



# Journal of Religion & Film

Volume 22

Issue 3 *Special Issue: 2018 International Conference  
on Religion and Film, Toronto*

Article 6

12-14-2018

## 'I am That Very Witch': On The Witch, Feminism, and Not Surviving Patriarchy

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### Recommended Citation

Zwissler, Laurel (2018) "I am That Very Witch': On The Witch, Feminism, and Not Surviving Patriarchy," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 3 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/6>

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# 'I am That Very Witch': On *The Witch*, Feminism, and Not Surviving Patriarchy

## **Abstract**

While contemporary discussions about witchcraft include reinterpretations and feminist reclamations, early modern accusations contained no such complexity. It is this historical witch as misogynist nightmare that the film, *The Witch: A New England Folktale* (2015), expresses so effectively. Within the film, the very patriarchal structures that decry witchcraft – the Puritan church from which the family exiles itself, the male headship to which the parents so desperately cling, the insistence, in the face of repeated failure, on the viability of the isolated nuclear family unit – are the same structures that inevitably foreclose the options of the lead character, Thomasin.

## **Keywords**

Witches, Satanism, Paganism, Feminism

## **Author Notes**

Laurel Zwissler is associate professor of Religion and affiliate faculty member in Women and Gender Studies at Central Michigan University. Her recent book, *Religious, Feminist, Activist: Cosmologies of Interconnection* (University of Nebraska, Anthropology of North America Series), focuses on global justice activists and investigates contemporary intersections between religion, gender, and politics, relating these to theoretical debates about religion in the public sphere. She is now building on this work with ethnographic research within the North American fair-trade movement, as well as occasional visits with contemporary Witchcraft communities. The author wishes to thank fellow panelists at the 2018 International Conference on Religion and Film in Toronto, Syed Adnan Hussain and Michael Ostling, the conference organizer and all around good human, Ken Derry, film scholar-at-large, John Lyden, as well as David Ferris, an unceasingly generous conversation partner, and the students in her "Witchcraft, Magic, and the Occult" courses, especially those who have watched "The Witch" through their fingers.

## Introduction

Despite the disappointment of a few slasher fans,<sup>1</sup> *The Witch: A New England Folktale*<sup>2</sup> has been widely celebrated. Much of this praise interprets it as an explicitly feminist film. Yet the feminist vision it represents, while a critique of literal patriarchy, is not one of hope. This article engages feminist theory and the academic study of religion to analyze the film and its reception in relation to contemporary contestations over the moral symbolism of the witch image. It is the anachronistic conflation of witchcraft and feminist agency, a construct at odds with the early modern world otherwise so faithfully portrayed in the film, which leads to conflicting understandings of the ultimate meaning of the protagonist, Thomasin, and her actions.

I want to be clear that what I outline here as troubling contradictions in reception are unique to this specific witchcraft film. It enters into a cultural milieu in which an overwhelming number of films and television shows about witches, even other period pieces, reflect the more recent idea that witches are feminist. What makes *The Witch* stand out is its counter project of portraying early modern fears as accurately as possible, that is, in portraying not the recent, feminist Witch, but the historical, diabolical witch. In public relations promotions for the film, writer/director Robert Eggers discusses at length his desire to faithfully recreate both the material conditions and the religious cosmology of colonial New England, a worldview that contained monsters in the form of witches.<sup>3</sup> In other words, I am not arguing that all witches must be viewed as pawns of the patriarchy; however, I am arguing that, in the case of *The Witch*, conflating witchcraft and feminism is a misapplication of a contemporary idea onto the historical worldview depicted in the film.

While contemporary discussions about witchcraft include reinterpretations and feminist reclamations, early modern accusations contained no such complexity.<sup>4</sup> The Satanic witch as a criminal profile was both morally irredeemable and overwhelmingly gendered as female. Historians repeatedly demonstrate that the stereotype, rather than reflecting actual practices, is a story that patriarchy tells about itself. As Lyndal Roper has articulated, the witch is one of the only models of female power within cultural contexts harboring deep discomfort with women.<sup>5</sup>

The early modern period (approximately 1450-1750 CE) was a time of great social and intellectual change across Europe, with the rise of scientific theory and great advances in legal and political thought. It was also the historical moment that saw the combining of elite Medieval Church heresy stereotypes, originally projected onto the Cathars/Albigensians and then the Waldensian sects in the 1200's, with non-elite, popular ideas of witchcraft as a system of cursing and curing, tracing back to ancient times. The resulting early modern witchcraft stereotype is the Satanic witch, interchangeably called the diabolical witch, a malicious, female magic user who derives her power from her voluntary enslavement to Satan and who practices the three abominations of heresy: infanticide, cannibalism, and indiscriminate sex. It is this stereotype which drove the witch hunts of the early modern period in Europe and its colonies to their fevered pitch, a scale unprecedented both trans-historically and cross-culturally.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary Western culture continues to encounter this stereotype in the form of the fairytale or Halloween witch archetype.<sup>7</sup>

However, contemporary culture also has other sets of sources for interpreting the image of the witch, those of feminism and disparate religious reclamation movements, such as Paganism and (quite separately) esoteric Satanism.<sup>8</sup> All these communities offer alternative visions of the witch, not as monster, but as noble rebel against patriarchal Christianity. In these

interpretations, witches actually have nothing to do with murderous evil; it is only the Church's slander, motivated by jealous fear and misogyny, which declares witchcraft and harm to be the same thing. To make this explicit: the feminist Witch image is deliberately constructed in opposition to the historical stereotype of the diabolical witch.

It is the historical witch as misogynist nightmare that the film, *The Witch*, expresses so effectively. Within the film, it is the very patriarchal structures that decry witchcraft—the Puritan church from which the family exiles itself, the male headship to which the parents so desperately cling, the insistence in the face of repeated failure on the viability of the isolated nuclear family unit—that are the same structures that inevitably foreclose the options of the lead character, Thomasin. In the end, her only choice for survival is to become the witch she was already suspected of being.

Briefly, *The Witch* focuses on a Puritan family in colonial New England whose father, William, has removed them from the nearby settler plantation over religious disagreements. They homestead by themselves in fields along the edge of a forbidding woods, removed from neighbors by at least a day's ride by horse. Misfortune begins to come in several forms—first the disappearance of an infant, then crop failures, livestock problems, accidents, injuries, and illnesses—until the entire family is eliminated save the eldest daughter, Thomasin. As their world begins to unravel under what they come to understand as assault by Satanic forces, the family tries to identify the enemy within, to determine which of them is a witch, with suspicion falling upon different children and finally landing hard on Thomasin. In the end it is revealed that, while she was not the witch who has been assaulting the family she actually loves, the actions that her family members have taken, motivated by their suspicion of her, ultimately

corral Thomasin into becoming one after all. She signs the Devil's book, consummates her pact, and disappears into the woods to join his other witches at the sabbat.

