfully, Film studies and the study of film are becoming a popular trend in the post-modern era (Kemlo 2008, p. 16). As Professor Carman from Chapman University explains: "Film Studies is the English degree of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Carman 2016). Bob Bassett, the Dean of the Lawrence and Kristina Dodge College of Film and Media Arts at Chapman University, concurs that "film is the literature of this century" (2016, *Film Studies*). "As an art form" Carman explains, the observations that film offers on...culture at large intersect directly with many other areas of study" and this also "raises questions related to journalism, about the value of fiction versus non-fiction...the way we see history, how ideology affects our perceptions of gender and women's rights (and) how we see the future" (2016, para. 7). On a deeper level Kemlo (2008, p. 22) writes "Films can then be deconstructed into their constitutive elements (sensorial supports, semiotic systems) and these can offer ground for meaningful comparison with other, more traditional, types of text". This means that films can be read as, but also speak to, other types of texts like oral and written myths, Lays and fairy tales. Films's visual character gives them greater visual efficacy than the other art forms.

There are many reasons why films have become a popular narrative medium. Their visual appeal, for example, translates into the deeper, more complex scopophilic pleasures identified by Mulvey. Lady Melisandre, perhaps the most controversial of HBO's *Game of Thrones* witches, is both alluring and repulsive. Utilising an analysis of "the powers of horror" in film as described by Mulvey (1999, p. 204), this study has illustrated that the ambiguity with which audiences approach films is largely caused by the combination of scopophilic pleasure and an internalised repulsion towards that same pleasure. The characters in a visual text often serve as 'objects' of voyeuristic phantasy (ibid.) and for this reason a film character who is well-written, who has both endearing and repulsive traits, is likely to attract a big audience.

The Red Priestess can be considered to conform in part to post-modern notions of a romanticized witch (following the trend of such film series as *Charmed*). Arguably, her most endearing trait can be defined as her proclivity to wield power as a form of rebellion against authority. She also uses this power as a means of establishing different kinds of sovereignty. The extent to which Melisandre manages to flaunt as well as subvert this sovereignty and other aspects of her character are the focus of this chapter. Firstly, therefore the study of film as a (modern mythic) text will be explored, after which Lady Melisandre will be scrutinized in terms of her role within the context of *Game of Thrones* as a modern myth. Barbara Creed's analysis of the Monstrous Feminine is utilized to analyse the complexity of Melisandre's character as a 'monster' while references to Matthews (1989) explain her mythic role in the film series. The employment of a few techniques from film analysis will help to uncover the producers' portrayal of Melisandre as a 'body' on which meaning is inscribed, after which a conclusion can be reached about the highly conflated nature of her character as both terrifying and alluring.

Linda Badley (1995, p. 3) tells us that "horror has become a fantastic 'body language' of our culture in which a person's self-concept has been increasingly constituted in images of the body". What sets film apart from literature, for example, is the fact that film studies can address questions that "can't be discussed in the mainstream media". Magali Sperling Beck (2017, pp. 14–15) from the University of Santa Catarina in Florianopolis concurs with this view, explaining why the Journal *Ilha do Desterro* – which publishes articles about "current critical perspectives in literature, film and cultural studies" – features so many articles on film and adaptation studies, the interrelation between literature and cinema as well as the interconnections between literary narratives and filmic adaptations in its 70<sup>th</sup> volume. Beck (2017, p. 32) claims that "it is not difficult to see how scholarship in English – and...scholarship that is related to the fields of literatures in English, and to cultural and film studies – has faced the challenge of critically responding to literary and cultural productions that have informed, in Esi Edugyan's words "what it means to be alive in the present moment...even if one considers the ephemeral and transitory nature of the present time" (2017, p. 16). Lady Melisandre, as a well-written and heavily inscribed 'body' within the modern mythic narrative of *Game of Thrones*, brings into focus questions about modern women's autonomy within Western society. Badley explains "in the ongoing crisis of identity in which the gendered, binary subject of Eurocentric bourgeois patriarchy (in particular, the Freudian analytical model

of the self) is undergoing deconstruction, horror joined with other discourses of the body to provide a language for imagining the self in transformation, re-gendered, ungendered, and regenerated, or even as an absence or a lack” (1995, p. 4). Barbara Creed reminds us that even though “woman *is* represented as monstrous in a significant number of horror films”, this does not necessary mean that such ‘active’ women within their own film contexts are “feminist or liberated” (1993, p. 7). This is because “the presence of the monstrous-feminine in popular horror film” (in one of five guises discussed in her book *The Monstrous Feminine*) “speaks more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity” though her presence within these texts “does challenge the view that the male spectator is almost always situated in an active, sadistic position and the female spectator in a passive, masochistic one” (ibid.). Lady Melisandre is an example of a filmic protagonist who takes on an active role as one of the five faces of Creed’s ‘monstrous-feminine’ (the other faces include: the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the vampire and the possessed woman). The extent to which this role empowers her as a woman or allows her to subvert popular ideas about women and witches are scrutinized at the end of this chapter.

To analyse HBO’s *Game of Thrones* from a filmic perspective, it is important to relate *Game of Thrones* to other apocalyptic films based on their relation to apocalyptic Medieval texts from Western Europe – such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Hamonic (2017, pp. 27–28) writes that there are “seven functions commonly found in American apocalyptic cinema expressed both in terms of its meaning...and message”. As an apocalyptic film series (because of the eminent threat of winter and the accompanying White Walkers), *Game of Thrones* forms part of the “explosion of apocalyptic films in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (2017, p. 1). To explain why apocalyptic films have increased in popularity and production over the last seven decades, Hamonic identifies the seven meanings or messages which these films commonly convey. These are: first to help audience members “make sense of the world and to order the chaos around them”, second to help them “attempt to work through historical traumas or to negotiate their way around human horrors” like the great wars; third to document humanity’s “hopes, fears, discourses, ideologies and socio-political conflicts” and fourth to “critique the existing social order”. Fifth, apocalyptic films aim to “respond to social crises, warning people to change their ways in order to avert an immanent apocalypse” or, sixth, “to argue that the end of the world is not near and to refute or ridicule apocalyptic hysteria” and, lastly, they aim to “bring people

to a religious renewal, spiritual awakening or salvation message” (2017, pp. 6–23). While *Game of Thrones* can certainly be said to promulgate more than one of these possible meanings and messages, an extensive analysis of the series’ apocalyptic nature cannot be forced into the space of this study.

In short, the series contains the underlying message of imminent doom (just like many Medieval treatises about witchcraft). It also contains several attempts at bringing its ‘community’ to religious renewal – especially the residents of King’s Landing, the capitol of Westeros. The threat of the White Walkers, which at first is focussed in the north, ultimately becomes the threat of the entire continent of Westeros. In this sense the film series provides its audiences with the opportunity to learn from the actions of the characters (2017, p. 7), leading to the film series “functioning as problem-solving exercise” (2017, p. 8). If one is to view the series as a ‘documentation’ of the “hopes, fears, discourses and ideologies” of our time (though the setting of the series in the Middle Ages, in which religious discourses were dominated by the “rise of the Anti-Christ” (2017, p. 24), which was a “key part of the apocalyptic Christian narrative”), then much can be said about 21<sup>st</sup> Century American civilization’s need to “make meaning of disaster” (2017, p. 13) after such devastating events as 9/11 and the fears and anxieties arising due to the eschatological beliefs that some kind of cataclysm would occur around 21 December 2012.

The coming of ‘Winter’, which became one of the popular slogans for the film series, can also be related to modern society’s fears and anxieties about the threat of global warming. Melisandre, as an agent of not only religious/spiritual instruction, but also as a mythic representation of the land in which she operates, actively participates in the problem-solving function of saving it (Westeros). She informs the actions of important individuals whilst being instrumental in the forming of alliances that can unite against the White Walkers. In this sense she acts like a modern government informant. It is interesting to note that, though she would have formed part of the ranks of the alleged ‘enemy’ (the Anti-Christ) within the Medieval European context, she forms a part of the ‘solution’ in this film series, which leads to the conflation of her role not only as witch, but also as priestess. In terms of Hamonic’s analysis then, Melisandre acts like the Baba Yaga (Cereno 2020, ‘The Ambiguous Morality of the Baba Yaga’), who “is equal parts trickster, monster, and savior.”



In keeping with the study of film as one of the dominant types of discourse of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the glossary from Bordwell, David and Thompson (2003, pp. 1–5) is utilised in the analysis of the filmic portrayal of The Red Priestess at a crucial moment in the series, namely: when her power, which is largely based in her ability to influence powerful individuals, is brought into stark focus for the first time. Mention has been made (Chapter IV) of Melisandre’s mythic role in the actions and events of Westeros. The most important moment in Melisandre’s appearance in *Game of Thrones* can be found in the 6<sup>th</sup> series, aptly entitled *The Red Woman*. This cliff-hanger scene holds the key to our understanding of her as the epitome of the conflation of all the different aspects of Britain’s ancient Sovereignty – Maiden, Mother and Crone.

