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New American Witches: A Transitioning Figure in the Twentieth Century

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NEW AMERICAN WITCHES:
A TRANSITIONING FIGURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Daniel Grafton
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Accepted by:
Dr. Christa Smith, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

This thesis compares the Wiccan faith with fantasy literature of the twentieth century in an effort to reveal the spread of radical feminist thought between 1963 and 1983 by examining how these groups represented the shared figure of the witch. By comparing these different representations it may be determined whether radical feminist thought was promoted through fantasy literature. If the figure of the witch did become radically feminist in this popular setting then this would indicate a broader acceptance of radical feminist thought in American culture. This is examined by establishing a definition of fantasy literature during the late twentieth century, looking at what the traditional figure of the witch represented and how the Wiccan faith under the influence of radical feminism initially altered this representation, and then comparing that with the figure of the witch found in fantasy literature. Evidence has been drawn from newspapers, fantasy literature depicting witches, speeches and interviews given by the authors, and important texts within the Wiccan community. This thesis challenges academic perceptions that popular culture is unworthy of study by showing how a popular form of literature helped spread radical feminist thought beyond the confines of the feminist movement. This was accomplished through the shared figure of the witch that underwent a radical transformation during the second half of the twentieth century. As a transitioning figure during a time of great social upheaval the witch represents a lasting legacy of change in American culture during this period.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated in commemoration of Dr. Jacob Seitz who devoted his life to inspiring high school students with a love for history and respect for themselves. This thesis is also dedicated to Dr. Sharon Ryan, my mentor in philosophy; Cathy Toth Sturkie, who welcomed me to Clemson as a friend but became like family; and to my parents, Emily and William Grafton, for all their love and assistance.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, some historians have begun to argue that literature, film, and other forms of media may be representative of how a culture perceives their present circumstances and their historical origins. The motives behind an author or director's portrayal of some issue may explain its reception in the broader culture or reveal how their perception reflects that of popular opinion. Popular culture may help instruct historians on how movements or ideologies were spread through a society and what aspects of their message became broadly accepted.

Robert A. Rosenstone has made a particularly deft argument for this historical theory in the area of film history. One classic example given by Rosenstone is the tremendous success of *The Birth of a Nation* released in 1915 and directed by D.W. Griffith. The film offers an extreme version of the Lost Cause myth as historical fact and depicts the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as the saviors of the New South. While historians have rightly pointed out the historical inaccuracies of Griffith's vision, Rosenstone argues that the importance of *The Birth of a Nation* is in how it reflected popular concepts of southern history. The film's "depiction of the American Civil War, its view of the South as suffering under the depredations of ex-slaves and carpetbaggers during reconstruction, its exaltation of the Ku Klux Klan as heroes in a racial conflict, and its (literally) dreadful stereotypes of African Americans were (alas) direct reflections of the major interpretations of the era in which it was produced – not just the beliefs of the citizen in

the street but the wisdom of the most powerful school of American historians of that era.”¹

Southern historians have shown that Rosenstone’s assertions are not only correct but that the release of *The Birth of a Nation* had significant real world effects. The film’s unique success for the time precipitated an actual and large-scale resurgence of the KKK while allowing white supremacists to champion their cause on a national level. At least one major historian has attributed this success as a primary motivation behind the “Great Migration” of African Americans from the southern to the northern United States during the second half of the 1910s.² This last assertion may be questioned since the film was equally popular with northern audiences seeking reconciliation with the South. However, as the popular face of the Lost Cause, *The Birth of a Nation* clearly had a widespread impact. This shows how movements expressed within popular culture can have powerful ramifications for a society and at times literally reshape the social landscape.

While this thesis is not concerned with either film history or southern history it is deeply connected with the ideas outlined above, that popular culture may serve as a reflection of important historical movements and may even be capable of influencing the course of history. All too often historians have focused so narrowly on political, economic, or military issues that they have forgotten the tremendous effect that society

¹ Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film: Film on History* (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 13.

² On the success and impact of *The Birth of a Nation* see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 137-138. And Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 107, 108. On the connection with the Great Migration see Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 219-222, 237.

and culture have in shaping these more traditional areas. Fictional literature has often been ignored and film is only just beginning to receive serious attention.

A recent example connected to this thesis that illustrates how historians may trace historical movements within popular culture would be a controversy in October 2007 that sprung up overnight around the fantasy series *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) by British author J.K. Rowling. After concluding the seven book series earlier that year Rowling revealed that one of the key characters was actually homosexual. This announcement had little bearing on how a reader might interpret the plot or even the character, and an article in *The New York Times* argued it was “unimportant.”³ However, most of the news media erupted over this revelation with the majority supporting Rowling and others denouncing the decision. Some Christian groups argued that the gay nature of the character was further proof of the series’ “anti-Christian point of view.”⁴ On the other hand, gay rights group Stonewall, based in the United Kingdom, stated that, “It’s great that JK has said this. It shows that there’s no limit to what gay and lesbian people can do, even being a wizard headmaster.”⁵

The *Harry Potter* series is largely considered young adult fantasy, which is typically a conservative genre due to its influence over children, making Rowling’s revelation all the more surprising. The series has had tremendous financial success

³ Edward Rothstein, “Is Dumbledore Gay? Depends on Definitions of ‘Is’ and ‘Gay,’” <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/29/arts/29conn.html?_r=1&oref=slogin>, 29 October 2007 [accessed 27 December 2007].

⁴ Phil Kloer, “Dumbledore’s gay? A caldron of reactions,” <<http://www.ajc.com/living/content/printedition/2007/10/23/potter1023.html>>, 23 October 2007 [accessed 8 November 2007].

⁵ BBC News, “JK Rowling outs Dumbledore as gay,” <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/7053982.stm>>, 20 October 2007 [accessed 19 November 2007].

establishing a “Harry Potter industry” estimated at \$15 billion, making Rowling one of the wealthiest individuals in Britain.⁶ While this week-long controversy is of little importance compared with the contemporary Iraq War or troubled housing market, it may help historians understand how American society viewed the homosexual community in 2007. The overall reaction by the news media was positive with *Entertainment Weekly* publishing the following assessment: “J.K. Rowling’s announcement about Dumbledore isn’t a plot twist. It’s a challenge to look at the world – even a world of wizards and magic – as it really is. Kids are more than up to meeting it.”⁷ Those extreme Christian groups condemning homosexuality appeared on the fringe of the debate and were often marginalized. Twenty years earlier the opposite reaction would have been more likely. Popular culture may not always directly affect a situation in as pronounced a fashion as with *The Birth of a Nation* but it may often act as a barometer of where social movements stand within a popular context. In this case, *Harry Potter* revealed some of the advances made by the lesbian and gay community over the past twenty years.

This thesis will focus on a particular figure in fictional and non-fictional literature that has had an enormous impact in Western culture: the witch. Although the idea of witches dates back thousands of years this paper is primarily concerned with the development of witchcraft during the second half of the twentieth century. In particular, it will focus on how the figure of the witch has been tied to the feminist movement in America. In the first half of the twentieth century, women had gained the right to vote in

⁶ Mark Harris, “2007 Entertainer of the Year: J.K. Rowling,” <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20152943_20153269_20162480,00.html>, 2007 [accessed 28 November 2007].

⁷ Mark Harris, “Dumbledore: A Lovely Outing,” <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20154416,00.html>>, 25 October 2007 [accessed 28 October 2007].

the United States, Britain, and other western countries during the 1920s. This was largely thanks to the early feminist movement (known by historians as the first-wave), which found varying levels of success through the 1930s and seemingly made great strides during the Second World War. Much of this would be reversed during the post-war period when a backlash occurred against working women. As Elaine Tyler May has noted, the pre-war era had much in common with the social revolution of the 1960s as they “behaved in similar ways politically, developing a powerful feminist movement, strong grassroots activism on behalf of social justice, and a proliferation of radical movements to challenge the status quo. It is the generation in between—with its strong domestic ideology, pervasive consensus politics, and peculiar demographic behavior—that stands out as different.”⁸

Following this aberrant period of feminist decline, a strong second-wave movement coalesced in the 1960s concerned with advancing female empowerment. This revived feminist movement developed along numerous paths but was initially divided in the first half of the decade between two main approaches: liberal feminists and socialist-feminists, who were often referred to as “politicos.” Liberal feminists largely accepted society’s basic foundation and focused on reshaping the public sphere in order to integrate women into positions of power. Politicos took a Marxist approach seeking a revolution to tear down and replace society largely along new class and racial lines. Radical feminists, who are the interest of this thesis, broke with both of these approaches beginning in 1967. Unlike liberal feminism which sought to bring women into

⁸ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), xvii.

mainstream society by reshaping women's place in the public sphere, radicals rejected the mainstream and embraced the sexual revolution more fully. Radicals also focused more on the private sphere arguing that sexism began in the home and viewed liberal's attempts at integrating women as tokenism. Unlike the socialist-feminists, radicals were less committed to revolution by removing all forms of social domination and angrily denounced politicians' narrow focus on class and race, which they felt was done to the exclusion of gender. The radical feminist movement was relatively short-lived, only maintaining a strong presence in the greater feminist movement from 1967 to 1975. However, its influence was significant as it "succeeded in pushing liberal feminists to the left and politicians toward feminism."⁹

As the radical feminist movement grew they began to look for symbols for their cause. Many of them turned to the figure of the witch, finding in it "one of the very few images of independent female power which historic European cultures have bequeathed."¹⁰ Under the influence of feminist thought witches underwent a transformation from the traditional "wicked" witch popularized at the start of the century in L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* into a powerful and positive symbol of female empowerment. These changes were evident in the name of a politico feminist

⁹ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 4.