### **Feminism, Patriarchy, and Horror**

Horror films, sharing a cultural continuum with early modern witch fears, arguably their own precursors, are always also about gender and sexuality, no matter what else they are doing. What makes *The Witch* different from your average monster-predator film is that the young female protagonist is also the potential monster. On one hand, the film adheres faithfully to early modern narrative tropes; on the other, through doing so, it busts open slasher movie conventions.<sup>9</sup> Both worldviews are deeply suspicious of female sexuality; both are stark morality tales. When using these lenses together, we get Thomasin as Final Girl, the virtuous survivor.<sup>10</sup> However, through this looking glass, the liberating murder to which her desperation to survive drives her is that of her own mother, rather than an external predator.

Nonetheless, putting aside the confusion of some film goers, slasher is not truly the horror sub-genre to which the film belongs: brooding, psychological horror films are more relevant. While one critic saw parallels with *The Exorcist*,<sup>11</sup> director Robert Eggers has cited *The Shining* as a major inspiration, mainly noting the atmosphere the film attains through the isolation imposed on its characters and the incremental deterioration of normalcy.<sup>12</sup> *The Witch* has more in common with *The Shining* than simply slow burning tension and atmosphere. Both films show families led into physical and metaphysical dangers through commitment to male-headship and a stubborn insistence that the nuclear family unit can be truly self-sufficient, even unto complete isolation.

In *The Shining* Jack prioritizes his own needs over his wife and child with their move to the isolated Overlook. Both he and his wife, Wendy, continue to perform as if he is in possession of his competence and mental health until the farce can no longer be maintained. Despite the ghosts and the cursed geography à la Shirley Jackson,<sup>13</sup> the true horror at the core of the film is domestic violence. Jack has to kill his wife and child to maintain his dominance over them. As in *The Witch*, nature is against the dominating patriarch; Jack's madness cannot sustain him outside the cursed hotel.

*The Witch* also has much in common with another Satanic witchcraft movie, *Rosemary's Baby*.<sup>14</sup> Both lay shockingly bare the social constraints that limit women's choices until they acquiesce to male domination. An important piece of the terror in the movie is society's sanction of the core abusive relationship. The Satanic cult sanctions Guy's dominance of Rosemary and, because he is her husband, he can, in turn, give that dominance over to them. The more she resists, the more Guy and the neighbors emotionally and physically control her, trapping her, in the end, through motherhood. She cannot bring herself to leave her demon baby. Acquiescing to the role of mother is the only power she can attain within the system. And there is no escaping the system. It is difficult to argue that Rosemary's final situation, capitulation to a relationship with the Devil (this time as mother rather than sexual prey), is one of empowerment.

Many critics have nonetheless found themes of women's empowerment in *The Witch*, with a good number of reviews including the word "feminist" in their titles. At *Dose*, Nathalie Lagerfeld breaks the film's gender politics down: "Puritan patriarchy = more horrifying than an ax-wielding murderer."<sup>15</sup> At *Bitch*, Britt Ashley's title tells us, ". . . Terror stems from Puritanical control of women."<sup>16</sup> Scott Pierce of *Wired* calls the film "wildly feminist," partly based on conversations with the film maker, Eggers, and with Jex Blackmore, Satanic artist and former

spokesperson for The Satanic Temple, who endorsed the film on religious grounds.<sup>17</sup> At the special website created by Blackmore for The Satanic Temple to promote the film, and where visitors are encouraged to sign their names in Satan's book electronically, Blackmore denounces "theocratic patriarchy," stating further, "While the patriarchy makes witches of only the most socially vulnerable members of society, Egger's film refuses to construct a victim narrative. Instead, it features a declaration of feminine independence that . . . inspires [us as] a tradition of spiritual transgression."<sup>18</sup> Blackmore was so motivated by the film that she developed four interactive, performance art installations across the country, collectively titled *The Sabbat Cycle*, to celebrate and promote its critique of Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Contextualizing the release of the film during the deeply contentious election season, Blackmore said, "This is what a 'return to conservative values' actually looks like."<sup>20</sup>

While Blackmore, as a leader in a religion that pointedly stands with the marginalized, has a more clear-eyed understanding of the cost of Thomasin's independence, there is little of this nuance in other reviews. In a mark-missing article for *Marie Claire*, critic Diane Cohen titles her piece, "'The Witch' isn't a horror flick – It's a high-powered feminist manifesto," subtitled, "Find your coven – and yourself." Ignoring the pains that the film takes to communicate a foreign worldview, Cohen refuses to see difference, collapsing witchcraft into empowerment. Referring to Thomasin, she writes, "She chooses to be a witch, the most reviled manifestation of womanhood – and she's all the better for it." In closing Cohen claims, "She is now a woman, with the awesome power to determine her own life."<sup>21</sup> In order to actually believe that is what is going to happen to Thomasin, you have to be completely ignorant of early modern witchcraft. Thomasin is not free; like Rosemary, she is now bound to the Devil.

## Women, Agency, and Early Modern Witchcraft

Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod has famously deconstructed what she calls the feminist “romance of resistance.” Using Foucault, she demonstrates that rebellion against compliance to one oppressive force is only possible through realigning to adherence with another.<sup>22</sup> In *The Witch*, Thomasin is caught in a power struggle between two patriarchal power structures: the Christian family (as represented by her father) and Satanism. Whichever one she chooses, she is allied with repression.

In reflecting on the film, Eggers has said that he understands his ending as a “happy” one for Thomasin, “because it was the first choice she really got to make.”<sup>23</sup> However, it is difficult, especially in this #MeToo moment, to pretend that hers is actually a choice. Who could describe her final situation as “free will” in the face of all the coercion to which the Devil has subjected her? Jess Joho at *Kill Screen* asks, “How can Thomasin’s story be one of female empowerment when, as the final scenes imply, she chooses Satan because she literally has no other choice?”<sup>24</sup>

*The Witch*, in addition to being a horror film about a family beset by predatory forces, can also be read, apparently against its creator’s vision, as a narrative about a young woman and her stalker. Satan tears down Thomasin’s world to get her alone. He is successful: he kills her family, coerces her into a sexual relationship, and abducts her. Thomasin’s final pact is not a fantasy of women’s empowerment, but instead an exposé of devouring male power.