In this scene, which takes place at the end of the premier episode of Season 6, she is revealed for who she truly is – an ageless hag. Not only does this revelation appal audiences, relegating her to the realm of the Archaic Mother (1993, p. 24), the witch whose agelessness situates her squarely within the realm of the abject (1993, p. 78), but it also poses questions about the nature of her identity as creature of myth. The scene which gives this episode, *The Red Woman*, its name is dominated by the figure of the distraught Melisandre as she stares, with a Medusa-like gaze, at her own pale reflexion in a mirror. The use of filmic elements such as close-ups help to paint the monstrous façade of a saggy old crone as described in detail by Creed in her chapter ‘Woman as Witch’ (1993, pp.73–83). As carnal creature (1993, p. 75), with a purported “evil nature” (based in a Medieval view), she is presented to the audience naked, her physical appearance and shape signifying her gendered connection to the abject. Shifting camera angles, clever lighting and fittingly ominous music help to create the dark mood and atmosphere of the cave-like interior of a monstrous womb (1993, p. 51), described as a “nightmare vision” of the “fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body” (Kristeva 1982, p. 54). The title *The Red Woman* also hints at Melisandre’s symbolic ties to menstrual blood (1993, p. 83) which, for the first time in the series, is not reminiscent of her fiery ties to the powerful Lord of Light, but to her own feminine body and its deplorable functions (Kristeva 1982, p. 71), this colour representing “the danger issuing from within the identity”.

The distraught Red Woman had earlier told Stannis Baratheon to sacrifice his daughter, Shireen, to the Lord of Light in order to be victorious over Ramsay's army yet, contrary to her prediction, Ramsay's army had won instead, massacring Baratheon's army with a sickening show of cunning and guile. In this scene as Melisandre prepares for bed, she removes her mysterious necklace and audiences are shocked as things take an unexpected turn. In a series of centred framing shots that zoom in and out on her, juxtaposing her façade from a straight-on angle, Melisandre's appearance in a blurry mirror (like one who is mediating Medusa's gaze with a mirror) is lit by a single candle. As the camera sneaks her into focus, she is revealed to be an aged crone of at least 100 years of age. Up to this point in the series, Melisandre had been portrayed as one of the most beautiful young women in Westeros – her trademark red hair and strikingly sleek features draped in a rich mauve coat with a dazzling jewels hanging around her neck. Film writer and producer Jeremy Podeswa explains (McClusky 2016) the importance of this scene:

The idea is there's an indefinite indeterminate quality that she could be ancient. We were limited by choosing to use a real person rather than a complete CG creation. Because what does a 400-year-old person look like? We don't know. So if you try to create that, then you're creating something that looks beyond our known reality. Here you feel like she's very old without putting a number on it. I think the performance of both actresses helps making her look ageless. There was a question of whether we should add more effects to make [the body double] look older, but I think anything we could have done would have made them look less real. When doing a fantasy show – or a show with fantasy elements – the more you can anchor an effect to reality the stronger the illusion is.

The actress who plays Melisandre, Carice van Houton, was overjoyed at the prospect of this hidden element of her character coming to light (Movieweb 2016, *Melisandre's big twist explained*, para. 2). She considers this episode to have been one of Melisandre's greatest moments in which the character's vulnerability, age, as well as transformation come to light. A different side of her is revealed, one which contradicts the strength and assurance with which she carried herself in the preceding seasons. This strength and assurance, the fierceness which is founded on her trust in the Lord of Light, become her 'weakness' – the colour of blood and shame, condemning her for her murderous actions.

Lady Melisandre belongs to an order of Red Priests and Priestesses who can resurrect the dead. It was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> season that one of the Red Priests, Thoros, managed to perform a resurrection six consecutive times, proving the power of this religious order. Bendric Dondarrion (played by Richard Dormer) was brought back to life by Thoros of Myr after being slain by ‘The Mountain’, Sir Gregor Clegane (played by Hafþor Júlíus Björnsson). Thoros confessed to Melisandre in season 3 that he himself had doubted in the Lord of Light’s abilities before personally experiencing Bendrick’s resurrection. It is in the final moments of Season 6’s first episode that we see a frail, uncertain Melisandre who, after the slaughter of Stannis’s army, seems to doubt her powers and her very role in the greater scheme of things. It is not until she successfully resurrects Jon Snow (played by Kit Harington) in episode 2 of Season 6, that she can be certain of her powers and of the potency of the Lord of Light. Her confession to Sir Davos Seaworth (played by Liam Cunningham) that her visions of the ‘great victory’ were a lie, proves this point. However, audiences are left wondering whether her lies were intentional – after all, Stannis had not been the rightful heir to the throne though it had been imperative that she convince him of the potency of his claim in order that he might fulfil his role within the bigger picture. When Melisandre’s age comes to light, her foresight into matters pertaining to Westeros’s fate becomes evident. In the above-mentioned scene, where Melisandre’s mysterious identity is first revealed, we experience her at the moment of a spiritual crisis where her abilities and prophecies come into stark focus and are sorely questioned.

The *mise-en-scène* in this scene is mundane and she is shown performing a mundane task – going to bed. Ordinary items such as a wolf-pelt covered bed beside a hearth and a dressing table bearing the candle and mirror fill the space. Two sources of light illuminate Melisandre’s image – from the front she is showered in cold, blue light filtering in from between the rafters of a window. A single candle lights the mirror in which she appears blurred and white as a ghost, with the whitish light paling her skin while, behind her, the hearth’s warm light fills the room and rests on the bed. This warm light does not touch her, though. Even her reflexion in the mirror is somehow shielded from it by a dark ring of emptiness around her face. Badley explains (1995, p. 12) that these close-up images of parts of the body in horror constitute a kind of “safe pornography” for viewers. Aspects of the young, alluring Melisandre which would normally excite and enthrall viewers (her intensely coloured hair, sharp features, curvy body and perky breasts), become repulsive when they transform precisely because they are the

different parts of the female body which usually constitute the “fetishistic objects of sexual fears and desires” (1995, *ibid.*). There is a similar scene in *The Witch* where the monstrous hag is shown naked, her sagging breasts dangling, about as she slices up the puritan family’s little baby. This literal transformation of Melisandre’s person can be described as the physical portrayal of her dichotomous, transformative person – she is a witch yet priestess, repulsive yet alluring, magickal yet religious. Filmic techniques help to portray this dichotomy visually. Medium shots of her frontal image reveal the cold, frail woman standing out against the warm, deep space that is created by the hearth in the background. When she looks at her reflexion in the mirror, she seems to stand out from the dark face of the metal; she is pale and there is almost no light visible from the candle illuminating her. The camera seems to shrink away from her sad face as if withdrawing from a horrifying sight and the scene ends with the old crone withdrawing sadly into the bed, naked and tired.

The editing in this scene also illustrates the dual nature which is so crucial to Melisandre’s person and her subversion of the witch stereotype throughout the series. O’Brien (2015, ‘Subverting our preconceptions’) explains that “the depiction of witchcraft in *Game of Thrones*...engages with many historical witch tropes...Melisandre is at her most powerful, and compelling as a character, when she subverts these tropes and becomes the facilitator of ritualistic burning”. O’Brien (2015, ‘Introduction’) claims that Melisandre is “a witch inspired by early modern history”. Though she is not the only witch in the series to be inspired by the evidence from the witch trials, she also embodies and subverts “traditional representations of gender” and our “perceptions of witchcraft”. Melisandre is “arguably the most powerful woman in Westeros” because “her magickal powers have been instrumental in destroying all five Kings who appeared in Season 2” (2015, ‘Melisandre: priestess or witch?’). Her resurrection of Jon Snow also attests to this fact. However, in the *Red Woman* scene from season 6 mentioned above another very powerful aspect of her character comes to light which has only been active in the background, namely, her age.

The single shot which reveals the ‘young’ Melisandre in the empty room soon becomes populated by her counter-image, an old crone of an indeterminate but ancient age. Juxtaposed with this transformation of the flesh is the image of Melisandre in the mirror, a blurred and yet clarifying image of her conflicting outer and inner worlds. What Melisandre knows of herself

is presented in this dark, empty surface. Her pale, bedraggled skin replaces the beautiful, perky breasts and intensely coloured hair of her ‘fake’ self, which audiences and kings both hate and love. This ritual to which Melisandre’s fans only become privy near the end of the series marks the revelation of her dual character while it also hints at an entirely secret existence. Whether or not she participates in this ritual daily is unknown; perhaps, after the terrible slaughter of her devoted Stannis, she feels as though she cannot go to bed in her youthful form. Melisandre’s literal action of going to bed also metaphorically puts to bed her failed prophecies and rituals – she must come face to face with her actions at the end of the day; when darkness descends, her dark nature also comes to the fore. If one considers the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum*’s illustration of witches’ characters (1487 in Rodker 1948), their inability to feel empathy and their knack for manipulation and subversion, then the seemingly moralistic guilt displayed by Melisandre in this scene is unusual and is more in line with modern portrayals of witches as normal women.