¹⁰ Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 341.

organization (WITCH), the popularity of the emerging Witchcraft traditions in the women's spirituality movement, and both fictional and non-fictional literature.¹¹

The arrival of Wiccan to the United States a few years before the radical feminist movement took off would prove beneficial to both groups. Wiccan would be adopted by many feminists involved in the women's spirituality movement who in turn influenced the development of the new faith. Wiccan offered an ideal spiritual space for radicals by providing a Goddess-based spiritual framework supposedly originating from ancient matriarchal societies and promoting a celebratory view of women's sexuality. Radical feminism would greatly influence Wiccan thought during the 1970s by bringing an opposition to patriarchal orders in society and an activist mentality to the new faith. As one leading radical witch coven wrote in its manifesto of 1971: "We are committed to defending our interests and those of our sisters through the knowledge of witchcraft: to blessing, to cursing, to healing, and to binding with power rooted in woman-identified wisdom."¹²

Given this broad spectrum in which witches and radical feminists influenced each other and the influence feminism had on American culture in general during this time, it may be wondered what broader changes took place in the American mind concerning the figure of the witch. Did the changes radical feminists and Wiccans made to the representations of witches carry over into popular culture or did these ideas remain meaningful only to a small minority? In order to answer this question both that part of

¹¹ The feminist organization WITCH (Women's International Conspiracy from Hell) is discussed in detail in the second chapter. Examples of witchcraft as a faith and in literature will be given throughout this paper.

¹² Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1980), 2.

popular culture most concerned with witches and that part of the feminist movement that most utilized the figure of the witch must be examined on a comparative basis. In the former case, witches are most abundant in the emerging fantasy literature of the time that explored the figure of the witch extensively through fictional novels and young adult books. In the latter, the crossing of Wiccan beliefs and practices with radical feminist ideology beginning in the late 1960s reflect how the witch served both for women's spirituality and political action. As both fantasy literature and Wiccan blossomed around the same time using much common imagery, it seems probable that they would also share a common perspective and ideology.

The core question of this thesis then is whether American popular conceptions of witchcraft represented by witches found in fantasy literature between 1963 and 1983 had a connection with emerging radical feminist thought and if the fantasy representation of witches was similar to the Wiccan figure. Since there are endless aspects of fantasy literature that could be examined for feminist influence, it makes sense to narrow the scope to a single figure that fantasy literature already shared with radical feminism through its connections with Wiccan. Therefore, the focus will be on how the figure of the witch in fantasy literature may have been informed by radical feminist and Wiccan thought. The study will begin by examining the figure of the witch in the first half of the twentieth century prior to the emergence of Wiccan or radical feminism in order to establish a traditional figure for comparison. A primary timeframe will be established beginning in 1963 when the first major depiction of witchcraft in science-fantasy appeared with the publication of *Witch World* and one year before Wiccan's arrival in the

United States. It will end in 1983 with the publication of *The Mists of Avalon*, which brought radical feminist and Wiccan ideas together in a popular fantasy novel.

Chapter 1 will provide an overview of the popular figure of the witch in Western history before focusing on the emergence of fantasy literature and its relevance to American popular culture. To date in academia, the fantasy literary genre has largely been relegated to a few scholarly studies on the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and his predecessors. The broader array of media that began to emerge out of this literature in the 1960s has yet to be thoroughly studied or even properly defined.¹³ This chapter will establish the parameters of fantasy literature and similar media. Representations of witchcraft found in fantasy stories from 1900 to 1955 will also be examined. This chapter argues that fantasy literature is relevant to American popular culture because of the new market it tapped into that was initially formed by Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

In chapter 2 a brief overview on the origins of Wiccan will be given before turning to this new faith's arrival in the United States and subsequent interaction with the emerging radical feminist movement. Several important feminists who discussed witchcraft but did not practice Wiccan will be discussed, as well as the major feminist-Wiccan writers of the time. This chapter will establish what feminist values were associated with witches during this time period and how the witch acted as an empowering feminist figure, particularly in the Wiccan Dianic tradition.

¹³ During this research no similar attempt by another historian to discuss fantasy literature was found. Various aspects of the topic have been addressed by scholars working in the areas of philosophy, computer-science, linguistics, English, and sociology.

Chapter 3 will return the spotlight to fantasy literature now that a comparative basis has been formed. The focus will be on the resurgence of fantasy literature during the late 1960s through the early 1980s under influential authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Peter S. Beagle, and Marion Zimmer Bradley. This chapter argues that this new fantasy did have an impact on American popular culture through the new market outlined in chapter 1. It will compare the witches of fantasy literature with the feminist witches described in chapter 2 to ascertain whether fantasy witches represented feminist thought.

In chapter 4, the previous three chapters will be compared to see if the radical feminist thought described in chapter 2 was connected with fantasy literature through the novels examined in chapter 3. It will be argued that the radical feminist/Wiccan figure of the witch affected the popular representation of witchcraft via fantasy literature resulting in lasting changes to America's perception of witchcraft. Fantasy role-playing games will briefly be discussed as an area for future research.

CHAPTER I

Of the many characters prevalent in American popular culture during the twentieth century one of the most fascinating was that of witches. While this imagery remained relatively obscure during the first half of the century, with a few notable exceptions largely originating in Britain, witches witnessed resurgence in popularity beginning in the 1960s that has continued unhindered into the new millennium. It is no coincidence that the figure of the witch, either as an empowering image or the more traditionally degrading character, gained popularity alongside the emerging feminist movement in the United States. As one of the few representations of an independent woman in the West, feminists were attracted to the witch as an emblem of female empowerment, while anti-feminists used traditional negative connotations associated with witches to attack feminists as deviants. The witch became even more tied to feminism in the United States as a result of the women's spirituality movement and Wiccan's spread to North America in the 1960s. But witches were not limited to spiritual or political arenas in the twentieth century and commonly appear in various cultural forms. Some of the most fascinating examples of this cultural expression may be found in the new genre of fantasy literature that emerged in the late 1960s. To understand these transformations in the representation of witches during the twentieth century there should be some understanding of their greater historical context in Western development.

Witches have been around for a long time. Some of the earliest recorded examples may be found in the Hebrew Bible where the practice of witchcraft is roundly

condemned. The New Testament took a similar stance and, with the ascension of Christianity in the Western world, this sinister reputation increasingly became one of the core attributes associated with witches. During the early modern period (1400 –1700) these beliefs would result in the deaths of an estimated 50,000 innocent people accused of witchcraft throughout Europe and North America.¹⁴ One of the primary motivators of this terrible tragedy was the imagery spread throughout Europe and its colonies by learned demonologists proclaiming a veritable witch invasion of Christendom sponsored by Satan. If it is true that “a word is an image of an idea, and an idea is an image of a thing” then this was manifested in terrible fashion during the witch hunts.¹⁵ Influential demonology texts such as the *Formicarius* (1435), the famed *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), and *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions* (1689) developed the idea of satanic witches and their Sabbath while assuring readers that witches were a very real threat. When people in positions of power began to accept these ideas as actuality the results were deadly and provide one of the clearest examples of how culturally defined figures may affect history.

Violent crimes blamed on witchcraft and sorcery did not disappear once the legal basis for the prosecution of witchcraft was removed. People continued to be sporadically attacked through the 1800s for allegedly practicing witchcraft. Beliefs in supernatural or magical powers remained significantly stronger than in the twentieth century, even in heavily urbanized areas such as London. As Owen Davies has shown, “the divorce from

¹⁴ Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 132.

¹⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 22.

rurality and changing urban community structures seem to have led to a decline in the expression of witchcraft beliefs in London, but did not similarly affect the belief in fortune-telling, divination and love magic.”¹⁶

By the fin-de-siècle (1890s) the figure of the witch, or its male counterpart the sorcerer, was being viewed quite differently in some circles as a result of the increasing popularity of spiritualism and occultism among the wealthy. Numerous secret societies, such as the still celebrated Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, were founded by these elites with the intention of uncovering “arcane traditions” and exploring ceremonial magic. In Britain where these organizations have been well documented, these secret societies attracted some members who would later gain widespread fame, such as Arthur Machen, Aleister Crowley, and W.B. Yeats, who often styled themselves as wizards or sorcerers. A cadre of independent and radical women joined these groups, some of whom were openly feminist such as the Irish nationalist Maud Gonne and theatre patron Annie Horniman.¹⁷ British occultism would establish the foundation for Witchcraft as a religion in the twentieth century and help tie it with feminist expression early on.

As noted above, one of the most fascinating areas in which the figure of the witch had a cultural effect was through fantasy literature and related fantasy media. Fantasy stories are an old genre that may be traced back centuries. The form that will spring to most reader’s minds is that of the fairy tale, which possesses many of the attributes

¹⁶ Owen Davies, “Urbanization and the Decline of Witchcraft: An Examination of London,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge (London: Routledge, 2002), 410.

¹⁷ For a good overview of occult secret societies see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), particularly pages 3-5& 62. And on the women of these orders see Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1995)

commonly associated with modern fantasy. However, fantasy in the second half of the 20th century is significantly different from that found earlier. “Fantasy” is a general term that may apply to many different types of stories and is primarily concerned with what has been described as presenting the impossible as actuality. Fantasy literature is grounded in traditional fantasy stories but focuses its attention on magic-users and alternate worlds. Historically, “fantasy” as a genre reached its height in the second half of the 19th century under such masters as Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald, whereas fantasy literature did not take form until the mid-20th century.

Since fantasy literature was deeply influenced by the 19th century fantasists their work will briefly be described here. Writing about this literary genre, W.R. Irwin defined fantasy as “a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into ‘fact’ itself.”¹⁸ Fairy tales are therefore an excellent example of this kind of fantasy. They often involve a youth or person having just reached maturation who by crossing some illusory boundary finds themselves in a world quite unlike their own. This “fairie land” will often break physical laws in such ways as the irregular passage of time or distortion of space. Impossible beings such as fairies, elves, goblins, or sentient trees which interact with the protagonist make regular appearances in such stories. They are often meant to have some underlying moral point to impart as their primary message.

A fantasy story succeeds by firmly establishing impossibility, and then logically developing that concept. In other words, a well written fantasy, while based on

¹⁸ W.R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 4.

improbable circumstances, will closely adhere to a rational plotline. A fantasy that rejects the rules of logic completely or is nothing more than a series of absurdities will fail. According to Irwin, “The events of a fantasy may be as remote and exotic as imaginable, but they are, separately and in sum, rendered objectively. What happens must be clear, because it could not happen.”¹⁹

Since *The Lord of the Rings* written by J.R.R. Tolkien will be discussed in detail below, it would be appropriate to turn to Irwin’s use of the book as an example of fantasy. He states,

With unbroken sobriety, Tolkien pretends to be relating a history of events that have been moving toward culmination since their half-known origins in the dim past. The elements are many and complex; yet all are arranged in a system that has the clarity Gibbon imposed on the innumerable details of the waning of the Roman Empire. Magic, marvelous events, and mysteries are discussed as matters of fact. A perspective is maintained whereby the relationship of small events to large patterns is never obscured, and the bearing of occurrences in antiquity on current happenings is always as evident as knowledge will allow.²⁰

This concept of the impossible as “fact” is essential to fantasy literature since it forms the foundation for most twentieth century fantasy-based products.