Her options, in the end, are two different patriarchal authorities. As with the spirit of the film overall, the competing authority structures reflect historically accurate theology. Within the Christian worldview of witchcraft, everything divides between God and the Devil. They are righteous king and his traitorous general. Humanity’s job is to support God against Satan’s

attempted coup. Of course the interwoven social and theological crisis of diabolical witchcraft is that some humans do *not* support God, siding instead with the betrayer, Satan.<sup>25</sup>

Given Puritan theology, all humans tended towards sin; if God forgave a particular sinner, it was remarkable grace, rather than earned merit. No soul was clean of sin, save Jesus.<sup>26</sup> We see this dire understanding of human nature reflected in the film, both in the older characters' concerns that Samuel, the stolen baby, is in hell because he was never baptized, and in the religious lessons that Caleb, Thomasin's younger brother, practices as he hunts with his father. William and Caleb recite questions and answers from Puritan John Cotton's *Milk for Babes, Drawn out of the Breasts of Both Testaments*, a popular catechism primer in colonial New England. Caleb recites, "My corrupt nature is empty of grace, bent unto sin, only unto sin, and that continually."<sup>27</sup> The natural state of human beings is damned. Salvation is a miraculous and unpredictable exception.

Nonetheless, particular humans were understood as much *more* likely to give in to Satan's temptations than others, despite concomitant eternal damnation. If humanity is weak, then how much more so are the 'weakest' humans: women. Elizabeth Reis has analyzed the Puritan conception of the soul as feminized and femininity as inherently weak, foreclosing women as especially vulnerable to Satanic temptation. Moreover, this positions women as the weak link between Satan and the larger human community, which in this patriarchal conception must default to men.<sup>28</sup>

This view of women as vulnerable and spiritually suspect matters especially because it was not only men who held it. Women were socialized to see each other and, most importantly, *themselves* through these lenses. Louise Jackson has done poignant work on the trial process as a psychological renovation project through which the accused woman came to understand her

own private thoughts and secret flaws as evidence that she had *already* made pact with Satan, even if she was unaware of it or couldn't remember having done so. Negative feelings, such as thoughts of infanticide or suicide, hating abusive husbands, hating themselves for having being raped, envy of others, self-loathing, resentment of children, husbands, neighbors, the experience of sexual attraction, or even wishing for a less difficult life, were Satan's voice. Satan couldn't be speaking to her like this if she had not already succumbed to him.<sup>29</sup>

The witch trial then becomes a shared project of solving a mystery: the accused and the court work together to discover how the diabolical script aligns with this particular woman's life. The trial transcript comes to represent a tragic, collaborative story-telling project about how this *specific* person was damned. Lyndal Roper demonstrates the specific mechanisms through which this might take place in her psychoanalytic readings of trial records.<sup>30</sup>

In the context of colonial America, these gendered concerns also overlap with racist concerns about missionizing.<sup>31</sup> While diabolical rumors in early modern Europe were always also about religious and racial difference, in Puritan New England, diabolical concerns were specifically overlaid onto Native American groups.<sup>32</sup> There are gestures to this in the film, such as the Native men who pass the family's cart on its way out of the plantation gates at the beginning of their exile, and the fears of the mother, Katherine, that Caleb may be "tormented of Indian magic."

Within the dichotomous frame of diabolical witchcraft, all difference is Satanic. In an androcentric world, women are Satanic. In a white settler world, Native people are Satanic. In a Calvinist world, all religious difference is Satanic. This is how William can feel justified in exiling his own family from the plantation; their theological differences mean that to stay within the church would be to damn his family.

This worldview feeds Christian missionizing concerns about cultural differences, gender roles, and the treatment of women. Saving women from their various cultural conditions has long been a missionizing rallying cry, one we can see echoing back through time and in our contemporary political moment.<sup>33</sup> The history of colonialism in North America as elsewhere is, among other things, fighting over the treatment of women as proxy for fighting over literal women. We can also reverse this: the contest over women is the contest over the human soul.

I take this digression to highlight that, in the film, Thomasin is one of these women being fought over. She is contested property between her father and the Devil. Given a forced choice between two patriarchal systems, she chooses the pimp over the father. I choose this language deliberately: within the early modern worldview, witchcraft was not only a crime of violence and apostasy, but a diabolical pact which enslaved women sexually to the Devil.<sup>34</sup> William positions himself as father in contest for Thomasin with a seductive suitor when he begs her to confess her (non-existent) pact so that Christ can dissolve it. Speaking of Satan as a rival who does not truly care for her, William despairs, “The Devil hath no interest in thee.”

It is also unclear if her final choice really is going to work out for her, eternal damnation aside. Despite promises of a pretty dress, the taste of butter, and getting to see the world, we have seen how the Devil’s other witches have been living. They are hidden in cottages in the woods, eating animal entrails, unclothed, with only evidence of one dress to be seen, and even that may be part of the glamor the hag puts on to torment Caleb.

But does Thomasin even really get to choose the Devil? Perhaps she believes she has done so because this is the only way she can explain to herself her previous, violent actions. Does she have a psychological break after being driven to kill her mother, literally killing the last vestige of her family?<sup>35</sup> Coming back to Reis and Jackson on ways that women internalized the

diabolical-pact script, we could read the coda of the film as a traumatized young woman wandering off into the woods to die under the delusion that she has become the worst thing her culture can think of: a witch. As she rises up at the Sabbat, despite the interpretation of many viewers that her expression is one of happiness, Thomasin's face is just as easily that of a mad-woman.

### **Contemporary Witches and Feminism**

Many viewers default to interpreting Thomasin's diabolical pact as feminist freedom largely because in the contemporary Western context, feminism and witchcraft are fused both by their proponents and detractors. However, this is not an inherent association, and certainly not one that would have held for either men or women in the early modern period. The genealogy of the feminist witch can be clearly delineated through the development of political feminism.

Accused witches have loomed large in the history of feminist movements in the West. In what is commonly referred to as the first wave, which coalesced during the Progressive era (1880-1920) largely around women's right to vote,<sup>36</sup> suffragists such as Matilda Joselyn Gage turned to victims of historical witch trials to demonstrate the bald face of patriarchy's violence.<sup>37</sup> This rhetorical strategy was meant to counter condescending criticisms that insisted that women should be kept from public life to protect their delicate natures.<sup>38</sup> Gage invoked the tortured bodies of accused witches against placating stories of gender complementarity, such as "The Angel in the House,"<sup>39</sup> that suffragists saw as serving one and the same purpose: keeping women out of public space and away from political power, that is, under the control of men.<sup>40</sup> In linking women's current conditions of political repression to the physical violence of the early modern witch hunts, activists of the first wave positioned themselves clearly as part of a centuries-long

struggle for emancipation from patriarchal oppression, as well as cast their opponents as cruel and ignorant. The thread that bound women accused of witchcraft historically and first wave suffragists was their shared victimization by patriarchy.<sup>41</sup>

When feminism surged again in the 1960s and 70s, this time focused on systemic and cultural oppressions that clearly had not been solved by women obtaining the vote, activists began to embrace the image of the witch in more complex ways.<sup>42</sup> While suffragists had generally seen accused witches as fellow victims of misogynist superstition, many second wave feminists engaged with the darker, magical aspects of the accusations. That is, first wave feminists, generally staunchly rooted in Christianity, decried the witch hunts for the lack of reality to the accusations. Women were not witches; men just thought they were and were horrifically wrong.