Melisandre adopts many roles throughout the series, from Maiden (in relation to kings) to Mother (in relation to spirits and those she evokes) and Crone (in terms of her role in the events of Westeros as a whole). In terms of an analysis of *Game of Thrones* as a modern myth, the role of Sovereignty – which is played by several ‘worthy’ women who are deemed to be the fit representatives of the land (in terms of Matthews’s analysis of Arthurian myths in chapter IV) – is an active one. The protagonists (or heroes/heroines) are defined as good/bad based on their interaction with said representatives of Sovereignty. Melisandre can be considered a vassal of Sovereignty (a steward of the throne of Westeros much like Gandalf is in *Lord of the Rings*) because of her active role in the setting up of suitable heirs in their position as king/queen. The ‘current’ queen of the Iron Throne, Cersei Lannister, is portrayed as a usurper. In the first episode of the series, the Targaryen heirs are introduced as they begin to make plans for reclaiming the Iron Throne. It can be noted that whether or not the Targaryens or Lannisters are truly fit to rule Westeros is a question which is often posed to the audience, as the last Targaryen king is frequently referred to as the ‘Mad King’; the assumption can be made that Daenerys Targaryen is a more suited candidate than the current Cersei Lannister, based on their respective actions within the events of the series. It is in light of this assumption that Lady Melisandre’s role as an active representative of Sovereignty can be determined (however, had Daenerys not been considered

a better candidate for the Iron Throne, Melisandre's role in terms of an analysis of the vassals of Sovereignty in Arthurian myth, would also be different).

Melisandre metaphorically steps into the role of “mother of Westeros” for the first time as soon as she removes her necklace and her age is revealed. The mother, whose role it is to mourn the dead (De Beauvoir 1997, pp. 178–179), in this case mourns the death of the kingdom's ‘honourable men’ (take note that they are considered honourable based on Melisandre's prophecy which posits them as the rightful followers of her chosen Stannis Baratheon; when read in the larger context of the events of the series, it becomes evident that not only was Melisandre wrong about Stannis's future as king, but this also means that she failed in her role as Westeros's Sovereign vassal at this point, making her failure both a professional and personal one). Her sadness is relatable to the sadness of Mary at the cross (1997, p. 179) – a metaphoric state which, in myth as well as in several religious contexts, is understood to be followed by a great famine or war (Matthews 1989, p. 17). In a mythic way, Melisandre embodies the Sovereign role at this point, revealed in her dual state as good and evil Mother (Geddes & Grosset 2007, p. 461) as well as her reversion from Maiden to Crone. The lighting of the scene also points to this transformation, which represents on a psychoanalytic level development within the conscious and unconscious planes (Estés 2008, p. 27). In developmental psychology, individuals' healthy (or unhealthy) sense of self is often relatable to the kind of mothering that they experienced during the crucial first few years of their life (Smit 2020). In an email, Smit (2020, personal communication, 26 April) explains “the mother becomes the internalised ‘good’ mother or internalised ‘bad’ mother”, the consequences of either unsuccessful or successful mothering being the broken “I am not”, “I am broken”, or “I am threatened” versus the intact “I am” psychological states which lead to either a defunct or functional sense of self.

If Melisandre can be equated with the spirit of Westeros at this point, then the revelation of her true inner darkness – which is symbolically tied to her old age, wisdom and decrepitude and not necessarily due to an inherent evil – is foreboding of the revelation of a similar aspect of the land, Westeros' true nature. The premier episode of HBO's *Game of Thrones* heralded the coming of winter (*Winter is Coming* was the title of the series' premier episode) and one can venture to guess that, after Melisandre's ‘revelation’, this symbolic winter (which is not an

annual season in this case but a prophesied ‘era’) is on the verge of commencing. Indeed, although viewers become aware of the threat of the ‘Long Night’ and the existence of the fabled white walkers from the outset, it is in season 6 of the series that they learn of the white walkers’ origins as the primordial First Men of Westeros. They had been turned into walking undead by the Children of the Forest. As Melisandre crawls despondently into her bed in the episode *The Red Woman*, viewers are left questioning whether she was around to witness the true nature of the white walkers and their leader, the Night King, before they were turned into monsters in defence of a more ancient, innocent Westeros. Also called ‘the Others’ in Martin’s texts, the white walkers seem to be reminiscent of agents of the Celtic Otherworld; the ‘collective unconscious’ and what Estés (2008, p. 27) would call “the place where the biological and psychological worlds...influence one another”, the “world-between-worlds” which threatens to break through as reality is split to reveal two aspects of itself at once, creating a vacuum where everything potentially becomes magickal and that which is underground rises to the surface or descends from the metaphoric north to threaten the ‘middle world’, the conscious – the viewer in her/his waking state who becomes trapped in an eternal Halloween.

The music in this scene from season 6 is just as descriptive. A monotonous-sounding, oscillating drone accompanies Melisandre’s distraught face as she prepares to remove her necklace. A violin sings out above the orchestral drone as her eyes lock with her image in the mirror and she anticipates the transformation. After the necklace is placed between herself and the mirror, an ominous drumbeat accompanies the more ominous person of the aged enchantress with white hair. The music is almost diegetic and seems to come from within her, with the scene’s focus remaining on her eye-line, where her eyes have pinned themselves to the dismal figure of reality – the true representation of what she looks like, which seems to be haunted by a sense of dismay. This dual image of Crone coming face to face with the murderous Mother (who had led Stannis’s men to their deaths), represents a sonorous internal struggle. There can be no doubt that the Old Melisandre has had to make place for the New in a Westeros which, like the modern West, focusses on outward appearances. Her younger, more alluring aspect was necessary in order to bring her message from the Lord of Light to the people of Westeros, however even her powerful Motherly aspect could not shelter Stannis and his men from death. Though she seems distraught at their defeat, she seems to know that death is an inevitable part of the fate of those living in Westeros. So, too, for some is resurrection. Her

figure becomes infinitely more powerful in this moment. Not only are her limitations revealed metaphorically by the darkness that encircles her reflection in the mirror, but its vastness is simultaneously established when the transformation occurs, making her immediately more mysterious and terrifying. All three aspects of the Sovereignty of Westeros have converged in the single figure of Melisandre's person. It is at this point that the episode ends.



According to Caitlín Matthews (1989, pp. 66–67) it is apparent in the reading of British myths containing Otherworldly characters, that characters tend to have a ‘bright’ or fair appearance, with accompanying names, when they are viewed from within their own realm – either earth or the Otherworld. It is when they cross over to a different realm that their names or natures transform, like sheep changing colour from white to black (1989, p. 235). In the last scene from the *Red Woman*, we see Melisandre appear in the dark mirror with her face white. Audiences are invited to reflect on the possibility of a darker nature in contrast to the acts of ‘light’ which she purports to do for the Lord of Light. In Welsh myth, the fourth aspect of Sovereignty which Matthews identifies is that of the ‘Black Maiden’, the ‘Voice of the Land’ which ultimately determines who will rule the land (as the female deity, fecund ‘Mother Earth’). For this reason, it is often portrayed in Celtic myths that the rightful king cannot gain access to the “hallows of the land” without a successful encounter with this ‘Loathly Lady’, who is capable of transforming from hag into ‘beautiful maiden’, generally after the king kisses her or consents to sleeping with her (1989, p. 235).

It is in doing so, that the destined king becomes a “beggar at the door of love” – a type of mythic initiate into a secret brotherhood without which he has not earned the right to rule (Black 2010, p. 401). After receiving the sovereign kiss (in other words, after undergoing his symbolic initiation), the chosen initiate attains a “higher state of consciousness” in which the “monkey mind” which “distracts us from spiritual realities” is ‘tamed’ (2010, pp. 402–403). Jon Snow’s death and resurrection can be read as a literal initiation of this kind, gaining him access to the occult secrets which give him the right to rule. Bran Stark’s journey to the North, which transforms him – in a similarly initiatic process – into the ‘Keeper of the World’s Memories,



also gains him this right. However, the 8<sup>th</sup> Season of *Game of Thrones* is not considered within the analytic spectrum of this study because it is not based on R. R. Martin's text.

In line with Matthews's analysis of the rotation of Sovereignty's vassal at certain points (for example at the turn of a season) within an Arthurian myth, this defeat of the Maiden by the Crone symbolises an upturn of events – the Maiden aspect of Sovereignty is supposed to succeed. However, in this case of Melisandre's transformation in season 6 the Crone as won. The metaphoric transformation of Sovereignty has gone wrong. In terms of Arthurian legend (to which reference is made earlier in the 1st season when Melisandre instructs Stannis to withdraw a burning sword from the flaming statue of one of the 'old Gods' or 'The Seven'), winter has succeeded over spring and the order of nature is reversed. Stannis has proven to be the unfit companion of Sovereignty. Perhaps, it may be suggested, Stannis's wife, Selyse (played by Tara Fitzgerald), is similarly the wrong representative of the Goddess of the Land, for it is Daenerys Targaryen (played by Emilia Clarke) who is the true destined ruler of Westeros, awaiting a prince who is more powerful than Stannis. The question of why Melisandre does not resurrect him, when she is obviously able to perform such feats, is answered when we meet the rightful heir. It is indeed Jon Snow who is more of an Arthurian prototype than any of Westeros's proposed kings. His origin, just like that of the mythic Arthur, is questionable seeing as the identity of his mother is kept secret. His father, King Eddard Stark (played by Sean Bean) had been a most noble and honourable man and Jon had even survived the tests inadvertently set for him by his ruthless step-mother, Lady Catelyn Stark (played by Michelle Fairley), who represents the omnipresence of the Mother aspect of Sovereignty from the earliest days of his existence (refer to Chapter IV *Sovereignty*).

