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Radically Feminist or Monstrously Feminine?: Witches and Goddesses in Guadagnino's *Suspiria* (2018)

Abstract

Guadagnino's 2018 remake of *Suspiria* explicitly and implicitly incorporates two connected myths, witchcraft and goddess centered matriarchal prehistory. The fact that each of these myths have been claimed by feminists in myriad ways may explain Guadagnino's claim that *Suspiria* is a great feminist film that escapes the male gaze. In this article, I argue that Guadagnino's representation of these myths lays bare their misogynistic origins and perpetuates, rather than subverts, patriarchal power structures.

Keywords

Women, Witches, Monstrous Feminine, Great Mother, Goddess, Myth, Power

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Author Notes

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Luca Guadagnino's 2018 remake (or, more aptly, reimagining),¹ of Dario Argento's *Suspria* is set in 1977 (the same year the original was released), in divided Berlin. It follows the journey of Susie Bannion, who leaves her Mennonite family in Ohio following the death of her mother, and travels to the prestigious Markos Dance Academy. Although she has no formal training, she *slays* her audition, and is welcomed into the "little family."² As she prepares to dance the lead in *Volk*, a piece written during the Second World War and being revived for one final performance, she grows close with fellow pupil Sarah (played by Mia Goth) and Matron Mme. Blanc (played by Tilda Swinton).³

As we might expect if we are familiar with the original *Suspria*,⁴ there is something sinister happening behind the scenes, or beneath the floorboards, of the Academy. Its matrons are members of a coven established by three primordial mothers, Mother Suspiriorum (Mother of Sighs), Mother Tenebrarum (Mother of Darkness), and Mother Lachrymarum (Mother of Tears). Helena Markos, who claims to be Mother Suspiriorum, is being held in the recesses of the Academy, where her severely disfigured and grotesque body (including small hands hanging from random, oozing places), is quickly deteriorating. For her to assume her role as leader of the coven, she requires a vessel, which the Matrons are attempting to cull from the young dancers. As Susie prepares to dance the lead in *Volk*, the matrons prepare a sabbath, complete with three sacrificial victims, that will ritualistically transfer Mother Markos'/ Suspiriorum's essence into Susie's body.

Suspria is a complex film with several layers of narrative and meaning, not all of which will be addressed in the scope of this article. It is a film about women, witches, and mothers. Set during the "German Autumn" of 1977,⁵ it is also a film about violent revolution and coming to terms with the Nazi past in Germany. It is also, according to Guadagnino, a feminist film.⁶ When pressed about what makes *Suspria* a feminist film, Guadagnino cites his incorporation of two

interconnected mythologies, witchcraft and goddess centered matriarchal prehistory. He thus places himself alongside feminists who have claimed these mythologies as central to their ideologies and identities for decades. A closer look at the genealogies of these myths, however, reveals a much more complex history. In their earliest constructions, each of these myths were used to justify patriarchal power structures and victimize women, a trend that has continued alongside feminist constructions ever since. Like all myths, witchcraft and goddess centered matriarchal prehistory are inherently malleable and inextricably connected with ideology and power. Simply invoking them does not ensure that *Suspiria* works to challenge and subvert patriarchal power structures, which I suggest, despite the diversity and complexity of feminist discourse and activism, is the least we should expect from a feminist film. In this article, I explore the genealogies of these two myths to argue that Guadagnino's representation of them relies upon and reproduces misogynistic tropes. Thus, rather than challenging and subverting patriarchal structures, it perpetuates them.

The Myth of the Witch: History and Film

When asked what motivated him to work in the “realm of femininity,” Guadagnino explains:

Well, the movie is about witches. And as we know, historically, witches are witches because people decide they are witches. And who are the witches? Usually a group of women that decides to be together, and a certain patriarchal voice doesn't like that. They don't like their independence. I think it was interesting that by making a movie about witches, we were able to summon the power of being a witch and not the indictment of being such, and really separate ourselves from the male gaze. Being a man.⁷

Leaving aside for the moment his claim to have “separated himself” from the male gaze, Guadagnino here acknowledges the constructed and ahistorical nature of the myth of the witch. Although he offers a particular interpretation of what drove the persecution of women as witches, that they established community and independence within patriarchal society, he also makes clear

that this construction is wholly a projection. What is a witch? Whatever the men in power say she is. Thus, as Guadagnino suggests, the myth of the witch is a reflection not of the deeds or beliefs of the thousands of women accused of witchcraft (and tortured and murdered as a result), but instead of the fears and anxieties of their persecutors.

This projection onto the witch's body of the fears and anxieties of her inventors exemplifies Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's thesis that the "monster's body is a cultural body." As "pure culture" the monstrous body is "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place." It is the site upon which the "fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy," of its makers are projected, displaced, given life and "uncanny independence." Like all monsters, the witch's body "signifies something other than itself," and thus can be read to reveal the culture that created it.⁸ As Guadagnino suggests, some of the earliest constructions of this myth reflect fears about women's power, independence, and solidarity within patriarchal society.

Unlike monsters that exist only in film or fiction, the fears and anxieties projected onto the witch's body are also historically projected onto the bodies of actual women. Thus, the myth of the witch also exemplifies Cohen's thesis that the "monster dwells at the gates of difference,"⁹ whereby difference itself within patriarchal, white supremacist, imperialist, cisgendered, heteronormative society,¹⁰ is constructed as monstrous. In the case of the earliest constructions of the myth of the witch, sexual and gendered difference was constructed as monstrous, compounding the monstrousness of women's bodies not just as the site of displacement of fears and anxieties, but also as aberrant and inferior to constructions of masculinity, gender, and sexuality within patriarchal society. As we have seen with the construction of monsters that "dwell at the gates of difference," across time and space, and as is certainly the case with the historical persecution of

women as witches, the construction of difference as monstrous precedes, justifies, and even necessitates the political oppression and physical destruction of marginalized peoples and groups.

Given the clear misogynistic and patriarchal functions of the earliest constructions of the myth of the witch, it is perhaps surprising that it “has become such a key part of many feminists’ identities [that] to point to its limitations is bound to be painful and dismissive.”¹¹ In fact, despite the myriad shifts and debates in feminist discourse, the myth of the witch has remained central, though the construction of the witch herself has shifted. Rather than being a site upon which fears and anxieties are projected, the witch’s body became a site to read back into the past the contemporary challenges, goals, and aspirations of feminist thinkers and activists.