Second wave feminists came to approach the issue in another way: what if women really were doing something different that confused and scared men, who could only articulate women's differences as Satanic? Reframing accused witches not exclusively as objects of ritualized violence, but as ritualizing subjects themselves, opened up room for feminist fantasy and identification with historical 'witches' in new ways.<sup>43</sup> If powerful men have hated both witches and now feminists, maybe feminists have been witches all along, and vice versa. Hence: feminist Witch.

The shift in approach between believing that the witchcraft women were accused of historically was completely made-up from Christian men's fears to believing that accused witches really *were* engaged in alternative practices different from the rest of society—even if these practices were not actually the horrific crimes that demonologists had ascribed to them—means that there is a whole new realm of knowledge about witchcraft to acquire. What were

those accused of witchcraft actually doing? Second-wave feminists had three main sources to help them answer this question.

The first main source was burgeoning interest in historical occult traditions.<sup>44</sup> The same counter-cultural factors which encouraged the rise of feminism and other major civil rights movements also encouraged the growth of religious diversity and exploration. New religious movements, such as contemporary Paganism gained popularity in activist circles. A highly influential, specific form of Paganism, Wicca, offered a detailed version of what accused 'witches' had really been up to.

Publicized by Gerald Gardner starting in the 1950s, Wicca, as it entered the counter-cultural scene in the USA in the 1960s, understood itself to be the true religion of the witches. While many Pagans and Wiccans today, alongside scholars, treat Gardner's foundational story as a mythical narrative, he and his original initiates did not.<sup>45</sup> Following the now-debunked trajectory laid out by historian Margaret Murray,<sup>46</sup> Gardner traced the history of Witchcraft, indigenously known as "Wicca," to the ancient, pre-Christian religion of the British Isles.<sup>47</sup> Persecuted as devilry by the increasingly powerful church that saw it as a rival, Witchcraft went underground and survived through secrecy. Gardner claimed initiation into a lineage coven in the 1930s. He now positioned himself as the conduit of Wicca's reawakening, bringing this earth-based, egalitarian and magical religion back to the world.<sup>48</sup> In its emphasis on honoring nature, women's leadership, and the Sacred in the form of an eternal Goddess, Wicca offered curious feminists potentially useful answers to their questions about historical witches and their practices.<sup>49</sup>

A second main source to which second-wave feminists turned to understand historical witches was the idea of women's natural knowledge. Drawing on cultural ideas of

complementarity, cultural feminists leaned into notions of gender essentialism, the idea that men and women are inherently different, not only on biological levels, but also cognitively, emotionally, and, most importantly here, spiritually.<sup>50</sup> This means that women have an inherent connection to nature, spirituality, and unconscious powers. Feminists such as Zuzsanna Budapest explained that these special women's gifts had been feared by men, denounced as irrational and Satanic in order to justify repression of women, but in their liberation women recognized their powers as magical and world-changing. Western esotericisms such as Wicca and Paganism may offer specific methods and tools to focus magic,<sup>51</sup> but every woman already has these powers, just by nature of her being. In this sense every woman is inherently a Witch.<sup>52</sup>

A third source of inspiration for what historically accused witches were actually doing focused less on religious practices and more on secular concerns. That is, you don't have to believe that accused witches were engaged in a rival religion or in magical practice to nonetheless believe that they were doing something interesting and threatening to powerful men. Reflecting a broader split on the political left between Marx-inspired secularists and those interested in religion as an activist resource,<sup>53</sup> some feminists wanted nothing to do with the deities and rituals inspired by Wicca and women's magic movements, but identified with historically accused witches nonetheless. For these activists, witchcraft accusations were just paranoid misogynist code for women's skilled abilities, such as healing, midwifery, agricultural knowledge, financial, social, and sexual independence. In this frame, it is irrelevant whether 'witches' were engaged in magic or ritual practice. Instead, "witch" stands for a woman not properly subservient to patriarchy: a political rebel. If a witch is a woman who is not doing what men want her to do, then she is the original feminist, and today's feminists are just the newest

witches. It is this approach that inspired activism such as the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH), an activist performance movement in the 1960s.<sup>54</sup>

Despite arising from discrete inspiration sources, during the second wave of feminism different ideas of historically accused 'witches' and their relationship to contemporary women's struggles coalesced into a general understanding of the witch as a rebellious feminist. This image has been promoted through popular culture in countless ways. For example, Donna Reade's *Goddess Trilogy* documentaries bring to life a narrative in which historical witch trials are the breach between a matriarchal, Goddess-worshiping past and a feminist future.<sup>55</sup> Today's feminists are yesterday's witches, but the priestesses of the day before.

Concurrently, non-Satanic, non-baby-murdering witches have become common cultural currency independent of past fairy-tales. Long-running television series, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed*, feature Witch protagonists directly linked to Wicca.<sup>56</sup> Harry Potter portrays witches whose powers are both very real and scientifically oriented.<sup>57</sup> The feminist witch-reclamation narrative has become so powerful culturally that it leads to reinterpretations of past films. We see this cultural reworking most saliently in the Grendlian<sup>58</sup> revisitations of classic witch villains, such as *Maleficent*'s redemption from *Sleeping Beauty* and of the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz* in *Wicked*.<sup>59</sup> While it is important not to dismiss backlash tropes represented in series such as *Supernatural*, *Salem*, *American Horror Story: Coven*, and arguably *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, in films such as *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* and *The Last Witch Hunter*, and in children's entertainment harkening back to folklore and fairytales, such as *Tangled*,<sup>60</sup> depictions of witches within entertainment media have evolved to the point where almost any witch character can default to feminist archetype.

Influenced by these newer, popular depictions of witches, more recent iterations of feminism, such as the third wave and the present moment, have built on the second wave's reclamation of Witchcraft by embracing its edgier connotations of the repressed, the "irrational," women's anger, but also women's intuition and sexuality. As a result, there are a wide variety of feminists who self-identify as Witches.<sup>61</sup> While the aesthetics may sometimes be different from the stereotype of the hippie witch spurred by the second wave, feminists today share with them the historically innovative idea that Witch and feminist are actually one and the same concept. This updated take on the feminist Witch is not only compatible with more recent depictions in entertainment because they share second wave feminist images as a mutual source; it is also directly inspired by those popular depictions themselves.<sup>62</sup>

The interpretive turn that assumes feminist for witch reflects recent cultural history and gender politics, which is to be expected. Where things get messy is in moments where the contemporary elision between witch and feminist is projected into past worldviews, as is the case in receptions of *The Witch*. Reviewers' assumptions that Thomasin's final actions are in her own interest would not be as jarring if the filmmakers had not made such an effort at historical accuracy and of faithfully representing a Puritan worldview.