It is in terms of this understanding of Lady Melisandre's role as vassal of Sovereignty within *Game of Thrones* that the nature of her role as mythical witch can be described as problematic. Even though she uses necromancy and sentences innocents to death, Lady Melisandre does seem to act with the best interests of Westeros in mind. Whether or not she has been instructed in her actions by some 'earthly' ruling authority over the order of Red Priests/Priestesses or whether she acts on her own whim (for example by following the directions purportedly given to her by the "Lord of Light") is unknown. It is because of this uncertainty that the nature of her actions cannot be described as purely good or evil. Fans of Daenerys Targaryen and John

Snow may agree that Melisandre's actions are good based on her efforts to unite them in the fight against Westeros's common enemy, the White Walkers. supporters of Cersei Lannister may disagree, however the understanding of the moralistic portrayal of Cersei as the evil step-mother in terms of Arthurian myth is somewhat satisfying.

A reading of *Game of Thrones* as a modern myth structured along the lines of an Arthurian myth as explained by Matthews posits Lady Melisandre as the active agent of Sovereignty who transforms from one aspect of Sovereignty to the other to bring about the actions of the story which lead to the development of the female protagonist or princess – Daenerys Targaryen. Lesley Lawton (2016, p. 3) reminds us that “as Propp has demonstrated to be the case with folk tale or fairy tale, the characters in medieval romances tend to perform narrative functions rather than having an individualised interiority of the sort we may associate with a certain kind of modern fiction. Stereotypes are thus an inevitable consequence of this type of writing for they provide an instantly recognisable shorthand for certain categories of behaviour or narrative possibility”. Lady Melisandre is not only a character based in Medieval romance, but she is also a character in a modern fiction. Lawton's statement can be applied to an understanding of her function as a conflation of all three of the aspects of Britain's pre-Christian Sovereignty; so too can modern film analysis describe her as an embodiment of the monstrous feminine in an apocalyptic film series containing elements of the horror genre.

The dichotomy between good and evil was not as apparent in pre-Christian Western Europe as it became in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century and onward; this means that an understanding of Britain's Sovereignty as apparent in Breton Lays and Welsh myth, for example, did not distinguish as starkly between the moral and immoral acts of its characters. Instead, as Lawton explains (2016, p. 3), their function determined their behaviour. If we are to read Melisandre as a functional character in terms of Matthews's analysis, then the morality of her actions must take a backseat to their much more important purpose – function. An understanding of the Red Priestess's actions based on her function within the cultural myth that is *Game of Thrones*, reveals her role as Sovereignty – Maiden, Mother and Crone. A modern reading of the Red Priestess's character based in film theory and the theory of the Monstrous Feminine as described by Creed, will reveal that she also contains within her portrayal several Medieval stereotypes hailing from the time of the witch trials and thereafter. O'Brien (2015, 'Melisandre:

priestess or witch?') writes that Melisandre's "religious practices blur the lines between the mystical and the magickal – a line which early modern people often understood as the divide between the Godly and the diabolic". The dichotomy of godliness and evil, which was at its most stringent in the Middle Ages (as detailed in Chapter III) can also be linked here to what Kristeva describes as woman's relation to biblical abomination (1982, p. 17). Kristeva (1982, pp. 17–18) tells us "abjection elicits more archaic resonances that are culturally prior to sin; through them it again assumes its biblical status, and beyond it that of defilement in primitive societies".

The act of ritual sacrifice is primordially evil in terms of religious discourse; it is prior to sin because the Christian God's religion was not present in order to challenge it on a moral level. However, scores of Christian enforcers made use of and carried out different forms of the death penalty in that same God's name, calling these acts 'righteous'. Melisandre uses the Lord of Light's rhetoric in the same fashion, justifying the deaths of her victims in terms of a type of religious rhetoric. This is an inversion of the known actions of religious authorities who burnt witches during the various witch trials in the West. Lawton (2016, p. 3) explains that "in many medieval romances (women are) often doubled with a negative example of femininity... Where women overtly display power, they are often wicked." This is indeed the case with Melisandre if one considers that she burnt an innocent child at the stake. Lawton tells us, with regard to the Breton Lays she analyses, that (2016, p. 3) "stereotypes may be deployed in literary works in ways which may disrupt or even subvert the basic type". Melisandre does indeed disrupt the basic type of an Inquisitor burning a witch when she becomes both witch and officiant over a burnt sacrifice. She is displayed as being wicked in this act. However, the purpose of the act – Stannis's success in battle – seems to justify it. In this case she is subverting the stereotype which is most often associated with the Western European witch: that of the heretic who is burnt at the stake.

The parallel here between Old Testament sacrifice and Melisandre's priestly actions is also apparent. Not only does Melisandre act as priest, but the value of these actions is questionable because, though her gender would hint at their sinfulness, her rank as priest nullifies this disparity. Audiences are uncertain as to whether she is good or evil, until in the *Red Woman* she is portrayed as not only a priest and heretic, but also a witch. Melisandre's diverse and

dichotomous roles blur the lines in an overtly abject way, as (Kristeva 1982, p. 1) “a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” expertly portrayed in the smoky face which is revealed in the mirror and which also reveals this divide between her dark and light aspects. O’Brien (2015, ‘Melisandre: priestess or witch?’) describes her as “the Merlin to Stannis Baratheon’s King Arthur”, though the greater scope of the series suggests (note that O’Brien’s thesis was written prior to the release of season 6 in June of 2016) that she aspires to become more of a Merlin to Jon Snow’s Arthur. It is Stannis’s unworthiness which leads to his death; Melisandre cannot serve an unworthy king if she is determined to perform the role of the triune Goddess’s supernatural ‘enforcer’, the land’s ‘personification’. Melisandre’s religious allegiance can be described as follows: Melisandre is servant to R’hllor’, the Lord of Light, who is the lord of fire, magick and prophecy, reminding us of the pagan religions which were demonized by the Roman Catholic Church in Western Europe. Westeros’s official religion consists of worship of ‘The Seven’. O’Brien (2015, ‘The Seven and R’hllor’) explains that:

The official religion of Westeros is worship of The Seven: the Father, the Mother, the Maiden, the Warrior, the Smith, the Crone and the Stranger. There are several strong parallels between The Seven and the Roman Catholic Church in Medieval and early modern Europe. It is essentially a monotheistic religion as The Seven are seven aspects of one deity, invoking the Holy Trinity. The Father correlates with God the Father while the Mother and the Maiden have Marian connotations...Without making a simplistic comparison with the Devil, the motifs used to represent Melisandre’s god, R’hllor, the Lord of Light– notably fire, magi(c) and prophecy – have counterparts in Medieval and early modern religious iconography. Historian Stuart Clark argues in *Thinking with Demons* (1997) that witches were viewed by early modern people as practitioners of a Satanic religion, which inverted Christian social order. It was this heresy that caused the fiery executions of witches in many jurisdictions. Like witches, R’hllor’s priests and priestesses are clearly viewed by servants of the Seven as a subversive threat to the religious conformity of Westeros. Early modern witches were believed to be part of a religious inversion of Godly society. In *Game of Thrones* Melisandre is in many ways the early modern Christian’s nightmare made real. She has tangible magi(c)al power, political authority, and she is winning (at least early in the series) new converts to her cause.

Medieval witches were believed, by some, to have been the agents of some underground cult (2015, 'The Seven and R'hllor', para. 6). As an agent of a contrary religion to the mainstream religion of Westeros, Melisandre does seem akin to a representation of a Medieval witch who is winning other converts to her cause, challenging political and religious authority. Her actions in this regard, make her the perfect Medieval political aggressor because she openly challenges the established religion by burning statues of 'The Seven', challenging the king's authority. She also challenges the bounds of sexual propriety, an act implicit in the person of the Medieval witch, when she encourages Stannis Baratheon to have intercourse with her. She sanctifies the act by describing it as a ritual in which he is 'giving himself to the Lord of Light', much like a metaphoric sacrifice, the kind of initiation that would make him fit to rule (Black 2010, p. 401). The 'profanity' of such a correlation is obvious. Intercourse with the devil was one of the assumed transgressions of Medieval witches; depictions of witches, young and old, can be viewed in countless sources which include the prints of Hans Baldung Grien (1514) and illustrated sources like *The Witch* (c.1609–1616) and *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634).