As suffragists fought for the right to vote in the first wave of feminist activism, the witch was constructed as a forerunner in suffering¹² who made clear the necessity of increased social and economic participation in society.¹³ When persecution continued despite this increased participation, making clear the systemic nature of misogyny, the witch of the 1960s and 1970s became a subversive figure. As a healer, activist, or midwife silenced by the men and the system she threatened, the witch was constructed as the “original feminist.”¹⁴ Practitioners of modern witchcraft, or Wicca, have drawn on these constructions to invent a religion centered around goddess worship that invites identification with witches and mythological figures of the past, and includes rituals, texts, communities, and an earth-centered worldview.¹⁵

The construction of the witch’s body as a “cultural body” upon which either misogynistic fears or feminist aspirations are projected is further demonstrated in the representations of witches and witchcraft in film. Scholars such as Marion Gibson, Dianne Purkiss, and Laurel Zwissler have traced representations of witches and witchcraft in films ranging from satanic and monstrous, to subversive and liberating, or somewhere in between. These representations draw on constructions

of the myth from the earliest misogynistic to more contemporary feminist sources. The two extremes of this spectrum are theoretically examined in Barbara Creed's work, which explores the representation of women in horror, revealing their potential to perpetuate or challenge patriarchal power structures.

In her earliest analysis of women in horror, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), Creed argues that the monstrousness of the witch in film is inextricably connected with her body, sexuality, and reproductive capacity. This emphasis on "gender in the construction of her monstrosity," leads Creed to insist that "[t]he reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience."¹⁶ We see this demonstrated in myriad films, including *Carrie* (1976), wherein the young protagonists' monstrous telekinetic powers develop when she gets her period; *The Witches* (1990, 2020), and even the children's film *Hocus Pocus* (1993), wherein witches commit infanticide; and *Rosemary's baby* (1968), where there is a sexual and reproductive link between the woman/witch and the devil. These films draw on some of the earliest misogynistic constructions of the myth to represent witches as inherently (bodily) monstrous figures who threaten the patriarchal order. By re-presenting these constructions, they perpetuate the structures that construct the witch as monstrous, which leads to the monsterization and policing of women's bodies beyond the screen.

In her more recent (2022) analysis of genre-bending¹⁷ horror films directed by feminist filmmakers, which she classifies as Feminist New Wave Cinema, Creed explores representations of witches as subversive figures. These witches exemplify the *return* of the monstrous feminine, which is marked by protagonists whose monstrousness becomes a tool for revolt against patriarchal structures and norms. Among these protagonists are witches like Thelma (*Thelma*, dir. Joachim

Trier, 2017), who, like Carrie, possesses the supernatural power of telekinesis. Unlike Carrie, Thelma's power results not from her menarche, but from repressing her romantic feelings towards another woman. As Thelma acknowledges her queerness, she learns to embrace and control her supernatural powers, while also using them to revolt against and ultimately kill her father, who, like Carrie's mother, represents the patriarchal/religious symbolic order. Witches like Thelma reflect feminist constructions of the myth in their emphasis on agency and empowerment, thus challenging and subverting misogynistic constructions of witches and women more broadly.¹⁸

Whether films about witchcraft exemplify the monstrous feminine, New Wave Feminist Cinema, or somewhere in between, the centrality of the myth of the witch in feminist discourse has resulted in an “anachronistic conflation of witchcraft and feminist agency” in popular consciousness.¹⁹ As a result, even films which construct the witch as a monstrous figure, relying on and reproducing misogynistic tropes to do so, are often labelled feminist by viewers and critics. This dynamic is explored by Laurel Zwissler in her analysis of Robert Egger's *The Witch: A New England Folktale* (2015). Even though this film clearly represents the projection of the “misogynist nightmare”²⁰ of the myth onto the body of the young protagonist, Thomasin, and her ultimate victimization as a result, reviewers read agency into her *choice* to make an alliance with the devil at the end of the film, and celebrate it as feminist. As Zwissler argues, however, Thomasin has no other options at this point, having lost her family, home, and everything she has ever known. In addition, by *choosing* to “live deliciously” in the end, she is not free, but is bound to a different patriarchal power, that of the devil, revealing that this “final pact is not a fantasy of women's empowerment, but instead an exposé of devouring male power.”²¹

Perhaps the fact that, “in the contemporary Western context, feminism and witchcraft are fused both by their proponents and detractors”²² helps explain Guadagnino's insistence that

Suspiria is a feminist film. As the brief genealogy of the myth of the witch I have provided reveals, however, this myth can be used to either perpetuate or challenge patriarchal structures, and simply representing witches and witchcraft in a film does not ensure it accomplishes the latter. A closer look at Guadagnino's construction of the myth in *Suspiria* demonstrates its clear reliance on and reproduction of the misogynistic tropes of the monstrous feminine. Thus, rather than challenging, subverting, or revolting against patriarchal structures, it perpetuates them.

The Monstrous Feminine: Woman as Witch

Much like the films previously discussed, including *Carrie* (1976), *The Witches* (1990, 2020), and *The Witch* (2015), *Suspiria* relies upon and reproduces the construction of witchcraft as associated with reproductive crimes, and therefore represents women's bodies, sexuality, reproduction, and motherhood itself, as monstrous and abject. The film makes this connection explicit in at least three ways: the manipulation of penises, the dream sequences, and the witches sabbath.

The claim that witches are able to manipulate penises is an especially absurd although common trope which we see *spelled* out in *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches). This text, published in 1486 and written by two Dominican Friars charged with combatting heretical opposition to the Church²³ includes *colorful* descriptions of witches manipulating men's minds so they could neither feel nor see their penises. In some cases, these women/witches even led men to believe that they kept their penises in their personal collections, "(twenty or thirty at once) in a bird's nest or in some cabinet, where the members move as if alive or eat a stalk or fodder."²⁴

The only scene in *Suspiria* which features men prominently re-presents this chimerical construction of the crimes of the witch. When two police officers arrive at the Academy to investigate the disappearance of Patricia (a previous unsuccessful vessel for Markos, whose

disfigured body is being stored as a sacrifice for the upcoming sabbath), three matrons put them in a trance state. They then strip them from the waist down, hysterically laughing as they poke at their penises with a meat hook, while mockingly playing with their guns.²⁵ We are invited to voyeuristically witness this scene through Susie's eyes, who peers in on it through a hole in a wall. Like Susie, we are inspired to laugh at this performative degradation of the authority of the police officers, as well as their symbols of power and control (penises and guns). While there are certainly subversive aspects of this scene, this subversiveness is ultimately belied by the fact that it is achieved by reproducing the misogynistic and chimerical accusation of women/witches as castrators, which was central in the accusations, torture, and murder of thousands of women.