So really what is happening within many reviews of *The Witch* is a projection of current ideas about witchcraft onto past ideas of witchcraft, which were themselves projections onto women. These feminist projections obfuscate the real tragedy in the film, that Thomasin is ultimately forced to become the worst thing she can imagine. Being fiction, interpreting Thomasin as liberated by her pact does not bear the same moral weight as reinscribing as Pagans actual women who suffered witch accusations, women who identified, to their painful deaths, as Christians. However, it is on a continuum with the silencing of actual victims, part of a broader

cultural project of putting words in dead women's mouths. They may be different words than those forced on women through the historical witch trial process, but that does not make them any more authentic.<sup>63</sup> We have replaced the inquisitors' assumptions and fantasies with our own. If the feminist project is creating conditions under which women can finally speak their own truths and be heard, then these projections impede it.

### **Witch Cuts All Ways**

An intractable problem in conflating historical witchcraft fears with contemporary feminist identities is that any reclamation continually abrades against patriarchal stereotypes. There are so few images of women's power in Western history that the monstrous feminine, gloriously personified by *The Witch*, shines like a beacon.<sup>64</sup> When we turn back to honor the real women historically who wore her face for their gift of transmission, however, we disrespect them to the core by taking them for the monsters their persecutors insisted that they were. We share in the enterprise of projection, even if our moral projects are at odds. Is it any better to force someone into the form of a hero than a demon, if it is not who they understood themselves to be? How can dissolving real women into abstracted symbols that serve our own ends truly be a feminist project? The issue is not with contemporary feminist Witch identity as embracing a powerful cultural symbol, but with the projection of that identity onto real women accused of witchcraft in the past. *The Witch* is an interesting intervention in this moral quagmire because it starts from historical perspective. The point of the film is not to renovate the early modern demonological worldview, but to lay it bare and express it on its own terms.<sup>65</sup>

In interpreting Thomasin's pact as liberating feminist Paganism, there is also a contemporary political problem more pressing than the potential exploitation of women from the

past: conflating contemporary Paganism and Satanism. It is significant that many of the most vocal public voices advocating for the film as a helpful representation of feminist Witchcraft are not Pagans, but secular feminists.<sup>66</sup> Contemporary Pagans are often deeply invested in distinguishing themselves from Satanists, explaining that, even though powerful Christians historically associated Pagan gods with Christianity's own devil, this is a slanderous misunderstanding: the Devil only exists within dichotomous Christian worldviews and therefore has no place in holistic, nature traditions such as Wicca.<sup>67</sup>

The distinction between Paganism and Satanism is especially important to Pagans because Satanic identity, whether real or assumed, frequently brings harassment and abuse from outsiders. During the Satanic Panics of the 1980s and 1990s, Witches of all stripes, and those mistaken for them, were targeted together.<sup>68</sup> When viewers conflate Thomasin's enslavement to the Devil and his Christian-family-destroying operation with feminist Witchcraft, this can be tantamount to reinforcing evangelical slander against Paganism. Collapsing early modern diabolical witchcraft into contemporary Pagan Witchcraft capitulates to Christian stereotypes both current and historical.

In fact, Pagan efforts to distinguish their communities from Satanists are sometimes met with disdain from Satanists themselves. In their efforts to explain themselves as harmless, Pagans sometimes contrast themselves with Satanism, which is assumed to be dangerous, allowing cultural stereotypes about Satanists to go unchallenged.<sup>69</sup> Satanists' annoyance is exacerbated by Pagans' willingness to flirt with dark and edgy Witch stereotypes aesthetically, but then disown Satanists as kindred religious groups when outsiders threaten them both.<sup>70</sup>

For their part, contemporary Satanists are also clear that they are different from Pagans. Just as there are multiple forms of Paganism, there are several prominent Satanic groups with

different cosmologies.<sup>71</sup> What they generally share is an acceptance of the Christian dichotomy of God vs. the Devil, but with flipped moral meaning. Satan/Lucifer is hailed as a rebel hero against a fascist God who would keep his creation ignorant and enslaved through arbitrary, punishing doctrine. While there is much diversity across Satanic groups, generally Satanists do not worship Satan directly as a deity, but rather honor him symbolically as a role model for independence and self-actualization. As articulated by Jex Blackmore, “. . . Satan is a symbol of defiance, independence, wisdom and self-empowerment, and serves as an affirmation of natural existence.”<sup>72</sup>

Paganisms, Satanisms, and political feminisms, different as they may be from each other, play with witch stereotypes derived from early modern Christianity. Collectively, they find power in the fear that ideas of witchcraft create in outsiders, especially Christians, but these witch-identified groups also insist that these stereotypes are deeply mistaken.<sup>73</sup> There is an element of condescending disdain for outsider misunderstandings of what insiders hold as the true nature of Witchcraft. All these communities indulge in the ambiguity of the witch image.

There are social advantages that come both with the fear that confused outsiders may have about what it means to practice Witchcraft *and* through the performance of intellectual superiority in explaining the truth that one's Witch community is not actually morally transgressive or physically dangerous and that outsiders are ignorant for thinking so. There is power in embodying the witch stereotype; there is power in deconstructing the witch stereotype. The ambiguities of identifying with early modern witchcraft, even in newly revised and reversed forms, cut to the unstable heart of the matter: are witches baby-murdering, nightmare devil-whores, or are they independent women who are here to help? The center of contemporary Witchcraft identity is always moving between fear-inducing mimesis and subversion.<sup>74</sup> But

when *The Witch* suggests that, within its cosmology, witches are indeed the Devil's slaves, it preempts the option of tacking back to subversion, relegating the role of the witch only to horror. In order to see Thomasin as empowered through her initiation into witchcraft, viewers must go beyond the worldview of the film and impose a different cosmology.

As feminist Witches are often aware, promoting Witchcraft as empowering also comes with risks. Self-identified Witches are not the only ones deploying the image. Witchcraft continues to loom large as an enemy of righteousness in conservative evangelical rhetoric. It also is enjoying a resurgence in political speech, most glaringly invoked during the 2016 election debacle, as a slur against Hillary Clinton, as a way of punishing powerful women for their public visibility.<sup>75</sup> At the same time powerful men, such as Donald Trump, Woody Allen, Harvey Weinstein, and their lawyers, have been especially keen to delegitimize investigations into their crimes - political, financial, and sexual - as "witch hunts."<sup>76</sup>

There is a deeply unsettling irony in privileged men identifying as victims of witch hunts, especially when rebutting accusations of sexual abuse, given the overwhelming gender dynamics of history. In early modern Europe, 80% of people tried were women. The criminal profile itself was heavily skewed to fit women, was often sexualized, as in the pact sealed with demonic sex portrayed in *The Witch*, and the trial procedures themselves involved many aspects that today equate with sexual violence and assault.<sup>77</sup> So when privileged men identify as victims of "witch hunts," they invoke the witch image into a new set of ambiguities, this time in the service, not of feminism nor civic freedom, but of male-dominance. Women transgressing out of the subservience of male-headship and into public space are disciplined by being taunted as witches. People calling out men's transgressions are delegitimized by being taunted as witch hunters.