Representations of the Witch from 1900 to 1955

During the first half of the twentieth century, several interesting examples of witches were published in fantasy stories. Most of these are found in children’s books, but at least one figured in serious literature. Of these, the most famous is undoubtedly the

¹⁹ Irwin, 72.

²⁰ Irwin, 163.

Wicked Witch of the West in L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900). Although the Witch of the West does not make a long appearance in the book, her role is pivotal to the plot and the character became engraved in American popular culture with the release of a Hollywood adaptation in 1939.

As may be guessed from her title as the "Wicked Witch of the West," Baum's character adheres very closely to the early modern representation of witchcraft. This is somewhat offset by the brief appearance of two supposedly good witches but these characters remain undeveloped even by the standards of children's literature. It is the Witch of the West that becomes central to the plot and has had the longest impact in American popular culture. Like those symbols of satanic allegiance created by early modern demonologists, Baum's witch is capable of summoning various beasts to do her nefarious bidding including wolves and crows. When the witch is bitten by Dorothy's dog she does not bleed, indicating that she has become some sort of unnatural creature. Perhaps most indicative is how the witch is finally killed. In a moment of anger Dorothy throws a pail of water over the witch, which results in her melting. This seems to have some connection to the early modern practice of "swimming" witches in which an alleged witch was thrown into a body of water and as "a sign of the monstrous impiety of the witches, that the water shall refuse to receive them in her bosom that have shaken off them the sacred water of baptism, and willfully refused the benefit thereof."²¹ Baum has simply taken a device used to reveal witches (water) and turned it into their bane.

²¹ King James VI, excerpt from *Daemonologie*, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 143.

Feminists could likely write volumes arguing about how female characters are portrayed in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. However, it is likely all would point to the Witch of the West as a perfect example of a misogynistic figure. As one of only two major female characters in the book, the witch is incredibly powerful as neither of the good witches or the mighty wizard Oz is willing to attack her. The witch is independent having no connection to any male and ruling the entire western segment of the Land of Oz. It seems ironic as well that the one character exhibiting any feminist traits is assaulted from all sides (North, South, and the Emerald City are all aligned against her).

Baum's depiction of the Witch of the West had much in common with the so-called "New Woman" who rejected Victorian ideals from the 1880s through the 1930s. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes these New Women as "a revolutionary demographic and political phenomenon. Eschewing marriage, she fought for professional visibility, espoused innovative, often radical, economic and social reforms, and wielded real political power."²² The Witch of the West largely meets the criteria for being a New Woman with the exception of having no formal education known to the reader. Although there's little evidence that the figure of the witch was linked with that of the New Woman on a regular basis, an article in *The New York Times* from November 1912 reveals the possibilities of such comparisons:

Feminine professors of high distinction are not "new women" in Italy. Centuries ago one of them occasionally occupied a chair of philosophy in famous institutions of learning, and some of them even taught the higher mathematics, as is evidenced by the references to the "witch of Agnesi," which are still

²² Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 245.

made by such of our geometries—they are lamentably few!—as try to add a little human interest and history to their propositions and demonstrations’.²³

With so many similarities it seems likely that Baum’s *Witch of the West* at least partially represented a fictional backlash against the New Women of his time.

The *Witch of the West* stands in contrast to Glinda the good *Witch of the South* who eventually shows Dorothy the way home. Glinda’s primary attribute is her beauty which is the opposite of the horrid *Witch of the West* whose key physical trait is having only one eye. She is otherwise defined as sacrificing power to aid Dorothy and her friends, which makes her “as good as you are beautiful!”²⁴ She is graceful and compassionate, which the feminist of the 1960s and 1970s would quickly point out were expected traits for any “good” conformist woman.²⁵

Glinda’s attributes largely match those of the Victorian ideal the New Women were rebelling against. Like the Victorian lady, Glinda is “modest, beautiful and graceful, ‘the most fascinating being in creation... the delight and charm of every circle she moves in.’”²⁶ It should be noted that Glinda doesn’t meet the most important qualification of a Victorian lady, which was having a husband or male guardian. However, as a proper Victorian lady Glinda reaffirms patriarchy by returning each of the three male characters back to kingdoms they will rule over, now that they have each proven their masculinity.

²³ Topics of the Times, “Violating Italian Traditions,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1912, 10.

²⁴ L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 1900), 210.

²⁵ For an example of this in feminist fiction see Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 141.

²⁶ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970), 4.

That an American author writing at the close of the 19th century should portray feminist New Women characters in a poor light is somewhat expected considering women did not even gain the right to vote for another twenty years. However, the witches of Oz are a good example of what feminists fighting for change would face in the 1960s. The film version was every bit as sexist as the book and had a much wider impact as one of the most successful films in Hollywood history. It is still widely distributed and continues to offer many young people a terrifying vision of the Wicked Witch of the West.

Another popular children's book featuring a witch was *Carbonel: The King of the Cats* (1955) by Barbara Sleigh whose title character is initially enslaved to a witch who exhibits many of the traditional characteristics found in the early modern period. The witch is an unpleasant old woman and when the book's heroine is asked to critique the witch's new hat she provides this description, "But when perched on the old woman's wild grey hair it only served to make the hair look wilder and her ragged clothes more disreputable."²⁷ This witch follows with the early modern tradition by breaking with norms concerning the boundaries of the body. The witch's ugly appearance, like that of the Witch of the West, is an early modern view of elites reflecting "the idea of the hard witch, for ugliness is apotropaic, turning away the would-be phallic gaze. The ugly old witch... refuses to be controlled or managed as a soft or yielding object of desire."²⁸

²⁷ Barbara Sleigh, *Carbonel: The King of the Cats* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 1955), 16.

²⁸ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 127.

The witch's refusal to be controlled is expressed in another section of *Carbonel*. This witch is again independent and found running her own store at one point in the story. After some of her products go bad due to poor spell casting, the children protagonists in the book save the witch from an angry mob of customers when she proves unwilling to cave in to the mob's demands for refunds. That children are more competent than the witch seems like a strong argument that Sleigh did not intend her to convey a feminist message. *Carbonel* offers a strong patriarchal vision in which a displaced cat-killing is more reputable than a simple witch.

Not all authors writing about witches turned exclusively to the early modern period for their inspiration. One of the more fascinating portrayals of witchcraft in the early 20th century was penned by British author Sylvia Townsend Warner in *Lolly Willows* (1926). The book was successful in the United States and is supposedly the only novel written by Townsend Warner that was "explicitly feminist."²⁹ Witches still form an agreement with Satan and gather at a Sabbath but aside from these there is little reminiscent of demonology or even Christian theology. The witches of Great Mop do not dine on infants or engage in sexual orgies at the Sabbath but spend the whole of the occasion dancing in a most incoherent fashion. Many of the villagers at the Sabbath are those kindest to Laura and it is revealed that the village priest would attend if only he were allowed to by the Sabbath's organizers. Although Laura eventually leaves the Sabbath in anger nothing indicates that the witches at the gathering are evil or

²⁹ Brooke Allen, "Sylvia Townsend Warner's 'Very Cultured Voice,'" *New Criterion* 19, no. 7 (March 2001): 20-27.

participating in nefarious schemes.³⁰ This depiction of the Sabbath is reminiscent of fairie gatherings described in European folklore such as the Seelie Court and would be revived in later fantasy literature such as *The Mists of Avalon* (1983) when Morgaine is lost in the fairie land.

The leader of the witches, Satan, deviates from early modern views in a similarly radical fashion. It seems likely Warner drew the primary inspiration for her portrayal of Satan from the reemergence of the god Pan in literature of the late 19th century. Ronald Hutton has shown that during that time Pan came to symbolize “all the aspects with which the Romantics had invested the natural world: sublime, mysterious, and awe-inspiring, benevolent, comforting, and redemptive. He was pitted directly against the perceived ugliness, brutality, and unhealthiness of the new industrial and urban environment and the perceived aridity and philistinism of the new science.”³¹ Laura Willowes leaves London out of just such disillusionment with industrialism and renews her spirit through a connection with the natural countryside surrounding Great Mop.

Although writing almost half a century before the second-wave feminist movement, Townsend Warner tells a striking tale of a suppressed woman under the restraints of patriarchy who manages to break free and lead her own life. This begins with Laura’s rejection of her brother’s family in London and decision to move alone to the country village of Great Mop. In one fiery passage Laura rejects patriarchy and returns to her own control both the direction of her life and her finances. As her brother

³⁰ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), 187-201.

³¹ Hutton, 44.

seizes every chance to use guilt or demean Laura's intelligence she rises above him and when she discovers that he has poorly invested her inheritance she takes complete control and dictates a new financial plan.³² After years of allowing choices to be made for her, Laura Willowes begins a rebellion that soon leads her to Satan and witchcraft.

Once in Great Mop Laura continues to enjoy her newfound freedom until her nephew Titus suddenly arrives declaring he will be moving to the same village. This can be seen as the reassertion of patriarchy and indeed Laura finds her life suddenly dominated once again by Titus' needs and demands. This unpleasant turn of events leads Laura to form a pact with Satan who then orchestrates Titus' removal through rather congenial methods. Although it is Satan who removes Titus, Laura has taken the initiative to control her life via the more powerful force of Satan. As Townsend Warner explains:

That's why we become witches: to show our scorn of pretending life's a safe business, to satisfy our passion for adventure... One doesn't become a witch to run round being harmful, or to run round being helpful either, a district visitor on a broomstick. It's to escape all that—to have a life of one's own, not an existence doled out to you by others, charitable refuse of their thoughts, so many ounces of stale bread of life a day, the workhouse dietary is scientifically calculated to support life.³³

In this passage patriarchy clearly comes under fire as the force that gives an "existence doled out." Satan may replace patriarchy as the master but he is a master who allows his servants to create their own life, a loose handed deity.