The dream sequences in *Suspiria* exemplify the association of witches with things that are abject, as well as the identification of the maternal body as an abject reality. In this, they exemplify Julia Kristeva's analysis of the construction of woman's bodies, especially the maternal body, as a foil to the symbolic patriarchal order.²⁶ This construction associates these bodies with things that are abject, causing us to recoil from them in disgust because they transgress or threaten to transgress boundaries and constructed borders.²⁷ We can think of these borders as bodily, so that shit, pus, and vomit are abject because they transgress the border between internal and external. We can think of them as existential, so that a corpse (which Kristeva identifies as the ultimate abject object), threatens the distinction/border between the living and the dead. Since it is a bodily form that we identify with, but it is not alive, we recoil from the corpse, thus cementing our place in the land of the living. The abject can also be that which transgresses symbolic or constructed borders, like gender, sexuality, good and evil, or moral and immoral.²⁸

Within patriarchal societies, the female, especially maternal, body is constructed as inherently abject not just because, as a menstruating body, it crosses the threshold of

internal/external, but also because it “lies outside... [and] does not seem to agree to the latter’s rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master.”²⁹ In order to police these bodies, ensuring they do not threaten the symbolic order, they are constructed in ways that compound their abjectness. Thus, the leaking (breastfeeding), bleeding (menstruating), and shit covered (because of the mother’s role in cleaning the baby and toilet training), body of the mother is constructed as inherently abject, and is represented as something the child must distance themselves (even recoil in disgust) from to take their place in the symbolic order of patriarchal society.

The dream sequences in *Suspiria* exemplify Creed’s claim that horror continues the trend of constructing women’s bodies as abject. As Susie writhes restlessly in her bed, Mme. Blanc fills her mind with rapid cuts of abject images that transgress bodily borders (a clump of hair in a toilet bowl, a bodily organ (perhaps a lung) on the pavement, blood being spit out of a mouth, intestines being rubbed sensually on a woman’s chest); and that construct women’s bodies, sexuality, and reproductive qualities as abject (underwear soaked in menstrual blood laid beside a dirty, squirming earthworm; a woman breathing heavily and seemingly orgasmically while directing a meat hook towards her vulva).³⁰ These dream sequences are essentially essays in abjection that exemplify the association of witches with abject realities,³¹ and the construction of women’s bodies and reproductive capacities as abject.

The witches sabbath that is the climax of *Suspiria* also recalls chimerical constructions of this event where women roast babies over open flames, offer children to the devil, dance around feverishly, and engage in wild orgies. *Malleus Maleficarum* includes a description of the witches sabbath, in which the witch makes her (often sexual) alliance with the devil and offers children in sacrifice:

There are two methods of making the avowal. One is a ceremonial way similar to a ceremonial vow. The other is a private one that can be made to a demon individually at any hour. The ceremonial one is carried out among them when the sorceresses come to a certain assembly on a fixed day and see the demon in the assumed guise of a human as he urges them to keep their faith to him... The women who are in attendance commend to him the female novice who is to be accepted, and then, if the demon finds the female novice (or male disciple) ready to renounce the Most Christian Faith and Worship, and never to adore the “Distended Woman” (that is what they call the Most Blessed Virgin Mary) and Sacraments, then the demon holds out his hand and conversely the male disciple (or female novice) promises to follow those practices, pledging this by signature. After getting these promises, the demon immediately adds that they are not enough, and when the disciple asks what further ones must be made, the demon asks for homage, which contains the provision that the person will belong to him eternally in body and soul and be willing, to the best of his abilities, to turn any other people, of both sexes, into the demon’s associates. He then adds that the person should make himself certain pastes out of the bones and limbs of children, especially those reborn with the Font of Baptism, and that with these pastes he would be able to fulfill all his desires with the demon’s assistance.³²

Suspiria’s sabbath uncritically re-presents many of these chimerical constructions. As Susie descends into the recesses of the Academy following the performance of *Volk*, she finds Helena Markos and Mme. Blanc waiting for her. The dancers and the rest of the matrons are dancing in a choreographed arrangement. The matrons wear outfits seemingly made from human hair, while the young dancers’ naked bodies writhe in rhythmic movements to the chanting that saturates the scene like the blood red that bathes it. In the centre of the dance are the three sacrificial victims, Sara (who is disembowelled before Susie arrives), Olga, and Patricia, both of whom are previous unsuccessful vessels who have been kept barely alive in the recesses of the academy awaiting this ritual.

As Susie enters, we sense a hesitation in Mme. Blanc, who assures her that she does not need to go through with the ritual unless she is willing. Susie, however, is committed, insisting, “I came here for this. You have all waited long enough.” This delights Markos, who exclaims, “It’s happening!” When Mme. Blanc continues to protest, Markos reaches out a hand and partially

decapitates her, causing blood to spurt dramatically from the back of her neck. Markos then instructs Susie to empty herself to her mother, “death to any other mother,” to prepare to become her vessel. At this point, a strange dark figure, perhaps the devil himself *in the assumed guise of a human*, enters the room. Terrified, Markos demands to know who Susie is. In response, Susie asks Markos which of the three mothers she was anointed for. When she replies “Mother Suspiriorum,” Susie corrects her, “I am she.”

What follows is a blood bath as the shadowy figure kills Markos and each of the matrons that supported her as head of the coven. As more blood fills the already saturated frame, Susie brings her hands to her chest, tearing open a vulva shaped wound while whispering “I am mother.” Standing in the centre of the dancers who remain, still writhing rhythmically (though they are now accompanied by Thom Yorke’s chilling score), and surrounded by blood and bodies, she insists they keep dancing, that “it’s beautiful.”³³

The clear reproduction of the misogynistic tropes of the monstrous feminine in *Suspiria* makes Guadagnino’s insistence that it is a feminist film especially dubious. Perhaps, like so many others, he conflates witchcraft and feminist agency. As I have demonstrated, however, the genealogy of the myth of the witch reveals its potential to both perpetuate and challenge patriarchal power. If Guadagnino was committed to creating a feminist film, he certainly had many feminist constructions of witches and witchcraft to consult. Instead, he seems to have relied solely on misogynistic constructions of witches’/women’s bodies as monstrous and abject.