Witches are both real problems and sick, non-existent fantasies. Both positions shore up male privilege through implying that challenges to it are caused by disordered others.

Even with reverse-moralizing flips, the witch is still an inherited misogynist nightmare that is easily redeployed within patriarchal frames. Can you subvert misogyny by leaning into it? It is telling that a film about inescapable patriarchy has resonated so strongly in our current moment, just as it is no coincidence that it has much in common with horror films bracketing the 70s, which themselves emerged out of gender turmoil and anxieties about the patriarchal family. In its deconstruction of pressures placed on women by patriarchal theocracy, *The Witch* is clearly a feminist film. The issue of whether the ending is a happy one may seem trite in the face of this larger point, but in the competing conclusions there is much at stake for the relations of contemporary feminists to the past.

## **Conclusion**

The uncertainty over whether *The Witch* is a triumphant film or a cautionary tale about women's entrapment throws into relief the ambivalent nature of the witch as a feminist symbol. On one hand, as a stereotype she is rife for reclamation. As a monstrous woman, she is literally a predator of the patriarchy. She is a violent rejection of women's reduction to motherhood and confinement within nuclear family. It is precisely *because* she struck such terror in the hearts of early modern men, and conforming women, that she becomes available as a symbol of resistance against these oppressive structures.

Further, as offering a template for feminist alterity, the witch is no longer understood as the terrorist she was to the early moderns. In contemporary Pagan and feminist revisionings, she is the opposite of everything Christianity once ascribed to her. She is kind to children,

magnanimous to those in need, and often vegetarian. No babies, of any species, were harmed in the making of this Witch.

Some of what is troubling about declaring *The Witch* a story of unequivocal feminist victory is that this interpretation anachronistically projects contemporary reclamations of Witchcraft onto the Puritan worldview that the film so accurately expresses. In fact, from an early modern, Puritan perspective, the only character who makes it through the film with his soul intact is Caleb. His is as close to a happy ending as anyone gets in this world. Interpretations that overlay success onto Thomasin's final actions do not take the horror of a diabolical worldview seriously enough. Instead, this approach reinforces historical othering, distancing ourselves from the irrational fools who could ever have believed such misogynist nonsense.<sup>78</sup> Eggers himself sums up the puzzle of overlapping worldviews, two incommensurate ways to think about witches, but without actually seizing on the moral problem of collapsing them into one another. He says, "I didn't set out to make a feminist empowerment narrative, but I learned that writing a witch story is one and the same."<sup>79</sup>

The disjuncture of perspectives is thrown into relief because the character of Thomasin is not a contemporary feminist; she is one of the historical 'fools' who believes in the Devil and in damnation. As scholars of religion, it is our responsibility to attempt to understand alternative worldviews on their own terms. To fully understand where Thomasin's final actions have taken her within *her own perspective* means that asking the question of her agency really forces another: Is self-annihilation ever a feminist choice?

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chris Eggersten, "Why Do So Many Horror Fans Hate 'The Witch?'" *UPROXX*, Feb 22., 2016, Accessed Aug. 7, 2018, <https://uproxx.com/hitfix/why-do-so-many-horror-fans-hate-the-witch/>

<sup>2</sup> Robert Eggers, dir. *The Witch: A New England Folktale* (Film, Parts and Labor, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Mekado Murphy, "That (Very, Very) Old Black Magic in 'The Witch,'" *The New York Times*, Feb 18, 2016, Accessed Aug. 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/21/movies/the-witch-movie-production-design.html>; Katie Rife, "The Witch Director Robert Eggers on Fellini, Feminism, and Period-Accurate Candle-Light," *The A.V. Club*, Feb. 23, 2016, Accessed Aug. 8, 2018, <https://film.avclub.com/the-witch-director-robert-eggers-on-fellini-feminism-1798244480>

<sup>4</sup> Following anthropological practice, for early modern stereotypes and victims of those stereotypes, I do not capitalize terms, such as witch or witchcraft, because the words functioned as external labels to which those so labeled objected. However, I do capitalize identities, such as Witch and Pagan, for current communities, in recognition of their legitimacy as religious movements.

<sup>5</sup> Lyndal Roper, *The Witch in the Western Imagination* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> This summary represents the consensus of witchcraft historians today. For example, see Roper, *The Witch*, as well as Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Inquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1975); Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: A History of Fear, From Ancient Times to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); and Laurel Zwissler, "In the Study of the Witch: Women, Shadows, and the Academic Study of Religions." Special Issue: Feminism and the Study of "Religions." *Religions* 9,4 (2018): 1-18. 105.

<sup>7</sup> See Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1996). See also Zwissler, "In the Study of the Witch."

<sup>8</sup> As I discuss later on, contemporary Paganism and esoteric Satanism are completely different religions relying on incommensurate cosmologies. All they have in common is the word, "Witch." For delineation of these religious identities in comparison to the early modern diabolical stereotype, see Wouter Hanegraaf, "From the Devil's Gateway to the Goddess Within: The Image of the Witch in Neo-Paganism," in *Female Stereotypes in Religious Traditions*, edited by Rita Kloppenborg and Wouter J. Hanegraaf, 213-242 (New York: Brill, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Of course, Barbara Creed, launching what has become a classic theoretical lens, draws on Julia Kristeva to argue that women have always been the truly monstrous in horror films. See Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2007 [1993]). One could easily extend a similar analysis to noir.

<sup>10</sup> The now-classic term is coined in Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> William Friedkin, dir. *The Exorcist* (Film, Warner Bros., 1973); Kate Hagen, "31 Days of Feminist Horror Films: THE WITCH and THE EXORCIST," *The Blacklist*, Oct. 10, 2016, Accessed Aug. 8, 2018, <https://blog.blcklst.com/31-days-of-feminist-horror-films-the-witch-the-exorcist-9824190b46c7>

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Kubrick, dir. *The Shining* (Film, Warner Bros., 1980). Jacob Hall, "The Influences of 'The Witch' Part One: Director Robert Eggers on 'The Shining,'" *Film*, Feb. 16, 2016, Accessed Aug. 7, 2018, <https://www.slashfilm.com/the-witch-influences-the-shining/2/>

<sup>13</sup> Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (New York: Viking, 1959).