Tying in with Medieval notions of woman's sexual ambiguity, witches were feared for their power to seduce men and for their susceptibility to the wiles of the devil and his agents (Mortimer 2009, p. 52). Freudian theorists draw parallels between the apparent ambivalent sexuality of females and castration anxiety in Medieval males. Female sexuality was used by the clergy to terrify Medieval men; the sermons of Jaques de Vitry (c.1170–1240) in Alcuin Blamires's *Women Defamed and Woman Defended* (1992, pp. 144–147) bear testimony to this fact:

Some things are so bare that there is nothing by which to get hold of them. Just as whoever tries to grasp a sunbeams opens his had to find it holds nothing, and just as a round glass container lacking handles to hold is not easily grasped by the hand and quickly slips away so it is with woman: roving and lecherous once she has been stirred by the devil's hoe. Put a frog on a silk cloth and it'll never rest until it jumps back into the mud; it cannot stay in a clean place...she will bring tears to your eyes – but *their* eyes are schooled in weeping. Do not believe her, because 'the iniquity of a man is better than a well-meaning woman'. When the time comes she will spread her wings, since if an opportunity discloses itself she'll fly off and quit. In this regard a woman

can be called a virtuoso artist, as they say; because she has one skill – that is, one way of deceiving – more than the devil.

In his *Sermones Vulgares*, Jaques liked using ‘exempla’ which he focussed on specific social groups and/or professions. He had been a crusader. It is ironic that he was also a ‘supporter of the female religious movement associated with Mary of Oignies’, making his ideas and opinions of women even more controversial seeing as he was one of the more lenient representatives of his class and social position. His sermons were a scathing example of the general sentiments towards women that were circulating in Western Europe leading up to the Middle Ages. He uses the rhetorical language which writers like Kathleen Biddick (1995, p. 29) explain place the author inside an “authoratorial space” which offers him a kind of “insight into the witch’s (in this case woman’s) actions”. The image of the frog, which is reminiscent of Martin’s Maggy the frog, refers to the impure ‘nature’ which was ascribed to women by early Medieval patriarchal society. Similarly, in *Game of Thrones*, there are men whose allegiance to the powerful Melisandre is ambivalent. Sir Davos is such an example. Melisandre’s powers of coercion bring about Stannis’s sacrifice of his daughter, Shireen. Interestingly Davos, who had initially attempted to dissuade him from following through with the sacrifice, eventually becomes the priestess’s confidant. Perhaps this is because he can see beyond her actions (and gender) and recognize the overarching results of her actions. After Stannis’s defeat, Sir Davos is forced – by his own good nature – to help her flee. He gets to know her, and he sees that much of what she says does indeed come to pass. Her body language and sudden withdrawal after Stannis’s defeat are proof of her anguish over his death and her resulting relatability. It is Sir Davos who, in the 7th Season, suggests that she be summoned to resurrect Jon Snow and, after Jon Snow’s successful resurrection, he never again questions her abilities. In fact, he becomes her firm supporter, endearing her to important political figures as a kind of spokesperson.

Mention should also be made of the Red Priestess’s heritage. Hailing from an island far to the East, Melisandre’s powers and her god are suggested to be foreign, mysterious as well as powerful. In the Middle Ages all foreign religions were considered to stem from the devil and the pagan gods were portrayed as demons and devils. Furthermore, though a distinction was made in the Western Europe of the Middle Ages between witches who used white (helpful,

healing) magick and those who used black (harmful, dangerous) magick, all were tried in court for heresy and could be burned with other heretics (2015, *Not the wicked witch*). Melisandre's use of blood magick equates to *maleficia* specifically because it requires victims. In the Middle Ages the use of blood for rituals presumably required witches to steal and slaughter babies and innocents. Eggars' *The Witch* (2015) provides shining examples of this, for it is not long after moving to the New England countryside that the family's young baby, Samuel, is stolen by a witch for his blood. This act of poaching babies, which was associated also with witches' ability to administer abortions, metaphorically linked them with the unsanctioned knowledge of bodily functions, which granted them an understanding of and control over life and death (De Beauvoir 1997, pp. 176–177).

The portrayal of Melisandre, especially in relation to her witch counterparts in the series, is expertly done to help destabilize existing notions of witches and their practices and beliefs stemming from before the Middle Ages. Not only does her Maiden-like aspect endear her to her peers and even superiors in the series, but Melisandre's Crone-like powers successfully establish her unquestionable role in the political events of Westeros and the lives of its most important characters. In terms of the Motherly aspect of Sovereignty, she enters the lives of both Daenerys and Jon in a maternal role, bringing them together in the act of saving the land, whom she comes to personify all the more leading up to and culminating in the *Red Woman* episode. In doing so, the Red Priestess, Melisandre, not only embodies, but brings to question the very nature of several known witch stereotypes.

Though she is outwardly beautiful while wearing the enchanting necklace, Melisandre is also terrifying without it. As a result of this incredibly timeless nature, she wields immense power, power which she does not fail to yield whenever necessary and which makes her wicked (2016, p. 3) and abject (Creed 1993, p. 73). Thankfully, in the 7<sup>th</sup> season of the series, it turns out that she does indeed have Westeros's best interests at heart; she becomes instrumental in uniting the forces for 'good', championed by Daenerys Targaryen and Jon Snow, against the forces of the Night King as in many modern apocalyptic films. By embodying this wide array of characteristics and by drawing on different sources from not only the Medieval era, Melisandre subverts all known beliefs regarding witches by embodying them all at once and to varying degrees at different times. The ambiguity of some of her actions thus makes it difficult to judge

her character, which leads to the conclusion that, if anything, Melisandre can be described as abject. She rebels, challenges, and subverts all that is known about the stereotypes which she inhabits; these she also adopts interchangeably, leaving her viewers perplexed and enthralled.



## Chapter VIII – Conclusion



his dissertation, *The Monstrous Feminine and the Abject in HBO's Game of Thrones*, investigates how Lady Melisandre, HBO's Red Witch (seasons 1 – 7), manages to tantalize and enthrall while simultaneously terrifying her admirers, which leads to a subversion of the witch trope within the context of the Post-Modern Western film industry, notably within apocalyptic films as well as the horror genre of films. This is due to Melisandre's abject nature (Kristeva 1982), her relation to the monstrous feminine (Creed 1993), as well as to her conflation of the three stereotypical visual representations of the Pre-Christian Goddess or 'Sovereignty', namely the 'Maiden', the 'Mother' and the 'Crone' which are traceable in early Breton myths (Matthews 1989) and Lays (Lawton 2016). Not only does Martin's Melisandre conform to Medieval notions of witches with their implied 'closeness' to Nature and the (pagan) spirit of the land (Mortimer 2009), but she also conforms to modern standards of filmic female portrayals in horror films (Mulvey 1999).

In order to discuss this conflation of the different aspects of Lady Melisandre into one, chapter three explores the historical context within which women were more readily branded as witches in the West of Europe during the Middle Ages than men (Mortimer 2009, p. 51). The religion of Melisandre in Martin's *Game of Thrones* has many parallels with the Christian religion (O'Brien 2015, 'The Seven and R'hllor', para. 2); the worship of 'The Seven' in HBO's series "evokes the Holy Trinity" and "the motifs used to represent Melisandre's god, R'hllor, the Lord of Light— notably fire, magi(c) and prophecy – have counterparts in Medieval and early modern religious iconography". In the West of Europe, women were included in the ranks of heretics during the Middle Ages because their relation to the original sin and fall of man (Mortimer 2009, p. 52) led to common misconceptions about their sexual ambiguity. Prophecy was considered one of their many 'occult' crafts, the proclivity for which they obtained by making a deal with the devil (Levack, 1996, p. 36), implying sexual intercourse with his demons and/or incubi. In 1184 Pope Lucius III issued his *Decree Against Heretics* (**Appendix 1**), arming secular courts to hunt and prosecute witches. Melisandre truly embodies early modern Christians' "nightmare made real" (O'Brien 2015, 'The Seven and R'hllor', para. 2) because "like witches, R'hllor's

priests and priestesses are clearly viewed by servants of the Seven as a subversive threat to the religious conformity of Westeros”.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation, *Sovereign of Britain – the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone*, discusses the presentation of powerful women in Breton Lays and pre-Christian Western European myths, which reveal that witches in the early literature of the British Isles played a functional role in these tales and not a subversive one. Alternating mainly between three stereotypical visual representations of the ‘Maiden’, the ‘Mother’ and the ‘Crone’ (Matthews 1989, p. 26), the ‘sovereign’ women in early Breton myths were feared as a result of the presumed closeness between their gender and outwardly mysterious natural processes. As prototypical modern myth, *Game of Thrones* draws on polytheism and historical accounts of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. The functions of the triune pre-Christian ‘Sovereignty’ (the Maiden, Mother and Crone) could for this reason be applied to the film series’ many witches in this chapter, in order to discover whether or not HBO’s witches are portrayed in line with Medieval stereotypes of women or rather with earlier notions inherited from paganism and the goddess-centred cults that predated Christianity in Europe. It was found that Lady Melisandre, in particular, combines the three pre-Christian stereotypes of the goddess into one priestess-witch persona. This adds to her subversive façade and brings into question the reasoning behind her portrayal as both a Post-Modern (more feminist oriented) and Medieval (mythically functional) witch.