It is also quite clear that, unlike the witches who exemplify the return of the monstrous feminine, these witches do not use their monstrousness as a tool to revolt against the patriarchal order. Even though the academy is a matriarchal space that is insulated from the world beyond its walls, it mirrors rather than challenges or revolts against the hierarchy, social stratification, and

violence of patriarchal society. Led by the decidedly dictatorial and delusional Mother Markos, the academy offers little to no space for the Matrons to exercise agency or protest her authority. Even Mme. Blanc, who has the most influence after Markos, is (nearly) beheaded by Markos when she tries to protect Susie at the sabbath. Although the other Matrons cast votes for who should become the next leader, Markos or Mme. Blanc, this perceived democratic agency is negated by the fact that they are being deceived by a delusional lie (that Markos is Mother Suspiriorum), as well as by the deadly consequences of this choice at the sabbath. The young pupils of the academy are powerless. They are unaware that their minds and bodies are being manipulated, and that sacrificial victims and vessels are being culled and groomed from among their numbers. The violent deaths of Olga, Sara, Patricia, and many of the Matrons, demonstrates that resistance to this order results in terror, torture, and sacrificial death.

The clear and uncritical reproduction of the tropes of the monstrous feminine in *Suspiria*, coupled with the lack of challenge or revolt against patriarchal norms and power structures, leads me to insist that this film cannot be considered feminist, nor does it escape the male gaze. Although it is a film about women, featuring a nearly all female cast, including the role of the one lead male character, these women continue to be framed by a man who relies upon and reproduces misogynistic, and frankly, tired, dated, and dangerous tropes. Rather than representing witches as figures who challenge and subvert patriarchal power, for which there are myriad excellent sources and scholarship, Guadagnino's construction of women/witches as the monstrous other who "dwell at the gates of difference," denies them agency and concretizes, rather than challenges, their otherness within patriarchal society.

The Myth of the Goddess: Supersession, feminists, and fascists

The final scene of *Suspiria* takes us away from the main narrative of the film both temporally and stylistically. Although there is no clear indication of when the scene unfolds, the modern power lines overhead, contemporary clothing, and technology (a cell phone and subway trains), suggests it unfolds years or perhaps decades later. The vibrant color of this scene, which takes place on a bright sunny day, perhaps in the middle of spring when all of nature is reawakened, stands in stark contrast to the washed-out hues and stormy days that precede it.

Everything about this scene suggests this is a world where women live in community and friendship with one another and the natural world. Like most of the film, it contains only women, save for one man who passes by quickly and is easily missed. One woman walks down a path overgrown with greenery. Another carries a basket of freshly picked flowers, which she passes to another over a garden fence. Graciously receiving the flowers, she leads a young girl, perhaps five years old, out of her home, seemingly returning her to the care of her mother. Another woman walks by the garden, greeting the one inside, then begins happily chatting on a cell phone. If we look closely, we can see that she is carrying a book bearing the title, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*.³⁴

This fleeting glimpse implicitly hints at the other myth that Guadagnino has explicitly stated informs *Suspiria*, the myth of the goddess. This myth posits that prior to patriarchal monotheistic society, social organization was matriarchal, and communities worshipped female goddess figures. This worship translated to the treatment of women in society, where reproductive capacities such as menstruation and childbirth were venerated.³⁵ Like the myth of the witch, Guadagnino makes clear that he understands this myth, and his reliance on it, to support his insistence that *Suspiria* is a feminist film:

There is a great book called *The Great Mother* by Erich Neumann, a great anthropologist that tracks the story of the goddess in cultures and how that has been wiped out in order to put patriarchy in the center. If we talk about the Great Mother, we cannot deny the terrible mother. True feminism is something that doesn't shy away from the complexity of the female identity. It's not about sugarcoating and saying, "They're good; men are bad." That's ridiculous. I think that's victimization. I think women are complex creatures who carry with them a difference [from] men in a generative power, and I feel that this movie is, in fact, about the relationship between women, mostly. And even the man is created by a woman. I think that if we approach that, you can't do something that is just a one-dimensional, vanilla idea of the power of women.³⁶

Leaving aside for a moment Guadagnino's reliance on a text written by a man, in 1955, as informing "true feminism," his use of Neumann as his source for the myth of the goddess, and more generally his reliance on the myth at all, demonstrate a lack of attention to feminist constructions and critiques of the myth. Like the myth of the witch, the myth of the goddess is inherently malleable and inextricably connected with power and ideology. Its genealogy follows a similar pattern, demonstrating its ability to both challenge and perpetuate patriarchal power structures. Unlike the myth of the witch, however, the myth of the goddess has been heavily critiqued by many contemporary feminist scholars, who cite its dated and dangerous ideological implications as actively threatening contemporary ideals and goals, calling into question whether it is a viable source of inspiration for a feminist film.

The earliest modern construction of the myth of the goddess comes from the works of a Swiss philologist and jurist, Johann Jakob Bachofen. In his 1861 work, *Das Mutterrecht: Eine Untersuchung über die Gynaikokratie der alten Welt nach ihrer religiösen und rechtlichen Natur* (*Mother Right: Research into the Religious and Juridical Nature of the Gynocracy of the Ancient World*), Bachofen argued that patriarchal and monotheistic social organization *superseded* matriarchal goddess centered organization, which he called the gynocritic culture, or the mother right. He locates the shift away from this strange, uncivilized, and uncultured society in "classical

antiquity,” which he associates with the societies and mythology of Greece and Rome.³⁷ Even though Bachofen maintained a “nostalgic yearning” for this prehistoric stage, he insisted that patriarchal monotheism was a “necessary and positive evolution of human society out of an inferior matriarchal age.”³⁸