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<sup>14</sup>Roman Polanski, dir. *Rosemary's Baby* (Film, William Castle Productions, 1968).

<sup>15</sup>Natalie Lagerfeld, "'The Witch' Is the Feminist Horror Movie You Need to See," *Dose*, 2016, Accessed Aug. 7, 2018, <https://dose.com/articles/the-witch-is-the-feminist-horror-movie-you-need-to-see/>

<sup>16</sup> Britt Ashley, "In Horror Film 'The Witch,' Terror Stems from Puritanical Control of Women," *Bitch*, Mar. 3, 2016, Accessed Aug. 7, 2018, <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/horror-film-witch-terror-stems-puritanical-control-women>

<sup>17</sup> Scott Pierce, "'The Witch' is Sinister, Smart, and Wildly Feminist," *Wired*, Feb. 19, 2016, Accessed Aug. 7, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/2016/02/the-witch-demonization-women/> Blackmore has since disaffiliated with The Satanic Temple, though she still strongly identifies as a feminist Satanist. Jex Blackmore, "'The Struggle for Justice is Ongoing': On My Departure from The Satanic Temple." *Medium*. Aug. 6, 2018, Accessed Nov. 26, 2018. <https://medium.com/@JexBlackmore/the-struggle-for-justice-is-ongoing-6df38f8893db> You can view her current projects at her website, [www.jexblackmore.com](http://www.jexblackmore.com).

<sup>18</sup> Jex Blackmore, "A Letter from Jex Blackmore," *The Satanic Revolution*, 2016, Accessed Aug. 7, 2018, <http://satanic-revolution.com/>

<sup>19</sup> The Satanic Temple, *The Sabbat Cycle*, Feb. 2016, Accessed Aug. 7, 2018, <http://www.sabbatcycle.com/>

<sup>20</sup> Jex Blackmore, "Satanic Feminism" presentation at Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, MI, Nov. 27, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Diane Cohen, "'The Witch' Isn't a Horror Flick—It's a High-Powered Feminist Manifesto," *Marie Claire*, Mar. 17, 2016, Accessed Aug. 7, 2018, <https://www.marieclaire.com/culture/a19362/the-witch-review/>

<sup>22</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist*, 17,1 (1990): 41-55. One of Abu-Lughod's examples: young women in Bedouin communities resist older systems of sexual modesty by buying fancy lingerie and secretly wearing it under their traditional clothing. This act of resistance against one set of power structures, older relatives and their ideas of religious modesty, also, however, moves the young women into new sets of repressive power dynamics: Western sexual objectification; global consumer economics, etc.

<sup>23</sup> Jess Joho, "The Witch Isn't an Empowerment Narrative and That's Why It's Great," *Kill Screen*, Feb. 23, 2016, Accessed Aug. 7, 2018, <https://killscreen.com/articles/the-witch-isnt-an-empowerment-narrative-and-thats-why-its-great/>

<sup>24</sup> Joho, "The Witch Isn't an Empowerment Narrative."

<sup>25</sup> Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*; Hutton, *The Witch*.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Reis. *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> John Cotton, *Milk for Babes, Drawn out of the Breasts of Both Testaments* (London: J. Coe for Henry Overton, 1626), 2. Available at University of Nebraska Digital Commons, Accessed Aug. 8, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=etas>

<sup>28</sup> Reis *Damned Women*; Clark *Thinking with Demons* 119–33.

<sup>29</sup> Louise Jackson, "Witches, Wives and Mothers." *Women's History Review* vol. 4, no. 1 (1995): 63-83.

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<sup>30</sup> Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> For example, Irene Silverblatt, "Colonial Conspiracies." *Ethnohistory* vol.53,2 no. (2006): 259-280 and *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Sigrid Brauner, "Cannibals, Witches, and Shrews in the 'Civilizing Process.'" In *"Neue Welt" / "Dritte Welt": Interkulturelle Beziehungen Deutschlands zu Lateinamerika und der Karibik*, edited by Sigrid Bauschinger and Susan L. Cocalis, 1-27. Tübingen: Francke, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Vintage, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); William T. Cavanaugh, "Colonialism and Religious Violence." In *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations*, edited by Timothy Fitzgerald, 241-62. (London: Equinox, 2007); Joan Wallach. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). See also Zwissler, "In the Study of the Witch."

<sup>34</sup> Roper *Oedipus and the Devil*; Jackson "Wives and Mothers;" Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Marianne, Lester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study in the Dynamics of Male Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Cowan makes the point that reductionist psychological readings of horror films, such as *Rosemary's Baby*, do not actually render theological messaging defunct. Doug Cowan, *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen* (Waco, TX: Baylor Press, 2008). 186-189.

<sup>36</sup> On feminist waves and the role of religion within them, see Laurel Zwissler *Religious, Feminist, Activist: Cosmologies of Interconnection*. Anthropology of North America Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Woman, Church and State* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1980 [1893]).

<sup>38</sup> Cynthia Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, 1861-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Elaine Hartnell, "'Nothing but Sweet and Womanly': A Hagiography of Pateore's Angel," *Victorian Poetry* 34, 4 (1996): 457-476; Natasha Moore, "The Realism of the Angel in the House: Coventry Patemore's Poem Reconsidered," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43, no. 1 (2015): 41-61.

<sup>40</sup> Laurel Zwissler, "Witches' Tears: Spiritual Feminism, Epistemology, and Witch Hunt Horror Stories." *The Pomegranate: International Journal of Pagan Studies* 18, 2 (2016):176-204.

<sup>41</sup> Laurel Zwissler, "In Memorium Maleficarum: Contemporary Pagan Mobilizations of the Burning Times." *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*, edited by Laura Kounine and Michael Ostling, Palgrave Studies in the History of Emotions Series. 249-268. London: Palgrave, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Zwissler "In Memorium Maleficarum," "Witches' Tears," and "In the Study of the Witch."

<sup>43</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*. See also Zwissler "In the Study of the Witch."

<sup>44</sup> Ronald Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Chas Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham md: Alta Mira Press, 2006); Sarah Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

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<sup>45</sup> Gardner, Gerald, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider, 1954). On mythical history, see Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshipers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986 [1979].) and “A Time for Truth: Wiccans Struggle with Information that Revisions Their History.” *Beliefnet*, Aug. 27, 2000, Accessed Aug. 8, 2018, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Pagan-and-Earth-Based/2000/09/A-Time-For-Truth.aspx>. See also Zwissler “In Memorium Maleficarum.”

<sup>46</sup> Margaret A. Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921).

<sup>47</sup> On the name, Wicca, see Ethan Doyle White, “The Meaning of ‘Wicca:’ A Study in Etymology, History, and Pagan Politics,” *The Pomegranate: International Journal of Pagan Studies* 12, 2 (2010): 185-207.