Bruce Knoll has argued that *Lolly Willowes* presents a less than appealing form of feminism because Laura is separated from the community of Great Mop in the end of the

³² Townsend Warner, 98-106.

³³ Townsend Warner, 238-239.

book following her rejection of the Sabbath in a “disturbing rejection of all human contact.” Knoll in particular cites the lack of any close friendship with another woman as evidence that the book’s conclusion leaves something to be desired. Although Knoll correctly ascertains the goal of the novel is “Laura’s development from a passive-resistant ‘feminine’ character to one of assertiveness” he misses the essential aspect of Laura Willowes.³⁴ Laura never sets society high on her agenda and only seeks out company at one point in the novel when she becomes interested in Mr. Saunter who is just as easily left soon after. Laura Willowes does not reach an unappealing conclusion at the novel’s close, but has at last found her true companions in the form of Satan and nature. This is not a flaw in Townsend Warner’s feminism but an excellent job of maintaining Laura’s character. In the end, Laura has more in common with a bodhisattva than a feminist leader.

Perhaps the most significant depiction of the witch in regards to influence on later fantasy literature was penned by C.S. Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in 1950.³⁵ This book was the first in a seven book series titled *The Chronicles of Narnia* that eventually became widely popular in Britain and the United States. Lewis was a close friend of J.R.R. Tolkien and a fellow member of the Oxford literary circle known as the “Inklings.” Their friendship left a mark on *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*,

³⁴ Bruce Knoll, “‘An Existence Doled Out’: Passive Resistance as a Dead End in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willowes*,” *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* 39, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 344-63.

³⁵ Although *The Chronicles of Narnia* are considered fantasy literature, Lewis does not receive credit for establishing the new genre since his books do not have an alternate world. Like many earlier fantasy stories, Narnia is not a distinct reality but connected with this one. Even if this were not the case, Tolkien had already presented a limited example of the new genre with *The Hobbit* in 1937 long before the Narnia books were published.

which shares many structural aspects with Tolkien's first book *The Hobbit* published in 1937. However, a strong emphasis is placed on Christian themes and many of Lewis's ideas have been criticized since its publication.

The main antagonist of the story is the "White Witch" who has taken control of Narnia, placing a magical spell over the land that renders it perpetually winter but never Christmas. The first character to encounter the witch describes her as "a great lady, taller than any woman that Edmund had ever seen... Her face was white—not merely pale, but white like snow or paper or icing-sugar, except for her very red mouth. It was a beautiful face in other respects, but proud and cold and stern."³⁶ Although this may sound like a fairly positive description compared with those given by early modern demonologists it is actually based on negative Christian portrayals of evil as beautiful. For instance, Lucifer was the most beautiful of the angels before his fall and the coldness of the White Witch may be tied to Dante's vision of a frozen hell.

From this initial description, things go continually downhill for the White Witch, who is revealed as an interesting combination villain of early modern witch and fin-de-siècle ceremonial magician. She uses a wand to turn her enemies into stone, which is more reminiscent of Aleister Crowley or Greek mythology than the early modern period. Lewis also presents the witch's unusual genealogy as being Lilith of biblical fame on one side and an unnamed giant on the other.³⁷ This makes the White Witch totally inhuman, which is something of an anomaly in the history of fictional witches. It should be noted that some witches are portrayed as having fairie lineage but they are almost always half-

³⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1950), 31.

³⁷ Lewis, 81.

bloods and not true fairies setting them apart from the White Witch. Harkening back to demonology, the witch's ritual sacrifice of Aslan seems lifted straight out of some accounts of witches' Sabbaths with a menagerie of horrid creatures in attendance to watch the "Deep Magic" be fulfilled.

As with most other depictions of witches in earlier fantasy stories, the White Witch is striking both for her feminine qualities and the denunciation of them. Before the arrival of the four children into Narnia, which apparently triggers the return of the Christ-figure Aslan, the White Witch ruled the land and its varied inhabitants. She is an independent woman unafraid to engage in combat with her enemies and is depicted as leading her army into the final battle. This stands in stark contrast with the book's message explicitly stated to the other two female characters that are told battles become "ugly" when women are involved.³⁸ In the book's conclusion, the boys become the rulers of Narnia with their sisters in subservient roles despite both women acting in morally superior ways. The White Witch is even less fortunate being killed by the lion Aslan.

Although deviating in some aspects from the traditional figure of the witch, feminists would find little positive to say about the White Witch. As noted above, the 1950s were a time of backlash against independent and working women, so Lewis's White Witch fits nicely with the restrictive attitudes prevalent in American culture. The White Witch is one of the most overtly sexist representations of a witch examined in this study. However, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* has lost none of its popularity over the years with a full-length feature film released in 2005 and distributed by Walt

³⁸ Lewis, 109.

Disney Pictures making over \$290 million in the US alone.³⁹ Feminists may find Lewis's vision lacking but it remains largely popular with the general American populace.

The Establishment of Fantasy Literature

While many of the elements found in 19th century fantasy stories contributed to the establishment of fantasy literature, the two are differentiated in some crucial aspects. Fantasy literature is a purely 20th century phenomena and has as its founding father the British author J.R.R. Tolkien. In his writings, particularly his masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), Tolkien established a new, more complex criterion for fantasy that would subsequently dominate a revived fantasy genre through the present and distinguish it from that which came before. This new form of fantasy literature quickly spread to the United States where it found a warm reception among many emerging authors beginning in the late 1960s. Similarly, other fantasy media (role-playing, film, etc.) that developed out of Tolkien's writings were primarily an American phenomenon.

Like his predecessors, Tolkien's base structure lay in the art of transforming the impossible into "fact." However, he would take this method to a new level of intensity by literally mapping out an entire mythological universe with its own history, geography, theology, boundaries, and languages. He called this world Middle Earth and populated it with all manner of creatures from fantasy stories and mythology including elves, dwarves, talking trees (ents), and goblins (which he renamed orcs in *The Lord of the*

³⁹ Internet Movie Database, "Box office/business for The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0363771/business>>, 2005-2006 [accessed 26 August 2008].

Rings). As never before, Tolkien presented his readers with a fantasy seemingly so well grounded in “fact” as to be nearly indistinguishable from an actual historical setting. This is particularly evident in *The Silmarillion*, which shares many similarities with medieval chronicles. Indeed, Tolkien wrote that his aim had been “to restore to the English an epic tradition and present them with a mythology of their own.”⁴⁰ In that context, *The Lord of the Rings* was meant to be the modern equivalent of the *Iliad* or *Aeneid*, although Tolkien would likely have scorned any such comparison as literary hubris.

The impact of Tolkien’s works in the 20th century was immense and may well have lived up to his high hopes. Discussing Tolkien’s commercial success, Tom Shippey has written that:

No market researcher in the 1950s could possibly have predicted [*The Lord of the Rings*] success. It was long, difficult, trailed with appendices, studded with quotations in unknown languages which the author did not always translate, and utterly strange. It had, indeed, to create its own market. And two further striking points about it are, first, that it did, and second, that unlike most of the works of the authors mentioned above (to whom I mean no disrespect) it has had a continued shelf-life. *The Hobbit* has stayed in print for more than sixty years, selling over forty million copies, the *Lord of the Rings* for nearly fifty years, selling over fifty million (which, since it is published usually in three-volume format, comes to close on a hundred and fifty million separate sales).⁴¹

Those sales figures were taken before *The Lord of the Rings* was turned into an academy award winning film series in the early 2000s, which undoubtedly led to resurgence in book sales.

⁴⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 231.

⁴¹ Tom Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), xxiv.

Tolkien's writings would begin to gain widespread popularity in the United States in 1965 with the release of a paperback set by Ballantine Books. The result was that *The Lord of the Rings* "secured a lofty place on the national paperback best-seller list and sold more than 50,000 copies within a few months."⁴² Prior to the Ballantine release the books had already become popular with some young people on college campuses that had embraced romantic neo-medievalist ideas such as idealizing the past or opposing technological advance. One article from 1977 in *The New York Times* pinned the series' rise to educational elites claiming that the "trilogy became a cult book on Ivy League campuses in the 50's" before moving into the mainstream.⁴³ However, the catchphrase "Frodo Lives" was taken up by many young people across the nation not necessarily associated with the Ivy League who often wore buttons sporting the phrase. Some people even spread the word through graffiti in places like Grand Central Station in New York City.⁴⁴

One of the most influential American fantasists, Ursula K. Le Guin, published the first novel in the *Earthsea* series in 1968 during this period of growing popularity and several other major fantasists followed soon after. It did not take long for the beginnings of fantasy literature as a fully fledged genre to come together as more and more fantasy novels based on the Tolkienian model became available. The fervor around Tolkien's own writings was still going strong through the late 1970s. When *The Silmarillion* was

⁴² Raymond Walters Jr., "Say It With Paperbacks," *New York Times*, December 4, 1966, BR16. Also see Shippey, 306.

⁴³ Richard R. Lingeman, "Book Ends: Fantastic Story," *New York Times*, October 16, 1977, 263.

⁴⁴ On "Frodo Lives" as graffiti see Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "In and Out of Books," *New York Times*, August 21, 1966, 276. On "Frodo Lives" buttons see Frederick Buechner, "Summons to Pilgrimage," *New York Times*, March 16, 1969, BR26. For more on the buttons and on neo-medievalism see Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 78.

released in 1977 it was “the fastest selling book in the stores, and trailing in its wake are several other books in what is called the fantasy adventure genre.”⁴⁵

Successes like *The Silmarillion* had become fairly commonplace by the 1980s. David G. Hartwell looking back from the vantage point of 1990 noted that fantasy literature had seemingly risen from nowhere to stake out “10 percent of all fiction sales in the United States.” Of particular interest to this thesis, Hartwell compared the financial success of fantasy literature with the lack of success in science-fiction, which is often compared with fantasy, by arguing that the fantasy genre had captured “enough female readers; [since] all the polls show that the majority of readers of mass-market fiction are women.”⁴⁶ Apparently fantasy literature was embracing themes that resonated with a female audience, although not necessarily a feminist one.