Bachofen’s work was, and remains, highly criticized by historians, largely due to the lack of concrete historical evidence to support the narrative it hinges upon.³⁹ Like many constructions of the myth of the goddess that followed, Bachofen relied primarily on archeological and mythological sources from which he constructed a historic narrative. Foremost among this evidence were excavated statues of pregnant and engorged women which he claimed to be venerated goddess figures, although there is no indication of whether or how these were used ritualistically.⁴⁰ Despite these critiques, Bachofen’s work was taken up over fifty years later by a group of scholars, including Carl Jung, Erich Neumann, and Joseph Campbell, who reinterpreted it as a psychological treatise. Rather than a historical narrative, the myth became the foundation of a symbolic map through mythology and the unconscious. In Neumann’s unpublished manuscript from 1934, the same year he fled Nazi Germany and briefly studied with Carl Jung (the “friend and mentor” to whom he dedicates *The Great Mother*), he makes clear both his reliance on, and reinterpretation of, Bachofen’s work:

Bachofen is overall a treasure chest of psychological knowledge, if one understands him—his merits as a historian aside—as a modern researcher of the soul, something he himself was not aware of. For instance, as soon as you read the tellurian [chthonic or earth centered] region as the unconscious and oppose it to the uranian region of the conscious, all of his findings—interpreted symbolically and not historically—gain a new and highly modern significance.⁴¹

Neumann’s text relies on mythology to trace shifts in representations of the mother goddess in the evolution from matriarchal to patriarchal consciousness and social organization. Like Bachofen, he considers this to be an evolution from a lesser to a more evolved form of human

consciousness. This reframing of Bachofen's work allowed Neumann, Jung, and Campbell to construct the myth of the goddess in new ways, and contributed to its popularization within and outside academia, including within feminist discourse.

Feminist constructions of the myth of the goddess, like the myth of the witch, are diverse and connected with the shifting challenges and goals of feminist thinkers and activists. While the narrative structure of these constructions remains fairly consistent, the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy is interpreted as resulting from the systematic and strategic silencing, murder, and erasure of the goddess, rather than the natural evolution to a higher form of consciousness and social organization. Some scholarly constructions, most notably Marjita Gimbutas' *The Language of the Goddess* (1989), have focused, like Bachofen, on archeological findings. Others, including Anne Baring and Jules Cashford's *The Myth of the Goddess: The Evolution of an Image* (1991) have, like Neumann, considered these findings alongside mythological representations of the goddess. Particularly since the 1970s, the myth of the goddess has provided feminist activists and scholars with both an explanation of how patriarchal power structures developed as well as a blueprint for an alternative, even a "promise to dethrone the apparently male god of traditional Western religions and replace him with a Great Goddess."⁴² In contemporary feminist spiritual practice, including Wicca, the myth of the witch is explicitly connected with the myth of the goddess. This connection is constructed historically, as the murder of witches is seen as a continuation of the murder of the goddess, and ideologically, as the worship of the goddess is read back into the lives of women accused as witches, and forward into the practice of contemporary Wiccans.⁴³

The popularity and prevalence of the myth of the goddess within feminist scholarship and discourse makes Guadagnino's reliance on Neumann's text even more dubious, as feminist

scholars have largely rejected Neumann's construction. Most strikingly, the two aspects of Neumann's work that are most readily apparent in *Suspiria* are emphatically rejected by feminist scholars. The first of these is Neumann's insistence that the Great Mother is a figure of duality that

combines positive and negative attributes and groups of attributes. This union of opposites in the primordial archetype, its ambivalence, is characteristic of the original situation of the unconscious, which consciousness has not yet dissected into its antithesis. Early man experiences this paradoxical simultaneity of good and evil, friendly and terrible, in this godhead as a unity; while as consciousness developed, the good goddess and the bad goddess, for example, usually came to be worshipped as different beings.⁴⁴

In other words, during what Neumann identifies as the "uroboric" period, the Great Mother is undifferentiated, a figure of totality, encompassing both life and death. Once human consciousness develops, the archetype is split into two antithetical forms: the great mother, associated with birth and nurturing care, and the terrible mother, associated with death and terror.

In addition to affirming the divided nature of the archetype, Neumann argues that in the process of evolving towards patriarchal monotheistic consciousness and social organization, representations of the Terrible Mother were obscured in favor of an emphasis on the Great Mother. Eventually, "the Great Mother becomes simply the Good Mother, consort of Father-Gods" and "her dark animal side," gets forgotten.⁴⁵ Neumann therefore sees his work as an important step in recovering the totality of the Great Mother, by teasing out the remnants of the Terrible Mother and restoring the original (though preconscious) totality of the archetype.⁴⁶ *Suspiria* reflects both Neumann's construction of the Great Mother as a dualistic figure as well as his emphasis on the Terrible Mother at the expense of the great.

Perhaps above all else, *Suspiria* is a film about mothers. Lest we miss the significance of this theme, our first glimpse of Susie, as her family tends to the body of her dying mother, includes a close-up of a needlepoint on the wall of the family home that reads, *A Mother is a woman who*

can take the place of all others but whose place no one else can take. Even as Susie travels to the Academy in Berlin in the following scene, her mother's labored final breaths, coupled with the final line from Thom Yorke's haunting title track, *Suspiriorum*, "Mother wants us back beside her, no tomorrows, at peace," continue to overlay (audibly) her journey.⁴⁷ Once she settles in at the Academy, the matrons, especially Mme. Blanc, assume a motherly role in her life. As previously mentioned, the coven itself is founded and maintained by three primordial mothers. When it is revealed that Susie is the true Mother *Suspiriorum*, the vaginal wound she tears into her chest (while stating "I am Mother") affirms her role as a motherly figure who gives birth, if not to a child, to a renewed community/coven.

As clear as the emphasis on motherhood is in *Suspiria*, it is equally clear that there is an overabundance of terrible or life-taking mothers, and a lack of great or life-giving ones. In fact, the only potential examples of great or life-giving mothers are Mme. Blanc and Susie/Mother *Suspiriorum*, neither of which is uncomplicatedly so. In Susie/Mother *Suspiriorum*'s case, there are a few clues that her reign may be more merciful than the previous one, and that she may be a life-giving/affirming leader/mother. In the witches' Sabbath, she grants a merciful death to the three sacrificial victims, Olga, Sara, and Patricia, suggesting that, despite the violent purge her assumption as leader necessitated, it does not require the death of these three innocent victims.