<sup>48</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*. See also Hutton *Triumph of the Moon* and Clifton *Her Hidden Children*.

<sup>49</sup> Zwissler, “In the Study of the Witch.”

<sup>50</sup> Zwissler “Witches’ Tears”; Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1993) and *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won’t Give Women a Future*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Laurel Zwissler, “Pagan Pilgrimage: New Religious Movements Research on Sacred Travel within Pagan and New Age Communities.” *Religion Compass*. New Religious Movements section 5,7 (2011) :326–342; “New Age, Wicca and Paganism.” *International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by Hilary Callan. Hoboken, NJ:Wiley-Blackwell, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Zuzsanna E. Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women’s Mysteries: Feminist Witchcraft, Goddess Rituals, Spellcasting & Other Womanly Arts*, (Oakland, CA: Wingbow Press, 1999 [1980]).

<sup>53</sup> Zwissler, *Religious, Feminist, Activist*.

<sup>54</sup> Zwissler “In Memorium Maleficarum” and “Witches’ Tears.” W.I.T.C.H. recently reignited in Portland. See *Haute Macabre*, “W.I.T.C.H. PDX: Portland Brings Back the Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell.” Jan. 27, 2017, Accessed Nov. 26, 2018, [hautemacabre.com/2017/01/w-i-t-c-h-pdx-portland-brings-back-the-womens-international-terrorist-conspiracy-from-hell](http://hautemacabre.com/2017/01/w-i-t-c-h-pdx-portland-brings-back-the-womens-international-terrorist-conspiracy-from-hell)

<sup>55</sup> Donna Read, dir. *The Goddess Trilogy* (Films, Film Board of Canada, 2007). The trilogy includes *Goddess Remembered* (Film, Film Board of Canada, 1989), *The Burning Times* (Film, Film Board of Canada, 1990), *Full Circle* (Film, Film Board of Canada, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (television series, Twentieth Century Fox, 1997-2003); *Charmed* (television series, Spelling Television and Paramount Television, 1998-2006) and the reboot, *Charmed* (television series, Poppy Productions and CBS Television Studios, 2018-present).

<sup>57</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter Series* (London: Bloombury, 1997-2007) and films (Warner Bros., 2001-2011).

<sup>58</sup> John Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: Knopff, 1971).

<sup>59</sup> Robert Stromberg, dir., *Maleficent* (film, Walt Disney Pictures, 2004); Victor Fleming, dir. *The Wizard of Oz* (Film, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939); Gregory Macguire, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996).

<sup>60</sup> *Supernatural* (Television series. Kripke Enterprises, 2005–present); *Salem* (television series, Beetlecod Productions, 2014-2017); *American Horror Story: Coven (Season 3)* (Television series, Brad Falchuk Teley-Vision and Ryan Murphy Productions. 2013-2014); *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (television series, Warner Bros.,

2018- present); Tommy Wirkola, dir., *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* (film, Paramount Pictures, 2013); Brick Eisner, dir., *The Last Witch Hunter* (film, Summit Entertainment, 2015); Nathan Greno and Byron Howard, dir., *Tangled* (film, Walt Disney Pictures, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Kristen J. Sollee, *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* (Berkeley, CA: ThreeL Media, 2017); Sanam Yar, "Witchcraft in the #MeToo Era," *New York Times*, Aug. 16, 2018, Accessed September 23, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/16/nyregion/witchcraft-in-the-meetoo-era.html>; Naomi Fry, "The Many Faces of Women Who Identify as Witches," *The New Yorker*, Aug. 24, 2018, Accessed Sept. 23, 2018, <https://www.thenewyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/the-many-faces-of-women-who-identify-as-witches>. Fry is covering Frances F. Denny's portrait series, "Major Arcana: Witches in America."

<sup>62</sup> For examples, see Peg Aloï and Hannah E. Johnston, *The New Generation Witches: Teenage Witchcraft in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> Zwissler "In Memorium Maleficarum" and "Witches' Tears." See also Purkiss, *The Witch in History*.

<sup>64</sup> Zwissler "Witches' Tears."

<sup>65</sup> Murphy, "That (Very, Very) Old Black Magic;" Rife, "The Witch Director Robert Eggers."

<sup>66</sup> For an exception, see Sollee, *Witches, Sluts, Feminists*.

<sup>67</sup> Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999 [1979]); Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*. See also Pike, *New Age and Neo-Pagan Religions*; Hutton *Triumph of the Moon*. For the crucial distinctions between Pagan Witchcraft and Satanic Witchcraft, see Hanegraaf, "From the Devil's Gateway to the Goddess Within."

<sup>68</sup> David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Ritual Abuse in History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2006). See also Zwissler "In Memorium Maleficarum."

<sup>69</sup> Zwissler *Religious, Feminist, Activist*.

<sup>70</sup> Gavin Baddeley, *Lucifer Rising: A Book of Sin, Devil Worship, and Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Plexus, 1999).

<sup>71</sup> Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*; Baddeley, *Lucifer Rising*; Ruben van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Per Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

<sup>72</sup> Blackmore "A Letter from Jex Blackmore."

<sup>73</sup> This can help contextualize The Satanic Temple's umbrage at the unauthorized use of their Baphomet statue to represent the oppressive antagonists in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. See Julia Jacobs, "Satanic Temple Sues Over Goat-Headed Statue in 'Sabrina' Series" *New York Times* Nov. 9 2018, Accessed Nov. 27, 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/09/us/satanic-temple-suing-netflix-sabrina.html?module=inline> See also Lucien Greaves, "The Satanic Temple Amicably Settles Lawsuit Against Warner Brother [sic] and Netflix." *Patheos*. Nov. 21, 2018, Accessed Nov. 26, 2018 <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/infernal/2018/11/the-satanic-temple-amicably-settles-lawsuit-against-warner-brother-netflix/>

<sup>74</sup> Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*.

<sup>75</sup> Stacy Schiff, "Witchcraft on the Campaign Trail," *The New York Times*, Oct. 31, 2016, Accessed Aug. 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/31/opinion/witchcraft-on-the-campaign-trail.html>;

<sup>76</sup> E.g. Julie Hirschfeld Davis, Eileen Sullivan and Katie Benner, "Trump Tells Sessions to 'Stop This Rigged Witch

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<sup>77</sup> Christina Lerner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (London: Blackwell, 1984); Lyndal Roper, *Witchcraze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004) and *Oedipus and the Devil*. For contemporary commentary, see West, “Yes, This is a Witch Hunt.”

<sup>78</sup> Moira Smith, “The Flying Phallus and the Laughing Inquisitor: Penis Theft in the ‘Malleus Maleficarum.’” *Journal of Folklore Research*. Vol. 39, No. 1 (2002): 85-117.

<sup>79</sup> Joho, “The Witch Isn’t an Empowerment Narrative.”

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