In spite of Tolkien’s resemblance to traditional fantasy stories he incorporated two additional components that are largely absent from prior fantasy pieces and that dramatically alter the focus of his fiction. After Tolkien, most fantasy adhered to this new criterion and used *The Lord of the Rings* as a kind of spreadsheet for new ideas.⁴⁷ Fantasy literature expanded beyond fairy land and its rather narrow story arcs into a rich genre capable of complex development. As one scholar has written, Tolkien “developed [fantasy literature] in a manner such that there exists almost a dividing line between

⁴⁵ Lingeman, 263.

⁴⁶ David G. Hartwell, “Dollars and Dragons: The Truth About Fantasy,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1990, BR1.

⁴⁷ For instance, Frank Herbert (of *Dune* fame) wrote about the popular novel *The Sword of Shannara* (1977) by Terry Brooks that, “The debt to Tolkien is so obvious that you can anticipate many of the developments.” See Frank Herbert, “Some Arthur, Some Tolkien,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1977, BR7.

fantasy written before Tolkien and fantasy written afterward.”⁴⁸ That dividing line is quite clear and lies in two of Tolkien’s innovations.

The first of these was the vital role Tolkien gave to magic-users, an umbrella term which may include a variety of titles such as wizards, witches, warlocks, magicians, enchantresses, etc. With very few exceptions, fantasy written after *The Lord of the Rings* tells one of three kinds of stories: the quest of the magic-user, a story of those following or fighting magic-users, or a legend that necessarily involves magic in some other form. Prior to Tolkien many fantasy stories did not even mention magic-users and those that did were often referring strictly to fairy queens or some other figure remote to the overall plotline. Wizards, witches, and their many offshoots appear to receive short shrift next to elves, goblins, kobolds, and giants. Magic-users certainly played leading roles in some tales, such as the Arthurian legends featuring the wizard Merlin and the witch Morgan Le Fay, but more often they were in the background.

W.R. Irwin did not differentiate between the presence of magic-users and the impossible being presented as “fact.” This makes sense from a materialist viewpoint in which spirituality and magical energy cannot exist in this world. It may also represent a Christian perspective where magic cannot be real since the only true spiritual power comes from the Christian God. Neither approach is beneficial to this study, or to an examination of fantasy literature as a whole.

Regardless of an individual’s personal opinion on the matter, the 20th century was marked by resurgence of the belief in spiritual and magical powers. Depending on how

⁴⁸ Douglas A. Anderson, *Tales Before Tolkien* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 1.

magic is defined this may include everything from occult ceremonial magic to shamanism or even the widespread interest in so-called “paranormal activity.”⁴⁹ Americans embraced many of these magical forms during the 20th century evidenced most strikingly by the growing Neo-Pagan and New Age movements. However, a study of the Christian evangelical movement might reveal even more evidence as faith in diabolic activity and satanic witchcraft are a form of belief in magic. Perhaps more so than at any time since the early modern period, people in the 20th century embraced the reality of a spiritual realm and the possibility of magical power.

Given the large numbers of people who argued for the reality of magic in the 20th century, placing magic-users in the realm of the impossible would make little sense. Fantasy literature is purely fictional but few would argue that fiction cannot speak to actuality. People who believe in the power of magic have found much inspiration in fantasy literature. One example of this is the Neo-Pagan community “Lothlorien” named after the elvish land in *The Lord of the Rings*.⁵⁰ Therefore, this thesis differentiates between the impossible presented as fact and magic-users whose existence was considered a fact by many during the 20th century.

⁴⁹ It should be noted that most Neo-Pagans would differentiate between “magic” and the “supernatural.” These two are distinct with magic often described as a “scientific” use of the Will to alter the world and is grounded firmly in this reality. The supernatural, on the other hand, has no boundaries and an otherworldly source. A good example for magic would be a ritual performed to ease the transition from middle-age to becoming a “Crone,” while a good example of the supernatural would be a diabolic pact in which a person swears allegiance to the Devil in exchange for great wealth. For more see Adler, 8.

⁵⁰ Pike, 32-33.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, wizards had an integral role in the plot and Tolkien wrote that Gandalf was meant to be at “the fore” instead of acting as a distant force.⁵¹ Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the series without the guiding force of the wizard, who not only initiates Frodo’s quest but serves as one of the story’s main heroes. There are few, if any, parallels in Western literature to the character of Gandalf the Grey and Tolkien’s own explanation for his wizards is particularly revealing:

Nowhere is the place or nature of ‘the Wizards’ made fully explicit. Their name, as related to Wise, is an Englishing of their Elvish name, and is used throughout as utterly distinct from Sorcerer or Magician. It appears finally that they were as one might say the near equivalent in the mode of these tales of Angels, guardian Angels. Their powers are directed primarily to the encouragement of the enemies of evil, to cause them to use their own wits and valour, to unite and endure. They appear always as old men and sages, and though (sent by the powers of the True West) in the world they suffer themselves, their age and grey hairs increase only slowly. Gandalf whose function is especially to watch human affairs (Men and Hobbits) goes on through all the tales.⁵²

Tolkien’s wizards (Gandalf, Radagast, and Saruman) maintain many of the traditional attributes of wizards by possessing incredible powers, great knowledge, serving as a guide or adviser, and possessing an otherworldly quality. Yet, most significant is Gandalf’s central role as one of the main heroes in the series. Magic-users in fairy tales often make brief appearances, but Gandalf not only binds the Fellowship and saves the other companions on numerous occasions, he also takes command of the defense of Minas Tirith in the finale. When the wizard is believed to have fallen to his

⁵¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 42.

⁵² Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 159.

death in the Mines of Moria, Aragorn cries out, “What hope have we without you?”⁵³ Tolkien found this question so pressing he was forced to literally resurrect the character early in *The Two Towers*. This hardly made sense in the context of the plot since a divine power capable of resurrecting a character wasn’t established until the publishing of *The Silmarillion* but such was Tolkien’s need for Gandalf that his reappearance occurred anyway.

While other legends have focused on magic-users, few had done so to the extent Tolkien did in *The Lord of the Rings*. Fantasy stories, particularly fairy tales, had little precedent for this shift in focus preferring knights or lost children as their main characters. While many of those who followed in Tolkien’s footsteps would use the traditionally male wizard as their leading magic-user, others seeking a female alternative turned to the figure of the witch.⁵⁴

The second significant shift in *The Lord of the Rings* was the establishment of an alternate world not recognizable in relation to our own as the setting. Earlier fantasy stories were almost universally set within our own world and often in the present time period. Such stories then have their hero(es) encounter “fairy land,” in which magic is an active force and bizarre beings are the norm. Tolkien’s close friend C.S. Lewis utilized this exact device in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which were published around the same time as *The Lord of the Rings*. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lewis has his protagonists enter the magical land of Narnia by walking through the back of a seemingly

⁵³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1954), 394.

⁵⁴ Some examples of witches as main characters include Morgaine in *The Mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley and Polgara the sorceress in *The Belgariad* by David Eddings, the former of which is discussed in greater detail later in this thesis.

ordinary wardrobe that connects the two worlds. Similar transitions are evident in most of the fairy tales that were widely read during the 19th century.

George MacDonald, whose writings greatly influenced Tolkien, was a master of this type of story. One of his greatest works, *Phantastes* (1858), begins with the protagonist Anodos awakening in his familiar bedchamber suddenly half turned into a magical forest through the power of a fairy. As with Lewis, the transition to fairy land is quite abrupt and Anodos remains in this magical realm until the close of the novel when he is magically restored to British civilization. However, at no time does the reader forget that Anodos is within a world that, though operating from laws very different than our own reality, somehow remains *a part of our world*. Time and again MacDonald reminds the reader of this link by having Anodos compare his own experience with “all authentic accounts of the treatment of travelers in Fairy Land.”⁵⁵ Our hero could as well be on holiday in a foreign country than exploring a magical realm populated with fairies and giants. The term ‘traveler’ is particularly revealing as this clearly indicates a journey in which the person will return home eventually.

Tolkien’s world of Middle-Earth is quite different from this transitional reality. Frodo Baggins and Gandalf the Grey are not on holiday in a strange country but engaged in a war that threatens the only world they have ever known. While Tolkien considered Middle-Earth a mythical past out of which our own world developed, there is nothing in his novels to indicate this to the reader. As noted above, Middle-Earth possesses its own alternative history, creation myth (*The Silmarillion*), geography, languages, etc. The sole

⁵⁵ George MacDonald, *Phantastes*, in *The George MacDonald Treasury*, ed. Glenn Kahley (USA: Kahley Publishing House, 2006), 235.

link to our own world is the presence of human beings but this is actually contrary to traditional fantasy stories in which humans were a rarity in fairy land instead of the rising power as depicted by Tolkien. As the fantasy writer Ursula K. Le Guin has said, "It's an alternate world, outside our history, as its map isn't on our map."⁵⁶ Alternate worlds would become a staple of fantasy literature and most prominent authors in the genre would develop their own version of a fantasy universe.

This creation of an alternate world may be of special significance for witches since it places the figure of the witch outside of this reality. In the early modern period witches were closely associated with the Christian figure of the Devil and were believed to be a very real threat. As noted above, these beliefs persisted through the 20th century with the most recent incident being the widespread fear of satanic cults in the 1980s. By placing witches inside an alternate world lacking Christianity fantasists dissociated the witch from Satanism altogether. This allowed the witch to act as any other female magic-user or even to take on traits borrowed from Wiccan. This is not to say that all fantasists abandoned the old stereotypes of witches or disassociated them from evil forces. As discussed above, Tolkien's contemporary C.S. Lewis made a witch his main antagonist in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. However, with an alternate world authors of a different persuasion could explore new ideas about witchcraft. As noted above, such

⁵⁶ Ursula K. Le Guin, "Ursula K. Le Guin's BookExpo America Speech," <<http://www.harcourtbooks.com/AuthorInterviews/LeGuinBEASpech.asp>>, 4 June 2004 [accessed 21 March 2008].

positive portrayals of witches continued to be labeled an “anti-Christian point of view” into the new millennium but these represented a minority opinion.⁵⁷

Fantasy literature at its most complex is the combination of these three elements: the impossible presented as “fact,” a central role for magic-users, and the establishment of an alternate world unidentifiable with our own. The first example of this new fantasy may be found in *The Hobbit* but it was *The Lord of the Rings* that first brought all three of these aspects together in a nearly flawless synthesis. Their literary descendants have often sought to emulate these traits, although not always on such an epic scale.