Touching on the purpose of this research dissertation, psychoanalytic texts such as those of Carl Jung are referenced by this chapter. Estés (2008, p. 4) is one quoted example, who posits that “Fairy tales, myths, and stories provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we can pick out and pick up the path left ... (to) knowing”. With ‘knowing’ she refers to knowledge of self, in other words the maturation process of every individual who is either participating in or emulating a text/myth. *Game of Thrones* is a modern myth; however, it does not only offer patterns of behaviour for emulation, it also serves as an apocalyptic film (Hamonic 2017, pp. 6–23) in that it has several “meanings and messages”. Texts like this one “critique the existing social order’, and “respond(ing) to social crises”, in many cases ‘warning people to change their ways’. In *Game of Thrones*’ case, several social dilemmas, including but not limited to

issues such as global warming, discrimination and class disparities caused by capitalism are brought into stark focus.

Western society's view of women, for example, and their inherited ties to magick and monstrosity is actively critiqued by the series' dichotomous characters such as Melisandre, Bran Stark and Tiron Lannister, all of whom are stereotypical 'outcasts', although their power and influence in the series are almost inadmissible. Film texts as a method for social critique offer a wealth of insight into existing societies' biases, beliefs and ideals (Kelly 2017). Fairy Tales and modern myths such as *Game of Thrones* need to be analysed for that reason, their underlying meaning and messages understood so that social imbalances (like biases, flaws in commonly held beliefs and injustices of different kinds) can be recognised and addressed. An example of the functioning of this process, Lawton (2016, p. 3), tells us can be found in many Medieval romances where women are "often doubled with a negative example of femininity" so that the appropriate gender roles can be followed. This 'doubling' of performative roles in stories can be utilized to good effect in post-modern representations of witches (as is done successfully in such text and film series as *Harry Potter*) and this dissertation attempts to suggest that this practice should become more common-place in Post-Modern film. A reading of *Game of Thrones* as a modern myth of the apocalyptic kind reveals both positive and negative roles for its female (and male) characters, which sets a good example for other film series of its kind, especially those which utilize the trope of the witch.

Though women's association with magick and witchcraft in the Western Europe of the Middle Ages was partly due to the fact that magick is situated within the realm of abjection, just like nature and women also are (De Beauvoir 1997, p. 171), the 21<sup>st</sup> Century should by all accounts have freed itself from such outdated beliefs. In my opinion, gender should not be automatically implied when mention is made of magick and witchcraft, which is why studies such as this one intend to challenge 'normalized' associations between women and that which is 'taboo' and 'other' (Assman 2007, pp. 29–30). In order to understand the origins of such beliefs, the different witches in HBO's series's implied relationship with both the Monstrous Feminine and magick is explored in Chapter 5, *The Monstrous Feminine and the Abject*. This chapter explores the reasons behind why women were considered to represent cyclic Nature herself to such an extent that this association often led to accusations of witchcraft in the Middle Ages

(De Beauvoir 1997, p. 229). In a symbolic, metaphoric but also intimately physical sense the strongest women in primitive societies represented the fecundity of fertile earth. This powerful association meant that they sometimes threatened others with their integrity of being, (Lurie 1981, p. 2) or because they potentially threatened to castrate men (Mortimer 2005, p. 52).

Chapter 6 of this dissertation, entitled *Witch Stereotypes Illustrated*, explores the different Western illustrations of witches from the Middle Ages and also the Post-Modern era. *Game of Thrones* is a modern myth in that it makes use of fairy tale mechanisms like a prototypical Arthurian Myth. In this sense, the characters in this film text step into a functional role to represent stereotypes and their predicted behaviour (Lawton 2016, p. 9). There is currently a trend in the film production industry where fairy tales are retold and altered to appeal to modern audiences (*Red Riding Hood* and *Beastly* in 2011, *Maleficent* in 2014, *Cinderella* in 2015, *The Huntsman* in 2016, *Beauty and the Beast* in 2017 and *Snow White*, which is expected to premier in 2021); the morals of the stories, along with the nature of their characters and the consequences of said characters' actions are altered to make these stories more appealing to public audiences (Redden 2005, p. 232) and their children and, in this process, these ancient stories lose a great deal of their symbolic value and meaning.

In the context of the maturation process of humanity (Jung in 1997, p. 171), the purpose of Sovereignty's representatives in myth and Breton Lays is to bring about the necessary tension that leads to transformation and maturation. Viewed within the overarching events of a story, this function is positive and is far from being 'evil' in the moral sense. The darkness, the abyss which is often related to the realm of the feminine, the monstrous and abject, is in fact the transformative crypt/womb into which the initiate steps (Black 2010, p. 288–289) in order to grow into a mature individual (Estés 2008, p. 4). Hated and feared at first, an experience of its interior inspires strength, transformation and rebirth, hence the concept of sacrifices made by ancient societies. This metaphoric darkness represents the unconscious, the home of the subliminal and uncontrollable forces which, when they are not integrated properly in the psyche, threaten to break free and jeopardize mental, emotional and even physical health (2008, p. 30). It is for this reason that reconciliation with the different aspects of the monstrous feminine', represented in the West by stereotypes of the witch, is of paramount importance

because, without her transformational influence, humanity struggles to face its inner darkness in order to reach integration and therefore maturity.

The penultimate chapter of this dissertation, *Filmic Portrayal of Melisandre*, presents a reading of Melisandre from the 6<sup>th</sup> season of the series *Game of Thrones*. In the episode *The Red Woman*, she is seen transforming from a gorgeous, full-bosomed young woman into an ageless Crone (Movieweb 2016, 'Melisandre's big twist explained'). This transformation is metaphorical and reveals her embodiment of the different aspects of the pre-Christian Goddess of the Bretons, Sovereignty (Matthews 1989, p. 14). The application of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection (1983) is applied to Melisandre's portrayal in this scene and, with dark lighting and ominous music, the Red Woman's symbolic ties to darkness and mystery are revealed on the screen. Women's relation to that which is 'other' (De Beauvoir 1997, p. 71), 'deviant' (Mortimer 2009, p. 52) and monstrous (Creed 1993, p. 9) are often tied to this notion of their dark and implicitly sinful nature. Theological treatises stemming from before the 10<sup>th</sup> century posited women as sinners because they are the daughters of Eve (Mortimer 2009, p. 53–58); however, as this dissertation illustrates, this kind of logic – which argues for woman's inherently sinful nature – is fraudulent.

Brian Levack (1996, p. 36–37) tells us that several Ecumenical Councils throughout the first ten centuries sought to alter the Bible to such an extent that all references to 'occult' practices, as well as to Judaic symbolism and female figures of authority, were either misconstrued or removed. The animosity with which Jews and their interpretation of sacred texts were dealt can be traced back to these councils, with resulting theological texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487 in Rodker 1948) being created which contain as much scorn and hatred for Jews as pagans, witches and other heretical sinners (Biddick 1995, p. 25). These 'classes' of 'anti-religious' individuals were feared for their potential to distort and invert social order; O'Brien (2015 'Witches of Westeros') claims that this is the true root of Melisandre's power in HBO's series. Other than presenting a threat to organized religion and/or political authority, women in Post-Modern text often fulfil another purpose, which is also discussed in this chapter and which references the film analyses of Laura Mulvey (1999).

An application of Mulvey's (1999, p. 840) analysis of the portrayal of women in horror films tells us that, in the context of the film industry, woman has become a 'sexual object' who satisfies the primordial erotic phantasies of man (Kristeva 1982, p. 58–59), though she is also a source of contention; that same "paradox of phallogentrism" which makes of her an object of voyeuristic eroticism also awakens in her (male) viewers the "threat" posed by "her real absence of a penis" (Creed 1993, p. 129). This ties back in with notions of women threatening to castrate men with their "toothed vaginas" (1993, p. 105), making them threatening and fearful.

Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of the argument that witches, as inherited stereotypes of that which is sinful and 'evil', often also fulfil important and positive functions in mythic and modern texts. They test the mettle of princes and kings (1989, pp. 22–26), training their offspring to be adept and strong, weaving the fate of those around her as she goes (Lawton 2016, p. 3), like Lady Caitlin Stark who protects and advises her sons, the future kings of Westeros. As the mourners of the dead, the comforters of the ill and the treacherous beggars who, when scorned, curse those who wrong them, women are often perceived as outsiders (De Beauvoir 1997, p. 171) – as, for example Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne and Tituba who were the first three women accused of witchcraft in the Salem witch trials because of their low social standing (2011, *History of the Salem Witch Trials*). These women represent what Kristeva calls the "invisible border" towards which the enchanted wander and from which the faint-hearted flee (Kristeva 1982, p. 91).

In conclusion, this dissertation comments on the urgent need for Post-Modern society to recognize and be reconciled with its own inner darkness, in a psychoanalytic sense (Jung in Dawson & Young-Eisendrath 1997, p. 191). In the film industry, for one, witches (and women in general) should not be cast in flat, static roles (Mulvey 1999, p. 199 and 845) unless they are balanced out by a character of their opposite stature, or unless their flat and static portrayal is in itself a means of critiquing gender disparities. There is a need for women and witches, as separate entities with their own symbols and meaning, to be re-evaluated in terms of their functions, not to mention the witch trope as a whole needs to incorporate more members of other genders and orientations. Film series need to reflect this like, for example, J.K. Rowling's

*Harry Potter*, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Terry Pratchett's numerous series containing witches and other magicians and, of course, the source text used to create HBO's film series, J.R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*). *Game of Thrones* is an example of a text which casts both males and females in the roles of magician/sorceress/witch and which also offers a myriad of alternative roles for characters of different genders. Martin's Red Witch, Melisandre, has served the crucial purpose in the modern West of bringing into focus inherited ideas and beliefs about witches which desperately needed to be re-evaluated and questioned.