We are also granted one last glimpse of Mother *Suspiriorum* after the Sabbath, just before the garden scene that concludes the film. Here, she visits Dr. Klemperer, who was cruelly forced to witness the sabbath massacre. Calmly sitting on the edge of his bed, she apologizes for his treatment by *her daughters*, and grants him the knowledge of his wife's fate, which he has been desperately seeking since they were separated during the war. She informs him that his wife died at the Theresienstadt ghetto alongside two women she befriended, and that her final thoughts were

of him. Although she died a painful death, she assures him she was not alone, or afraid.⁴⁸ This description of female friendship and solidarity in the midst of death and desperation may be an indication of the kind of community/coven that she will inaugurate. In a final act of mercy, she erases Dr. Klemperer's memory, absolving him of the immense guilt he harbours for not getting his wife out of Germany in time (despite her warnings), and removing the pain of her memory and loss.

We also see these qualities of the great, or life-giving mother, reflected in Mme. Blanc's love and care for Susie. They develop a close bond over the course of the film, which among other things allows Mme. Blanc to control Susie's dreams and communicate with her telepathically. At one point, Susie lets Mme. Blanc know that she is aware that she loves her. At the Sabbath, Mme. Blanc, though oblivious (like everyone else) to Susie's true identity, tries her best to spare her from the ritualistic transference of Markos' essence into her body. Mme. Blanc's care and love for Susie is, however, a contrast to her active participation in the grooming, torture, and murder of other pupils at the Academy.

The rest of the mothers in the film, including Susie's mother and the Matrons of the Academy, are quite uncomplicatedly terrible, and exemplify the life-taking aspects of the Great Mother archetype. Although Susie's mother dies in the opening scenes, flashbacks and dream sequences make clear that she abused Susie during her childhood and adolescence. In one dream sequence, we see her burn Susie's hand with an iron after discovering her masturbating in a closet.⁴⁹ In a flashback, as Susie studies geography alongside her sisters, obsessively encircling Berlin despite their insistence that they "have to study America," her mother angrily tears the page out of her book and crumples it up.⁵⁰ This, along with her confession to the priest delivering her last rites that Susie is the "sin I smeared on the world,"⁵¹ suggest that she is aware of Susie's true

nature, identity, or potential to become Mother Suspiriorum, though it's unclear what role she plays in this.

Alongside Mme. Blanc, all the other Matrons at the Academy have been actively involved in the torture and sacrifice of the young dancers in their attempts to find a vessel for Markos. As we have already seen, this mother is also terrible. Not only is she seeking control of the coven based on a lie (that she is Mother Suspiriorum), but her leadership necessitates violence and life-taking. Her deteriorating body is both motherly, including pendulous breasts, an enlarged abdomen, and wide hips; and abject, including wounds, leaks, and grotesque features that cross the bodily boundary.

It is possible to interpret Guagagnino's division of these mothers into great and terrible, as well as his emphasis on the terrible mothers at the expense of great, as reflecting Neumann's analysis. Perhaps, like Neumann, he is attempting to restore the totality of the Great Mother by teasing out the remnants of the Terrible Mother he claims have been obscured within patriarchal systems. If this is his objective, he has succeeded. However, given that these two aspects of Neumann's construction of the myth of the goddess are vehemently rejected within feminist discourse, it's difficult to affirm his conclusion that the film can be considered feminist.

The first of these, that the goddess is a figure of duality from the time of the emergence of human consciousness, is explicitly rejected by Baring and Cashford who explain that

Neumann ... has described the Mother Goddess as separated into two opposing functions from the beginning: 'positive' and 'negative'—the 'good' mother, who gives life, and the 'terrible' mother, who takes it away. But this differentiation of the role is not truly felt in earlier millennia, when there seems to have existed an experience of totality prior to these distinctions. It is important not to read back into the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages those distinctions that we unthinkingly accept because we have inherited them ourselves from the Bronze Age. The radical difference in feeling between the 'good' mother and the 'terrible' mother belongs rather to the oppositional paradigm of the Aryan and Semitic tribes, which was imposed upon, and gradually accepted by the people they conquered. The evidence

now available from the Neolithic shows that this opposition had not always existed.⁵²

In other words, rather than being a figure divided into great and terrible mothers from the emergence of human consciousness, this division is a direct result of patriarchal violence. In addition to reproducing this division, *Suspiria* also perpetuates the patriarchal violence feminist scholars argue divided and obscured the goddess in the first place.

Neumann's second claim, that patriarchal structures systematically obscured the Terrible Mother at the expense of the great, is also rejected in feminist scholarship, both implicitly and explicitly. Kristeva's and Creed's analyses of the construction of the maternal body as abject and monstrous in literature and horror reveals precisely the opposite dynamic, whereby the life-taking aspect of the Great Mother is emphasized over the life-giving one, and even the life-giving aspect is constructed as monstrous and life-taking. In tracing the mythological origins of these representations, Creed aligns her work with Jules and Cashing's, who point to texts like the Babylonian epic of creation, *Enuma Elish*, as instrumental in the representation of the Great Mother as monstrous and life taking. Here the mother goddess Tiamat becomes a violent monster who gives birth to monsters in her effort to protect herself from her warring children. She is slain by Marduk, a single male god, who takes over as the ruler of creation. A foundational point in the transition from goddess centered to monotheistic patriarchal consciousness, this myth exemplifies the "association of light, order and good with the god, and of darkness, chaos and evil with the goddess."⁵³ In this constructed opposition, the life-giving aspects of the goddess are completely obscured, and projected onto the male god. All that remains of the mother goddess is her monstrousness—and her dead body, which becomes the earth and sky, the setting for the monotheistic patriarchal god's creation.

Neumann never makes quite clear how emphasizing the life-giving aspect of the Great Mother and obscuring the life-taking aspect serves patriarchal power structures. By contrast, it's quite clear how emphasizing the life-taking aspect of the goddess, killing her completely, and/or constructing women's bodies as abject and monstrous, functions to perpetuate patriarchal power structures. Whether in mythology, literature, or horror, these representations necessitate the control and policing of women's bodies and justify their secondary status in the gender binary that this system naturalizes. By adding more terrible mothers to the already saturated cultural frame, Guadagnino continues this trend and perpetuates these dangerous and dated frameworks.