An Alternate Definition of Fantasy Literature

Matthew Dickerson and David O’Hara have offered a different definition of what constitutes fantasy literature. They also compare fantasy literature with fairy tales but include a long discussion on myth as well. Instead of viewing fairy tales as a part of fantasy they differentiate it based on its scale and offer the same explanation for myth. In their own words:

The continuum [between myth, fantasy, and fairy tale] can be seen as one of scope. There is a range of geographic scope from global to the local, and a range of historical scope from eons to perhaps a few days. There is also a range in the scope of significance, in the scope of character types, and in the scope of meaning.

Myth, for example, often spans a broad geographic scope, encompassing whole worlds and even spanning different worlds (whence Tolkien’s “cosmogony”), bringing us even into the land of Faërie. At

⁵⁷ Phil Kloer, “Dumbledore’s gay? A caldron of reactions,” <<http://www.ajc.com/living/content/printedition/2007/10/23/potter1023.html>>, 23 October 2007 [accessed 8 November 2007].

the other end, fairy tale usually has a very narrow geographic scope of a single village or wood. Fantasy falls in the middle, broader than a single village, perhaps involving whole realms, but not extending to the heavens.⁵⁸

Time is distinguished by centuries for myth, years for fantasy, and days or weeks for fairy tales. Character types go from the gods of myth to great heroes and kings in fantasy, and the common person of fairy tales. Other aspects are treated in a similar fashion.

In addition to scale, they borrow an idea from Tolkien that fantasy presents “three faces: ‘the mystical toward the supernatural, the magical toward nature, and the mirror of scorn and pity toward man.’”⁵⁹ The first essentially means that spirituality and the supernatural have a place in fantasy as in Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion* which provides a theology for Middle Earth. The magical toward nature is the most important aspect for Tolkien and involves all that summed up by Irwin’s impossibility as fact. It is the concept that in nature there is magic that cannot be explained away by science. Finally, and most subjectively, the mirror of scorn and pity toward man argues that fantasy recognizes humanity’s moral failings but also offers a sense of sorrow for this followed by a hope for betterment.

They combine these two aspects with an appreciation of fantasy as containing essential truths though not based in actuality. *The Lord of the Rings* may teach us about our world by acting as a fantastic counterpart. In short, “Fantasy is imaginative literature

⁵⁸ Matthew Dickerson and David O’Hara, *From Homer to Harry Potter: A Handbook on Myth and Fantasy* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 27.

⁵⁹ Dickerson and O’Hara, 49. Also see J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), 33-90.

that gives glimpses of subcreative otherworlds, literature free from the domination of observed fact, providing instead images of things not found in our primary universe.”⁶⁰

Myth is only a subcategory within fantasy on one end of the scale outlined above.

There are numerous difficulties in this description of fantasy, not the least of which is a failure to understand what makes fantasy literature distinct in the first place. Dickerson and O’Hara seemingly find no difference between fairy tales, fantasy, and mythology other than one of “scope.” An immediate criticism that springs to mind is that of numerous counterexamples dealing with scale. *Phantastes*, discussed above, clearly follows in the footsteps of fairy tale but takes place over a fairly long period of time and covers a vast geographic area in the realm of faerie. The role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons* places great emphasis on the realm of the gods with a priestly character class associated with specific deities and some versions have stories directly related to the movements of the gods such as *Baldur’s Gate*. It is doubtful anyone would mistake *Dungeons & Dragons* for myth in line with Homeric poetry. Likewise, many Greek myths (or histories depending on one’s perspective) are concerned with geographically localized situations such as the tragedy of Oedipus that focuses on the travails of one royal family or events that span only a short time such as the tale of the harassed priestess Io. As for a scale in meaning, it could be argued that each of the above offers as much moral and spiritual commentary as the others. Dickerson and O’Hara even recognize that there are not dividing lines of scope between these three forms.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Dickerson and O’Hara, 53.

⁶¹ Dickerson and O’Hara, 28.

The main problem with the “three faces” of fantasy idea is that it only describes fantasy as Tolkien saw it while ignoring where his successors took fantasy literature. As noted above, the magical toward nature is evident in fantasy literature and forms an important aspect. On the other hand, the mystical toward supernatural is often absent from modern fantasy literature. An ironic example of this is Tolkien’s own *The Lord of the Rings*, which makes few, if any, references to a supernatural or spiritual component outside of a brief mention at the return of Gandalf in *The Two Towers*. Even more contentious is the idea that fantasy literature is tied to the so-called “mirror of scorn and pity.” Tolkien’s own work certainly reflects this attribute but many modern fantasists are largely uncritical of humanity as a whole and more apt to portray a few villains or vile creatures as the source of people’s problems.

Another problem with their definition is the inclusion of myth as a form of fantasy since myth is not necessarily fictional whereas fantasy and fairy tales are. Their argument is that like myth, fantasy tells certain “truths” about the human condition and so deserves as much credence as its ancient counterpart. What seems to have been forgotten is that while myths provide such truths today their events have not always been considered outside the realm of history. Homer’s *Iliad* is the best example of a “myth” whose events were long considered fictional only to have modern archaeology uncover evidence of Troy’s actual existence. Myths may not only confer “truths” through their message; they may be truth themselves. However, no one would question the basic fictional quality of fantasy literature, regardless of what “truths” may be gleaned.

Perhaps most confusing of all is the final definition given which could as easily begin with “Fiction” as it does “Fantasy.” Nothing in the definition explains what separates fantasy literature from the fantastic in general or even from most other fiction. All that it states is the rather obvious point that fantasy is a creative interpretation of what this world could be under different circumstances. Numerous other creative forms could fall under such a description ranging from political satire to the stage or even sculpture. A definition should clarify the nature of something instead of providing further ambiguity.

Some Notes on Fantasy Literature

Some of the fantasy works discussed in this study do not utilize all three elements (the impossible as fact, central role of magic-users, and an alternate world) found in fantasy literature but focus on only two. The wildly popular *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling is almost entirely about magic-users and making the impossible into “fact” underlies the entire series. However, Harry Potter and his friends remain a part of our own world with many identifiable locations such as London featured and even an unnamed British Prime Minister makes an appearance at one point. Similarly, *The Curse of Chalion* by Lois McMaster Bujold also relies on impossibility presented as “fact” and is placed in an alternate world (although one that closely mirrors the 15th century Iberian Peninsula), while the only thing that could be called magic in the book are several acts of divine intervention. In spite of these deviations from the Tolkienian format these books

are as identifiably a part of the fantasy literary genre as anything else published in the twentieth century.

For the purposes of this work, the literature of twentieth century fantasy is of primary interest but many other forms of media are involved. Beginning in the 1960s fantasy branched out into film, made guest appearances in music lyrics, provided slogans for disenchanting college students, and even formed the basis of popular card games such as *Magic: The Gathering*.⁶² The most significant of these offshoots were fantasy role-playing games, which first appeared in 1974 with the release of *Dungeons & Dragons*, and will be discussed briefly in the final chapter of this work. Many of these fantasy products have gained mainstream success and carried their version of witches into the popular culture. After the 1960s but before Wiccan's popularization in the 1990s, witches were almost exclusively the domain of fantasy products outside of spiritual and political depictions. Therefore, fantasy literature and other fantasy media are the ideal areas in which to compare popular ideas of witches with those put forth by feminist Wiccans of the same era.⁶³

⁶² For an early example of fantasy film see *Wizards* (20th Century Fox, 1977). For fantasy references in music see the lyrics for the Led Zeppelin songs "The Battle of Evermore" and "Ramble On." For information on "Frodo Lives" slogan see Pike, 78.

⁶³ An important methodological note should be made at this point, as fantasists tend to view all feminine terminology for magic-users as synonymous. For instance, the same character may be interchangeably referred to as a "witch," "enchantress," or "sorceress." A good example of this may be found in Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968) in which a male magic-user is labeled a "wizard," "healall," and "Mage" within five paragraphs of each other and female magic-users are called both "witch" and "enchantress" although both men and women derive their magical abilities from the same source (p. 14, 15 & 5, 36). Outside of popular culture these terms have differing meanings, sometimes dramatically so, often concerned with how their magic operates and from what source it is derived (external/internal, nature/divinity/inner, etc.) Since many fantasists use these terms interchangeably this approach has become widely accepted in popular culture. As this thesis is primarily concerned with how popular culture views witches I will also utilize these terms as synonyms except where this would distort Wiccan beliefs or practices, in which case the distinction will be made clear.

CHAPTER II

In the 1960s the United States witnessed some of the greatest social upheaval in its history including a renewed desire for alternative spirituality and a major revival of the feminist movement. The second-wave feminist movement was essentially launched with the publishing of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan in 1963 which chronicled the suppressive social atmosphere of patriarchal domination prevalent throughout the 1950s. It was this toxic home life championed in the 1950s that created a generation gap between mothers and daughters. As historian Ruth Rosen has written, “The ghost haunting these young women wore an apron and lived vicariously through the lives of a husband and children. Against her, the women’s liberation movement would be forged.”⁶⁴

The first iteration of this new movement was that of the liberal and politico feminists described above. Their approach largely focused on enforcing the non-discrimination clause in the Civil Rights Act (1964) concerning sexuality, as well as pushing the Equal Rights Amendment. Radical feminism appeared shortly thereafter and “began to extend the politics of self-determination to gender.”⁶⁵ As noted above, radicals placed an emphasis on altering women’s place in society, embracing the sexual revolution (including an embrace of lesbianism for many), ending any form of social domination, and placing the focus on gender instead of race or class.

⁶⁴ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2000), 39.

⁶⁵ Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 87.