Hopefully, the popularity and profusion of witch-friendly and women-friendly texts will continue the trend of restoring balance to our understanding of women and women's roles in society today. The association between woman and magick, the abject and the monstrous feminine is not necessarily a negative one in the sense that these intimate connections between abject beings, places and things is also a source of power and joined authority. As Jex Blackmore (Pierce 2016, '\*The Witch\*'s 'Satanic Uprising') iterates, films need to be created which "feature(s) a declaration of feminine independence".

What remains to be done after a study like this is to utilize it to raise awareness of the nature of the association between women and witchcraft. This can be done by bringing to the table an understanding of woman's dual nature within the context of texts and sources which contain her primal, pre-Christian essence – an essence that is not inherently heretical or evil, but which is magickal and mysterious (Geddes & Grosset 2007, p. 461). The dual nature of woman as good and bad mother, nurturing wet nurse and relentless force needs to be understood in terms of her function as an aspect of the psyche of all individuals, not only of women (Jung 1977, p. 102). A fully functional individual needs to balance all aspects of their psyche, conscious (male) and subconscious (female) alike, a purpose for which the witch as mobilizing force is perfectly suited. Furthermore the roles of female protagonists in modern myths and stories need to be re-evaluated in terms of their function as symbols of the subconscious realm that need to be retrieved, after maturation, into the conscious realm so that the psyche can achieve integration (Estés 2008, p. 37).

Lady Melisandre, from *Game of Thrones* similarly subverts known witch tropes within the horror genre. She is portrayed as a fully rounded, abject yet alluring (2017, p. 9–11), heretical yet priestly witch who takes on different roles at varying intervals throughout the series in order to precipitate the action and bring about the maturation and development of the main characters. At the same time, she has her own motivations for her actions; she makes her own decisions and harbours her own thoughts and beliefs like an autonomous individual. The Red Priestess can be considered to conform in part to post-modern notions of a romanticized witch (following the trend of such film series as *Charmed, 1998–2006*) because of her outward beauty and her autonomy. Arguably, her most endearing trait can be defined as her proclivity to wield power as a form of rebellion against authority (Wallace 2018, para. 2). She also uses this power as a means of establishing different kinds of sovereignty. Like Thomasin in Eggar’s 2015 film, *The Witch*, Melisandre claims her own autonomy and participates actively in the decision-making process which grants her authority in and over her own life.

The limitations of this study suggest that further research can be done about the original fairy tales in which women’s (and men’s) functions are portrayed on a psychoanalytic level. *Game of Thrones* as a modern myth structured along the lines of an Arthurian myth posits Lady Melisandre as the active agent of Sovereignty who transforms from one aspect to the other to bring about the actions of the story which lead to the development of the female protagonist, princess – Daenerys Targaryen (and, by extension, her male counterpart Aegon Targaryen – Jon Snow). *Game of Thrones* is a modern myth in that it makes use of fairy tale mechanisms as a prototypical Arthurian Myth. There are many films and film series that include witches and which have influenced the portrayal of the witch trope in Western visual culture in the Post-Modern era. Such modern fairy tales (original modern works of literature and not retellings of older myths) when understood in the light of the functions of their characters can offer new roles for women to inhabit that are powerful, complex and fulfilling (Deb, S 2019). Films in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century should comment on and critique the social injustices of the past and the skewed power structures which led to the witch hunts in the Middle Ages. Like *In ‘RBG,’ the Life and Times of a Beloved and Controversial Supreme Court Justice* (2018), they should celebrate the contribution both men and women can make to the development of the global community, both intellectually and socially (Scott 2018, para. 7).



Woman may be ambiguous, ‘other’ and, at times, monstrous – a myth in herself which “cannot be grasped or encompassed”, but she is also potentially and essentially the one who regenerates, heals and restores to order that which has been damaged and bruised (Jung 1966, p. 218). Melisandre, as representative of the new kind of portrayal of witches offers religious/spiritual instruction on how to navigate the threats of this world. She is both a modern and mythic representation of the ‘West’ – the land in which she operates, one who actively participates in the problem-solving function of saving it. The apocalyptic landscape which has become the Post-Modern West eagerly awaits the advent of more powerful textual and filmic roles for women who, in their own witchy way, have the potential to bring about the earth’s transformation and regeneration.

*∞ End*

## Appendix i:

œ Burr, GL 2001, *The witch-persecutions*, viewed 02 September 2020,  
<<https://www.globalgreybooks.com/read-online/witch-persecutions/read-online.html>>

### THE RECANTATION OF LOOS



*elrio, Disquisitiones Magicae*, lib. v, appendix I. Latin.

It was during this persecution at Trier that Comelius Loos, a scholar of Dutch birth who held a professorship in the university of that city, dared to protest against both the persecution itself and the superstitions out of which it grew. Failing in his appeals to the authorities, he wrote a book to set forth his views; but the manuscript was seized in the hands of the printer, and Loos himself thrown into prison. Thence he was brought out, in the spring Of 1593, and, before the assembled church dignitaries of the place, pronounced a solemn recantation. This recantation has been preserved by the Jesuit Delrio in the great work which in 1599–1600 he published in support of the persecution. Thus Delrio tells the story:

And, finally, as I have made mention of Losæus Callidius, who tried by a thousand arts to make public the book which he had written in defence of the witches (and some fear that even yet some evil demon may bring this about), I have brought for an antidote the Recantation signed by him. Its authentic and so-called original copy is in the possession of a devout and most honorable man, Joannes Baxius, J. U. Lie. (whose energy and zeal against this nefarious heresy God will some day reward), from whom I have received the following transcript, certified by a notary:

I, Cornelius Losæus Callidius, born at the town of Gouda in Holland, but now (on account of a certain treatise On Trite and False Witchcraft, [14] rashly and presumptuously written without the knowledge and permission of the superiors of this place, shown by me to others, and then sent to be printed at Cologne) arrested and imprisoned in the Imperial Monastery of St.

Maximin, near Trier, by order of the Most Reverend and Most Illustrious Lord, the Papal Nuncio, Octavius, Bishop of Tricarico: whereas I am informed of a surety that in the aforesaid book and also in certain letters of mine on the same subject sent clandestinely to the clergy and town council of Trier, and to others (for the purpose of hindering the execution of justice against the witches, male and female), are contained many articles which are not only erroneous and scandalous, but also suspected of heresy and smacking of the crime of treason, as being seditious and foolhardy, against the common opinion of decisions and bulls of theological teachers and the decisions and bulls of the Supreme Pontiffs, and contrary to the practice and to the statutes and laws of the magistrates and judges, not only of this Archdiocese of Trier, but of other provinces and principalities, I do therefore revoke, condemn, reject, and repudiate the said articles, in the order in which they are here subjoined.

1. In the first place, I revoke, condemn, reject, and censure the idea (which both in words and writing I have often and before many persons pertinaciously asserted, and which I wished to be the head and front of this my disputation) that the things which are written about the bodily transportation or translation of witches, male and female, are altogether fanciful and must be reckoned the empty superstition; [and this I recant] both because it smacks of rank heresy and because this opinion partakes of sedition and hence savors of the crime of treason.

2. For (and this in the second place I recant), in the letters which I have clandestinely sent to sundry persons, I have pertinaciously, without solid reasons, alleged against the magistracy that the [aerial] flight of witches is false and imaginary; asserting, moreover, that the wretched creatures are compelled by the severity of the torture to confess things which they have never done, and that by cruel butchery innocent blood is shed and by a new alchemy gold and silver coined from human blood.

3. By these and by other things of the same sort, partly in private conversations among the people, partly in sundry letters addressed to both the magistracies, [15] I have accused of tyranny to their subjects the superiors and the judges.

4. And consequently, inasmuch as the Most Reverend and Most Illustrious Archbishop and Prince-Elector of Trier not only permits witches, male and female, to be subjected in his diocese to deserved punishment, but has also ordained laws regulating the method and costs of judicial

procedure against witches, I have with heedless temerity tacitly insinuated the charge of tyranny against the aforesaid Elector of Trier.

5. I revoke and condemn, moreover, the following conclusions of mine, to wit: that there are no witches who renounce God, pay worship to the Devil, bring storms by the Devils aid, and do other like things, but that all these things are dreams.

6. Also, that magic (*magia*) ought not to be called witchcraft (*maleficium*), nor magicians (*magi*) witches (*malefici*), and that the passage of Holy Scripture, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (*Maleficos non patieris vivere*), [16] is to be understood of those who by a natural use of natural poisons inflict death.

7. That no compact does or can exist between the Devil and a human being.

8. That devils do not assume bodies.

9. That the life of Hilarion written by St. Jerome is not authentic.

10. That there is no sexual intercourse between the Devil and human beings.

11. That neither devils nor witches can raise tempests, rainstorms, hail-storms, and the like, and that the things said about these are mere dreams.