Beyond engaging with a construction of the myth of the goddess that is rejected by feminist scholars, Guadagnino's reliance on the myth in general also demonstrates his lack of concern to engage with feminist thinkers. Although it has been central within feminist ideology for decades, contemporary feminist scholarship makes clear the political dangers of a myth that centers feminine identity around reproduction. One of the most striking examples of this is the use of the myth under Nazi rule, where an emphasis on the reproductive capacity of women helped ensure that women were policed into their role of furthering the "master/Aryan race," and producing soldiers for the Reich.⁵⁴ The centrality of the performance of *Volk* (a term used during the Second World War to express the "unique Genius of the German volk, or people"⁵⁵), in *Suspiria*, is particularly problematic when interpreted in this light.

One need not go as far back as Nazi Germany, however, to see the dangers inherent in the myth of the goddess. Even though it has provided women and feminist thinkers with a source of inspiration and empowerment, that inspiration and empowerment is limited to those whose bodies, capacities, and agency correspond to its narrow construction of gender and sexuality. It thus excludes myriad lived experiences and identities, ultimately perpetuating the same patriarchal

violence that has excluded and marginalized women for centuries. Put succinctly by Cynthia Eller, “it’s hard to believe that staying within a patriarchal culture’s lexicon of femininity can provide a hardy alternative to the present order.”⁵⁶

Even though, like the myth of the witch, the myth of the goddess originates in “male fantasy,”⁵⁷ its centrality within feminist discourse may explain Guadagnino’s reliance on it to produce what he insists is a great feminist film. However, like the myth of the witch, the myth of the goddess has the potential to both perpetuate and challenge patriarchal power. If it were truly Guadagnino’s goal to accomplish the later, he certainly had a myriad of feminist constructions of the myth to consult. Even a cursory glance at this scholarship would, however, have revealed not just the widespread rejection of Neumann’s construction, particularly those aspects that seem to have directly inspired the film, but also widespread critique of the myth itself. His failure to engage with feminist sources amounts to the fact that, although he does succeed in representing women as “complex creatures” who are not “one-dimensional,” he continues to construct these women, their bodies, and their capacities, in dialogue with outdated and dangerous sources, all of which are written by men and rejected by feminists. He therefore has continued the long trend of men who use the myth of the goddess for their own purposes, and who perpetuated rather than challenged patriarchal power structures.

Conclusions

Suspiria is a complex and complicated film. It is also, in many ways, especially technically, an incredible film that leaves little doubt as to Guadagnino’s skill as a filmmaker. In many ways, *Suspiria* is a great film. It is not, however, a great feminist film. Although Guadagnino relies upon and reproduces mythologies that have been central to feminist identity and ideology for decades, he fails to engage with feminist constructions and critiques of these myths, and instead relies on

outdated and problematic constructions. In his construction of the myth of the witch, he reproduces the misogynistic tropes of the monstrous feminine and constructs women and witches as abject creatures engaged in reproductive crimes. In his construction of the myth of the goddess, he reproduces patriarchal violence both in his emphasis on mothers as terrible and life taking, and in his perpetuation of patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality. As a result, rather than producing a feminist film that challenges, subverts, or revolts against patriarchal structures, Guadagnino has created one that perpetuates them.

Notes

¹ It is beyond the scope of this article to compare these two versions, but a helpful analysis is found in Luke Lewin Davies' "Appropriating the abject: Witchcraft in Dario Argento and Dario Nicolodi's *Suspria* (1977) and David Kajganich and Luca Guadagnino's 2018 remake," *New Cinemas Journal of Contemporary Film*, 18 (1 & 2) July 2020, 43-59.

² Mme. Blanc describes the Academy in this way to Susie during her first rehearsal. Luca Guadagnino, *Suspria* (Amazon Studios, 2018), 31:27.

³ Swinton in fact plays three roles in the film, Mme Blanc, Mother Markos, and Dr. Klemperer, the only prominent male character in the film. Guadagnino's intention was for audiences to be unaware of this. To support this ruse, a fake IMBD profile for Lutz Ebersdorf, who supposedly plays Dr. Klemperer, was created. When questioned on the importance of having this one male lead role played by a woman, he explains, "The whole purpose of *Suspria* is about the feminine point of view. Apart from three men, the cast is entirely made up of women. And my basis for the subterfuge was to give audiences the unconscious feeling that everything in the movie is indeed female. Including the main man! I never wanted the truth behind the actor Lutz Ebersdorf listed as playing Klemperer to become part of the narrative. I just wanted to impart a questioning feminine sensation. When we shot the movie in Germany it seems we had a mole in the crew who took pictures of Tilda coming out of the make-up van in character and called the paparazzi. So my creative aim was shattered." Alan Jones, *Killing the Mother: Luca Guadagnino Discusses Suspria*. Notebook Interview. Nov. 16, 2018. <https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/killing-the-mother-luca-guadagnino-discusses-suspria>. Accessed Nov. 19, 2022.

⁴ Dario Argento, *Suspria*, Produzioni Atlas Consorziate, 1977, 1h. 33m.

⁵ October of 1977 saw the culmination of decades of terrorist acts by the Red Army Faction, (RAF, or Baader-Meinhoff group/ gang). Motivated by the claim that the West German State remained fascist following the Second World War (since it re-integrated many former Nazis), this group perpetrated a series of kidnappings and assassinations of high-profile politicians and civil servants, many of whom were affiliated with the Nazi party or served in the SS during the war. After prominent members Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin were given life sentences, the group attempted to negotiate their release by hijacking a Lufthansa passenger plane and holding the passengers hostage for five days. After being told by German officials that Baader and Ensslin would be released from prison, the hijackers landed the plane in Somalia, where they were apprehended or killed by antiterror units. Later that day, both Baader and Ensslin died by suicide in their prison cells. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of*

Europe Since 1945 (New York: The Penguin Press, 2002), 470-1. Assaf, Moghadam, "Failure and Disengagement in the Red Army Faction," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35:2, 2012. 156-181.