Although the Wiccan faith and radical feminism emerged from very different circumstances each was appealing to the other. While having no similarity to the witchcraft of demonology, Wiccan had much in common with the ceremonial magic of the fin-de-siècle and folk magic of the early modern period. The emphasis on a female deity, connection to the early modern witchcraft trials, synthesis of modern ideas, progressive ethics, and the strong role of women in ritual were all attractive aspects of Wiccan for feminists seeking a new form of spirituality. As Cynthia Eller has written:

The appeal of neopaganism to feminists newly arrived in the emergent religious tradition must have been tremendous: here were people already worshipping a goddess, naming women as priestesses, and talking about “the feminine.” There were no elaborate rites of entry, if one wished to avoid them; groups were small and intimate, leaving ample space for individual experience; and in a religion with no central headquarters, religious hierarchies were unlikely to get in the way.⁶⁶

For many of the same reasons, Wiccans were encouraged to adopt a feminist perspective. As many Wiccans entered the wider social Movement for change they found strong allies in feminist activists concerned with other issues such as environmentalism. Timing would also play a key role in forming an alliance between radical feminism and Witchcraft in the United States. The first American coven was established in 1964 by Raymond Buckland in Long Island, NY and various other Neo-Pagan groups were forming by 1967. Radical feminism would also originate in 1967 when many influential women’s liberation groups began to form.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 52.

⁶⁷ A coven is a group of approximately 13 practitioners who gather for rituals and to observe important days together such as the solstices and equinoxes. For information on the arrival of Wiccan in the US see Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press,

Wiccan had only recently entered the public eye through the work of its British founder Gerald Gardner during the 1950s. As with fantasy literature, Wiccan would really blossom in the United States despite overseas origins. The new faith was not at first associated with any particular political ideals or causes. Instead, it was represented as the reemergence of those ancient Pagan religions supposedly persecuted as witchcraft during the early modern period. Although linking Witchcraft to the twentieth century was the work of Gardner, the idea of a “fertility cult” surviving into the early modern period was actually supported by most leading academics of the time.

In 1921 British scholar Dr. Margaret Murray, an archaeologist turned historian, published *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, which seemed to support the above ideas with archival evidence. She argued that an organized religion centered on the worship of a god that “was incarnate in a man, a woman, or an animal... [or] in the shape of a man with two faces” had continued to exist in Christian Europe through the sixteenth century.⁶⁸ The massive trials of accused witches in the early modern period had been Christendom’s attempt to finally wipe out this spiritual competition. Murray drew “an important distinction between Operative Witchcraft and Ritual Witchcraft. Under Operative Witchcraft she classes charms and spells of all kinds; but Ritual Witchcraft is witchcraft as a system of religious belief and ceremony.”⁶⁹ The latter concept would provide an historical foundation for modern Wiccan.

2004), 87. For the beginnings of radical feminism see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 20-21.

⁶⁸ Margaret Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 12.

⁶⁹ Doreen Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present* (Washington: Phoenix Publishing, 1973), 10.

Murray's ideas did not have an immediate impact but in the late 1940s *The Witch-Cult* and another work *The God of the Witches* (1933) were republished to popular success. Both books would inspire a number of historical novels in the 1950s, like *The Witches* (1957) by Jay Williams, which supposedly contributed to the popular interest in Murray's "celebrated books."⁷⁰ Around the same time the British academic community began to accept Murray's thesis as well and by the 1960s it was widely seen as indisputable in Britain. The academic community in the United States remained more cautious as research into the trials was ongoing in American universities. However, many scholars in the US continued to endorse the majority of Murray's ideas. There was even a temporary resurgence in Murray's popularity within academic circles when Carlo Ginzburg published his book *I Benandanti* (1966) on Italian witchcraft, which initially appeared to support Murray's idea of a witch-cult surviving into the early modern period.⁷¹

Both the academic and Wiccan communities eventually discarded the Murray thesis due to some surprising revelations. Norman Cohn would reexamine Murray's sources in his 1975 work *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*. He found that Murray had selectively presented trial transcripts so that they supported her theory of an actual witch-cult while leaving out large portions of the documents describing "fantastic features" often taken from British folklore. Since "stories which have manifestly impossible features are not to be trusted in any particular,

⁷⁰ Orville Prescott, "Books of the Times," *New York Times*, June 21, 1957, 23.

⁷¹ Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 200 & 276.

as evidence of what physically happened,” Murray’s theory was also false.⁷² As discussed in greater detail below, Cohn presented this evidence in a way that was less than diplomatic towards feminists. Many Wiccans continued to support Murray’s ideas well into the 1980s but the general public and larger women’s spirituality movement had largely discarded them by that time. For instance, a 1982 article in *The New York Times* about feminist thought in religion describes Murray’s ideas as “discredited” and “a source of embarrassment for other [non-Wiccan] feminist students of religion.”⁷³

Gerald Gardner had tied his own ideas closely to Murray’s thesis by using it as the scholarly basis for Wiccan. However, Gardner deviated from Murray in some critical aspects, most notably by shifting the emphasis away from the horned God of folk tradition and focusing instead on a Goddess almost totally absent from *The Witch-Cult*. This apparently bothered Murray little for she wrote a positive forward for Gardner’s most important work, *Witchcraft Today* (1954), which proclaimed that Witchcraft was a religion that remained in existence despite its suppression in earlier eras. Gardner claimed to have been initiated sometime in the late 1930s into one of these few surviving covens of Witches who were the inheritors of those Witches described by Murray. Fearing this religion might die out soon, Gardner supposedly gained the permission of this coven to openly publish some of their ideas in *Witchcraft Today*.⁷⁴

As the closest thing Wiccans had to an authoritative text, *Witchcraft Today* is surprisingly ambiguous concerning theology or ritual. This has no doubt contributed to

⁷² Norman Cohn, excerpt from *Europe’s Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*, in *Witches of the Atlantic World*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 57.

⁷³ Mark Silk, “Is God a Feminist?,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1982, BR11.

⁷⁴ Gerald Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (New York: Citadel Press, 1954), 18-19.

Wiccan's great diversity and modern emphasis on eclecticism among many practitioners. Aside from bringing Witchcraft into the public eye, Gardner's main goals appear to have been establishing Wiccan as a religion with a definite heritage extending back into pre-Christian times and refuting the claims of contemporaries who believed in the existence of Witchcraft but claimed it was diabolic.

The announcement of Witchcraft's modern presence was far from an immediate success either in Britain or the United States. However, the inclusion of high priestesses who led many rituals, several of whom would leave lasting impacts on the faith, such as Doreen Valiente, and the emphasis on the Goddess made Witchcraft appealing to feminist women. Leo Ruickbie has argued that, "Gardner's conception of the priestly partnership of Magus and Witch in the 1950s, reflecting his belief in a divine partnership of God and Goddess, was ahead of its time, bringing women into a central position within religion, which was in the West, dominated as it then was by Christianity, simply unheard of."⁷⁵ This may be an exaggeration to some extent but placing women on equal footing was an important innovation in Witchcraft. In this aspect, Gardner's ambiguous theology was likely helpful since feminists could interpret the Goddess as they saw best and the strong role of early priestesses gave the new faith a distinctly feminist air.

All of this was in dramatic contrast with the traditional representation of witchcraft as a sinister and often diabolical force. When Wiccan reached the United States, radical feminists interested in the new faith took note of these differences with the historical figure and began to reexamine the witch trials of the early modern period. It

⁷⁵ Leo Ruickbie, *Witchcraft Out of the Shadows: A Complete History* (London: Robert Hale, 2004), 166.

has been estimated “that three-quarters of those executed for witchcraft in Europe were women, though the figures varied considerably from place to place.”⁷⁶ Radical feminists were particularly interested in the gendered aspects of the trials and how the majority of those affected were women. They connected the supposed persecution of females with the attempted destruction of Goddess centered fertility cults and in the process found what radicals viewed as a holocaust aimed at strong, independent women living outside the bounds of patriarchy. This will be the topic of the following section.

Before turning to radical feminist perceptions of the early modern witchcraft trials, one early example of how feminism and witchcraft combined should be noted. In 1968 a group of politico feminists formed a group using the name WITCH in New York. This acronym originally stood for “Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell,” which implied the revolutionary aspect of its membership. Various groups adopted different names under the same acronym. Although WITCH had little to no connection with the Wiccan faith despite originating in the same location it is often discussed by historians of the Craft as the earliest example of the crossover between feminism and Neo-Paganism.⁷⁷ Cynthia Eller notes that, “These first feminist witches did not gather to worship nature, but to crush the patriarchy, and to do so in witty, flamboyant, and theatrical ways.”⁷⁸ They utilized the figure of the witch purely as a political symbol and alluded to the persecution of women for witchcraft during the early modern period.

⁷⁶ Ed. Darren Oldridge, *The Witchcraft Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 268.

⁷⁷ “The Craft” is another term for “Wiccan” or “Witchcraft,” and is commonly used within the Wiccan community. The term’s use should not be confused with the 1996 movie of the same name, which borrowed this term from the Wiccan faith it sought to portray.

⁷⁸ Eller, 53.

Members of WITCH were known for staging elaborate protests such as one in February 1969 when they attempted to derail the Bridal Fair at Madison Square Garden in New York City. After comparing women at the fair with whores, dressing in black veils to sing chants indicating participants were “slaves,” and releasing live mice into the fair grounds they succeeded only in alienating attendees.⁷⁹ WITCH’s activities were not limited to the East Coast as affiliated groups staged events around the United States. In June 1969, a WITCH group protested the arrival of the First Lady and her daughter to a Portland, Oregon emergency telephone aid service. Members of the protest chanted, “Mrs. Nixon, trouble’s mixin’; money to kill, against our will; people at home, denied their own; brother in jail, denied their bail; this hex on you will all come true; we’ll all say no; your kind will go.”⁸⁰ The group even managed to attract the attention of some British organizations who reportedly “admired” their techniques.⁸¹

Radical feminists were largely critical of WITCH, particularly for their unwillingness to attack patriarchy as the core of women’s problems. Radicals argued that “actions such as these whose sole point seemed to be ‘we’re liberated and you’re not’ only served to distance the movement from its natural constituency.”⁸² By 1970, WITCH had largely faded from the scene as it became “just another small group in women’s

⁷⁹ Judy Klemesrud, “It Was a Special Show—And the Audience Was Special, Too,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1969, 39.