12. That spirit and form apart from matter cannot be seen by man.

13. That it is rash to assert that whatever devils can do, witches also can do through their aid.

14. That the opinion that a superior demon can cast out an inferior is erroneous and derogatory to Christ.[17]

15. That the Popes in their bulls do not say that magicians and witches perpetrate such things (as are mentioned above).

16. That the Roman Pontiffs granted the power to proceed against witches, lest if they should refuse they might be unjustly accused of magic, just as some of their predecessors had been justly accused of it.

These assertions, all and singular, with many calumnies, falsehoods, and sycophancies, toward the magistracy, both secular and ecclesiastical, spitefully, immodestly, and falsely poured forth, without cause, with which my writings on magic teem, I hereby expressly and deliberately condemn, revoke, and reject, earnestly beseeching the pardon of God and of my superiors for what I have done, and solemnly promising that in future I will neither in word nor in writing, by myself or through others, in whatsoever place it may befall me to be, teach, promulgate, defend, or assert any of these things. If I shall do to the contrary, I subject myself thenceforward, as if it were now, to all the penalties of the law against relapsed heretics, recusants, seditious offenders, traitors, backbiters, sycophants, who have been openly convicted, and also to those ordained against perjurers. I submit myself also to arbitrary correction, whether by the Archbishop of Trier or by any other magistrates under whom it may befall me to dwell, and who may be certified of my relapse and of my broken faith, that they may punish me according to my deserts, in honor and reputation, property and person.

In testimony of all which I have, with my own hand, signed this my recantation of the aforesaid articles, in presence of notary and witnesses.

*(Signed)*

CORNELIUS LOOSÆUS CALLIDIUS.

*(and attested)*

Done in the Imperial Monastery of St. Maximin, outside the walls of Trier, in the abbot's chamber, in presence of the Reverend, Venerable, and Eminent Sirs, Peter Binsfeld, [18] Bishop of Azotus, vicar-general in matters spiritual of the Most Reverend Archbishop of Trier, our most elegant lord, and Reinerus, abbot of the said monastery, Bartholomæus van Bodeghem, of Delft, J. U. L., Official of the Ecclesiastical Court of Trier, Georgius von Helffenstein, Doctor of Theology, Dean of the Collegiate Church of St. Simeon in the city of Trier, and Joannes Colmann, J. U. D., Canon of the said church and Seal-Bearer of the Court of Trier, [19] etc., in the year of Our Lord 1592 *more Trev.*, [20] on Monday, March 15th, in the presence of me the notary undersigned and of the worthy Nicolaus Dolent and Daniel Maier, secretary and copyist respectively of the Reverend Lord Abbot, as witnesses specially called and summoned to this end.

*(Signed)*

ADAMUS HEC Tectonius, Notary,

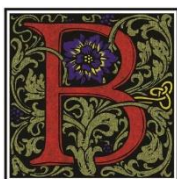
*(And below)*

Compared with its original and found to agree, by me the undersigned Secretary of the town of Antwerp,

## Appendix ii:

♻ Burr, GL 2001, *The witch-persecutions*, viewed 02 September 2020,  
<<https://www.globalgreybooks.com/read-online/witch-persecutions/read-online.html>>

### THE WITCH-BULL OF 1484



*ullarium Romanum (Taurinensis editio)*, sub anno 1484. Latin.

*Innocentius, episcopus, servus servorum Dei. Ad futuram rei memoriam.*

Desiring with supreme ardor, as pastoral solicitude requires, that the catholic faith in our days everywhere grow and flourish as much as possible, and that all heretical pravity be put far from the territories of the faithful, we freely declare and anew decree this by which our pious desire may be fulfilled, and, all errors being rooted out by our toil as with the hoe of a wise laborer, zeal and devotion to this faith may take deeper hold on the hearts of the faithful themselves.

It. has recently come to our ears, not without great pain to us, that in some parts of upper Germany, as well as in the provinces, cities, territories, regions, and dioceses of Mainz, Köln, Trier, Salzburg, and Bremen, many persons of both sexes, heedless of their own salvation and forsaking the catholic faith, give themselves over to devils male and female, and by their incantations, charms, and conjurings, and by other abominable superstitions and sortileges, offences, crimes, and misdeeds, ruin and cause to perish the offspring of women, the foal of animals, the products of the earth, the grapes of vines, and the fruits of trees, as well as men and women, cattle and flocks and herds and animals of every kind, vineyards also and orchards, meadows, pastures, harvests, grains and other fruits of the earth; that they afflict and torture with dire pains and anguish, both internal and external, these men, women, cattle, flocks, herds, and animals, and hinder men from begetting and women from conceiving, and prevent all consummation of marriage; that, moreover, they deny with sacrilegious lips the faith they received in holy baptism; and that, at the instigation of the enemy of mankind, they do not fear to commit and perpetrate many other abominable offences and crimes, at the risk of their own

souls, to the insult of the divine majesty and to the pernicious example and scandal of multitudes. And, although our beloved sons Henricus Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger, of the order of Friars Preachers, professors of theology, have been and still are deputed by our apostolic letters as inquisitors of heretical pravity, the former in the aforesaid parts of upper Germany, including the provinces, cities, territories, dioceses, and other places as above, and the latter throughout certain parts of the course of the Rhine; Nevertheless certain of the clergy and of the laity of those parts, seeking to be wise above what is fitting, because in the said letter of deputation the aforesaid provinces, cities, dioceses, territories, and other places, and the persons and offences in question were not individually and specifically named, do not blush obstinately to assert that these are not at all included in the said parts and that therefore it is illicit for the aforesaid inquisitors to exercise their office of inquisition in the provinces, cities, dioceses, territories, and other places aforesaid, and that they ought not to be permitted to proceed to the punishment, imprisonment, and correction of the aforesaid persons for the offences and crimes above named. Wherefore in the provinces, cities, dioceses, territories, and places aforesaid such offences and crimes, not without evident damage to their souls and risk of eternal salvation, go unpunished.

We therefore, desiring, as is our duty, to remove all impediments by which in any way the said inquisitors are hindered in the exercise of their office, and to prevent the taint of heretical pravity and of other like evils from spreading their infection to the ruin of others who are innocent, the zeal of religion especially impelling us, in order that the provinces, cities, dioceses, territories, and places aforesaid in the said parts of upper Germany may not be deprived of the office of inquisition which is their due, do hereby decree, by virtue of our apostolic authority, that it shall be permitted to the said inquisitors in these regions to exercise their office of inquisition and to proceed to the correction, imprisonment, and punishment of the aforesaid persons for their said offences and crimes, in all respects and altogether precisely as if the provinces, cities, territories, places, persons, and offences aforesaid were expressly named in the said letter. And, for the greater sureness, extending the said letter and deputation to the provinces, cities, dioceses, territories, places, persons, and crimes aforesaid, we grant to the said inquisitors that they or either of them, joining with them our beloved son Johannes Gremper, cleric of the diocese of Constance, master of arts, their present notary, or any other notary public who by them or by either of them shall have been temporarily delegated in the provinces, cities, dioceses, territories, and places aforesaid, may exercise against all persons,



of whatsoever condition and rank, the said office of inquisition, correcting, imprisoning, punishing, and chastising, according to their deserts, those persons whom they shall find guilty as aforesaid.

And they shall also have full and entire liberty to propound and preach to the faithful the word of God, as often as it shall seem to them fitting and proper, in each and all of the parish churches in the said provinces, and to do all things necessary and suitable under the aforesaid circumstances, and likewise freely and fully to carry them out.

And moreover we enjoin by apostolic writ on our venerable brother, the Bishop of Strasburg, that, either in his own person or through some other or others solemnly publishing the foregoing wherever, whenever, and how often soever he may deem expedient or by these inquisitors or either of them may be legitimately required, he permit them not to be molested or hindered in any manner whatsoever by any authority whatsoever in the matter of the aforesaid and of this present letter, threatening all opposers, hinderers, contradicters, and rebels, of whatever rank, state, decree, eminence, nobility, excellence, or condition they may be, and whatever privilege of exemption they may enjoy, with excommunication, suspension, interdict, and other still more terrible sentences, censures, and penalties, as may be expedient, and this without appeal and with power after due process of law of aggravating and reagravating these penalties, by our authority, as often as may be necessary, to this end calling in the aid, if need be, of the secular arm.

And this, all other apostolic decrees and earlier decisions to the contrary notwithstanding; or if to any, jointly or severally, there has been granted by this apostolic see exemption from interdict, suspension, or excommunication, by apostolic letters not making entire, express, and literal mention of the said grant of exemption; or if there exist any other indulgence whatsoever, general or special, of whatsoever tenor, by failure to name which or to insert it bodily in the present letter the carrying out of this privilege could be hindered or in any way put off, or any of whose whole tenor special mention must be made in our letters. Let no man, therefore, dare to infringe this page of our declaration, extension, grant, and mandate, or with rash hardihood to contradict it. If any presume to attempt this, let him know that he incurs the wrath of almighty God and of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul.[8]

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, in the year of Our Lord's incarnation 1484, on the nones of December, in the first year of our pontificate.



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