⁶ In one interview, Guadagnino calls *Suspiria* both a "great feminist film," and describes its feminism as "radical." Edward Douglas, "Director Luca Guadagnino on the Coming-of-Age Drama and his "Radical Feminist" Remake of "Suspiria." January 2, 2018. <https://www.tracking-board.com/call-me-by-your-name-director-luca-guadagnino-on-his-coming-of-age-drama-and-making-a-radical-feminist-remake-of-suspiria-interview/>. Accessed Nov. 11, 2022. In a later interview Guadagnino expresses some embarrassment over calling the film a "great feminist film" and qualifies that "I didn't mean "great" in terms of value. Maybe I wanted to say that it was a... the size of a statement in feminism." Rich Juzwiak, "Director Luca Guadagnino on Assaulting the Senses and Indicting Patriarchy in *Suspiria*." *Jezebel*, Oct. 25, 2018, <https://jezebel.com/director-luca-guadagnino-on-assaulting-the-senses-and-i-1829994124>, accessed Nov. 16, 2022.

⁷ Juzwiak adds that following this statement, Guadagnino "laughs, literally like: "Ha ha." "Director Luca Guadagnino on Assaulting the Senses and Indicting Patriarchy in *Suspiria*." *Jezebel*, Nov. 16, 2022.

⁸ In this piece, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen identifies seven theses, or ways, that monsters function to reveal the cultures that create them, "Monster Culture: Seven Theses," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Here I am referring both to bell hook's theorization of "white supremacist, capitalistic, imperialistic, patriarchy," as well as its expansion as also being cisnormative and heteronormative in conversation with Laverne Cox. bell hooks and Laverne Cox in a Public Dialogue at the New School, *The New School*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oMmZIJjgY>, accessed August 24, 2023.

¹¹ Diane Purkiss, *The Myth of the Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), 26.

¹² Marion Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths in American Culture* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis), 113.

¹³ Ibid., 116.

¹⁴ Laurel Zwissler, "'I Am That Very Witch': On The Witch, Feminism, and Not Surviving Patriarchy." *The journal of religion and film* 22.3 (2018), 14.

¹⁵ Purkiss, *The Myth of the Witch in History*, 38-9

¹⁶ Barbera Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London & New York, 1992), 3.

¹⁷ Creed is here pointing to the "genre hybridity" of these films, which rethink "horror and its fluid formations" combining it with "other genres, such as science fiction, the love story, historical drama, and the road movie, while retaining its powers of subversive social critique and cutting-edge ability to undermine patriarchal ideology." Creed, *Return of the Monstrous Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema* (London & New York: Routledge, 2022), 6.

¹⁸ Ibid., 120-125.

¹⁹ Zwissler, "'I Am That Very Witch' 1.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Ibid., 7.

²² Ibid., 11.

²³ Christopher Mackay provides a thorough overview of the authorship and context of this text in the introduction to his complete translation, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-58

²⁴ Christopher S. Mackay, and Heinrich Institoris. *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 328.

²⁵ *Suspiria*, 54:15- 59:26

²⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁰ *Suspiria*, 53:16- 54:13, 1:06:54.

³¹ Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, 8-9.

³² *Malleus Maleficarum*, 283.

³³ *Suspiria*, 2:03:53- 2:16:32

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:26:47- 2:27:47.

³⁵ Cynthia Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 3.

³⁶ Juzwiak, "Director Luca Guadagnino," *Jezebel*, Oct. 25, 2018.

³⁷ In the preface to his book, Bachofen is clear that his inquiry constitutes an exploration of a "strange world," which "contradicts our notions of a civilized culture," full of "people who did not attain the high cultural level we associate with the people of classical antiquity." Johann Jakob Bachofen, *An English Translation of Bachoffen's Mutterrecht (Mother Right) (1861) A Study of the Religious and Juridical Aspects of Gynecocracy in the Ancient World*, trans. David Partenheimer (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 1.

³⁸ Cynthia Eller, "Matriarchy and the Volk." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81.1 (2013), 191.

³⁹ Martin Liebscher, "Foreword to the Princeton Classic Edition," in Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), viii.

⁴⁰ As explained by Rosemary Radford Ruether, "A variety of female figurines with markedly large breasts, buttocks, and bellies are found in Neolithic sites. These figurines are often seen as reflecting a view that links the female body with fecundity, likely an inheritance from the Paleolithic period...But without writing, it is very difficult to determine the actual thoughts or intentions of those who created these images...with no writing, and with only those artifacts that happen to be made of materials capable of longer survival (stone, metal, baked clay, bone), determining what a group of people *meant* by particular images is guesswork, an area into which trained archeologists venture with great caution." *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005), 14.

⁴¹ Liebscher, "Forward," in Neumann, *The Great Mother.*, vi.

⁴² Eller, "Matriarchy and the Volk," 189.

⁴³ This chronology is the core of Donna Reed's three-part documentary series, *Women and Spirituality: The Goddess Trilogy*. In the second installment, *The Burning Times* (which follows *Part I: Goddess Remembered*, and precedes *Part III: Full Circle*), this is clearly laid out in the introductory scenes, which argue that goddess religion was continued by "wise women," until "the Christian Church and state branded them witches and condemned them as worshippers of the devil (National Film Board of Canada, 1990), 0:00-3:41.

⁴⁴ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, 12.

⁴⁵ Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Maresfield Library, 1954), 324

⁴⁶ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, xlviii

⁴⁷ *Suspiria*, 7:51-11:10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:21:38- 2:26:12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 53:59.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 44:33.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1:35:35

⁵² Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (London: Arkana/ Penguin Books, 1993), 168.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁵⁴ While there is no concrete evidence that Hitler was inspired by the myth of the goddess, or that it influenced official Nazi ideology, Bachofen's work experienced a great resurgence alongside the increase of fascism in Germany in the 1920s that continued into the years of the Second World War. Demonstrating the inherent malleability of the myth, as well as its connection with power and ideology, scholars and later prominent Nazi party members such as Ludwig Klages, Alfred Schuler, Alfred Bäumer, Alfred Rosenberg, Ernst Bergmann, and Heinrich Himmler, all latched onto different aspects of the myth of the goddess, while creating others anew to suit their political purposes. In the hands of powerful fascists, the myth became a tool for promoting antisemitism, as Jews were constructed as responsible for destroying paganism, and policing the bodies of "Aryan" women, who were instrumental in combatting racial pollution by producing racially "pure" babies and future soldiers. Eller, "Matriarchy and the Volk."

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵⁶ Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, 65.

⁵⁷ Purkiss, *The Myth of the Witch in History*, 33.

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