⁸⁰ Nan Robertson, “War Protests Mar Mrs. Nixon’s Tour,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1969, 1.

⁸¹ Gloria Emerson, “British Women Battle for Equal Rights,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1969, 42.

⁸² Echols, 98.

liberation.”⁸³ Some of WITCH’s former members, such as Robin Morgan, eventually joined with the radical movement.

WITCH would act as an inspiration for later groups of feminists and Wiccans seeking to combine the two. In the first major examination of the emerging Neo-Pagan movement, *Drawing Down the Moon* (1979), Margot Adler described the spread of WITCH’s ideas: “At the time WITCH was founded it was considered a fringe phenomenon by the women’s movement. Today its sentiments would be accepted by a much larger number of feminists, albeit still a minority.”⁸⁴ The same would be true of Wiccans, many of whom initially saw efforts such as WITCH and feminist covens as unwanted interlopers but generally came to accept their presence in the larger community during the 1970s.

A Radical Feminist Perspective of the Witch Trials

As the radical feminist movement began to grow some women began to apply feminist thought to fields traditionally dominated by men such as history, philosophy, and literature. The results were an often startling and insightful reinterpretation of subjects that deviated dramatically from orthodox opinion. Unfortunately, in some cases early feminist scholars relied on faulty evidence or overstated their claims, as Margaret Murray did in the early twentieth century. This has dampened their historical impact, although the core of their message retains much of its power as a critique of society. One such

⁸³ Susan Brownmiller, “‘Sisterhood is Powerful’: A member of the Women’s Liberation Movement explains what it’s all about,” *New York Times*, March 15, 1970, 230.

⁸⁴ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1979), 179.

case was the radical feminist interpretation of the witchcraft trials in the early modern period.

As noted above, by the mid-1970s Murray's thesis was beginning to face considerable opposition within the academic community and most scholars would reject her idea of a witch-cult within a decade. The attack on the Murray thesis led by Norman Cohn was also seen as an attack on female scholars in some circles. Cohn viciously attacked Murray's character along with her work. In one particularly amusing passage Cohn claimed that Murray's advanced age when writing *The Witch-Cult* had led "her ideas [to be] firmly set in an exaggerated and distorted version of the Frazerian mould."⁸⁵ As one of the few highly respected female scholars in any field at the time, these petty swipes at Murray's character came across as blatant misogyny and an attempt to reassert the patriarchal dominance of men in the field of history. Even before Cohn, radical feminists had looked favorably on Murray's thesis but it seems likely Cohn's open sexism only inspired more feminists to champion Murray's ideas. As one leading radical wrote on a similar topic, "It is rather obscene to be more concerned... with berating women for an alleged lack of scholarship than with the deep injustice itself that is being perpetrated by [Christian] religion."⁸⁶

An early example of a radical feminist view on the witch trials was developed by Mary Daly in *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (1973). The book is largely concerned with revealing the destructive presence of

⁸⁵ Cohn, 54. Also see Oldridge, page 7 about the move away from Murray's thesis by academics.

⁸⁶ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 5.

patriarchy in the monotheistic religions by clearly explaining “how the idols embedded in myths become ‘facts,’ and function as unexamined assumptions which victimize women.”⁸⁷ Daly explores a variety of topics in regards to this ranging everywhere from Christian theology and US politics to the history of philosophy. She eventually concludes that the emerging women’s movement is the only fulcrum upon which society may shift in a truly positive direction.

Before examining Daly’s stance on witchcraft it should be noted that she was not an historian but trained in religion and philosophy. Daly’s observations in *Beyond God the Father* were those of an amateur in the field who, like Murray, chose to present only that evidence which supported her own theories. For this reason, feminist revisionist histories like *Beyond God the Father* are often discounted in modern academia but their impact within the feminist movement should not be ignored.

In *Beyond God the Father* Daly addresses the witch trials of the early modern period as an example of Christianity’s attempts to suppress women. Citing the *Malleus Maleficarum* and Margaret Murray extensively, Daly argued an interpretation of the witch hunts that would become common among radical feminists and Wiccans:

The role of the witch, then, was often ascribed to social deviants whose power was feared. All women are deviants from the male norm of humanity (a point emphasized by the ‘misbegotten male’ theory of Aristotle and Aquinas, the ‘penis-envy’ dogma of the Freudians, and other psychological theories such as the ‘inner space’ doctrine of Erikson and the ‘anima’ theory of Jung). However, those singled out as witches were characterized by the fact that they had or were believed to have power arising from a

⁸⁷ Marie Augusta Neal, review of *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation*, by Mary Daly, *Contemporary Sociology* 5 (Summer 1976): 442.

particular kind of knowledge, as in the case of ‘wise women’ who knew the curative powers of herbs and to whom people went for counsel and help.⁸⁸

According to Daly these women practiced the “Old Religion, or Ritual Witchcraft” originally described by Murray.

According to both Daly and Murray, the most famous representative of this underground faith was the French heroine Joan of Arc whose burning at the stake in 1431 “could be seen as part of the war between Christianity and the Old Religion... an ancient religion of pre-Christian origins, which should *not* be confused with ‘Black Magic.’”⁸⁹ Joan’s subsequent canonization was an attempt by the Catholic Church to subvert the appeal of her rebellion against patriarchy. This is an excellent example of how Daly played loose with the facts since Joan was not executed for witchcraft but for heresy and most experts of the Hundred Years’ War would not question Joan’s Christian conviction.

Daly’s account of the witchcraft trials refutes the traditional view of witches as weak women forming diabolic pacts. A strong emphasis is placed on reinterpreting the historical evidence to present witchcraft in a positive light. For Daly and other feminist revisionists, women were persecuted as witches because they were politically and religiously powerful. This made them the ideal forebears of women’s spirituality since, “The beginning of liberation comes when women refuse to be ‘good’ and/or ‘healthy’ by prevailing standards... This is equivalent to assuming the role of witch and madwoman.”⁹⁰ Such a view of real-world witches had not been expressed before except in a limited manner by early Wiccans. There were no real parallels in American popular

⁸⁸ Daly, 64.

⁸⁹ Daly, 147.

⁹⁰ Daly, 65-66.

culture either since those few witches that had been presented in a positive light remained within patriarchal bounds. The figure of the witch was beginning to symbolize social liberation and empowerment in addition to the original Wiccan emphasis on spiritual fulfillment.

Some radical feminists who were largely unconcerned with the witchcraft trials would still manage contributions to their reinterpretation. The art historian turned amateur archaeologist Merlin Stone made such a contribution with her book *When God Was a Woman* (1976). As with Murray and Daly, Stone was writing on a subject that lay outside her own expertise and many of her observations would be disputed by professional archaeologists. Stone addressed these very critics by arguing that prior historical and archaeological interpretations were largely suspect due to the influence of patriarchal ideals over earlier scholars. Evidence of a matriarchal period preceding the emergence of patriarchal monotheism had been suppressed or misunderstood. She wrote that, “Through the violent imposition of the male religions, women had finally been maneuvered into a role far removed from the ancient status they once held in the lands where the Queen of Heaven reigned.”⁹¹ The result was that most people in the twentieth century believed Goddess worship either had never been a dominant religion or that it had been an unpleasant historical aberration.

Stone’s approach revealed the hypocrisy and male chauvinism subtly influencing earlier scholarship. Joan W. Gartland commented that, “The strong point of the book is the author’s respect for ancient cultures: she quite rightly emphasizes the prejudices

⁹¹ Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1976), 228.

involved when scholars refer to priestesses as ‘temple prostitutes’ and assume that a woman-centered religion must be a ‘fertility cult.’”⁹² Although Stone states that she is not seeking a revival of a Goddess religion, the book’s arguments provide strong support for anyone seeking to do so. By questioning earlier historical interpretations of the female, Stone compliments the arguments of those doubting the legitimacy of the traditional figure of the witch.

Radical feminist Wiccans would incorporate a very similar interpretation of the witch trials into their historical reinterpretations under the dramatic title of “the Burning Times.” Six years after Daly presented a radical feminist perspective on the witchcraft trials it was repeated almost verbatim, albeit with some embellishment, by Starhawk in her most important book, *The Spiral Dance* (1979). Like the above revisionists, Starhawk had no historical training and used no archival evidence to support her claims. However, *The Spiral Dance* is a purely theological text rather than an attempt at revisionist history or amateur archeology such as that found in *When God Was a Woman*. Although the book’s approach may be criticized on academic grounds the historical aspects should be viewed more as an attempt at modern myth-making.

In spite of the mythic qualities, Starhawk does use several sources to back up her description of the witch trials. These included the *Malleus Maleficarum* and *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, with Starhawk even using one of the same quotes as Daly from the demonology text. The trials are once again presented as a misogynistic suppression of the Old Religion, for which Starhawk provides an entire account spanning back as far

⁹² Joan W. Gartland, review of *When God Was a Woman*, by Merlin Stone, *Library Journal* 101 (Autumn 1976): 2184-2185.

as the Ice Age. Even Joan of Arc makes another appearance as a leader of the Old Religion. It should come as no surprise then that Starhawk discusses Daly in the same section and promotes Wiccan as the solution radical feminists have been looking for in a women's spirituality.⁹³

However, Starhawk provides this familiar tale from a different perspective and in the hopes of achieving separate goals. Starhawk's revisionist approach is concerned with establishing legitimacy for the new faith of Wiccan by placing it in the historical context of "perhaps the oldest religion extant in the West." She operates from an assumption that the reader is already aware of society's abuse of women and already understanding that the Judeo-Christian tradition is not the solution for the women's spirituality movement. Patriotism is even a concern with Starhawk alluding to the possibility that Samuel and John Quincy Adams, in addition to other "Founding Fathers," may have been remnants of the Old Religion via the megalithic "Dragon" cult.⁹⁴ In a text so fully rejecting patriarchy this is a humorous lapse of using the enemy to promote the solution.

For Starhawk, "to reclaim the word *Witch* is to reclaim our right, as women, to be powerful; as men, to know the feminine within as divine. To be a Witch is to identify with nine million victims of bigotry and hatred and to take responsibility for shaping a world in which prejudice claims no more victims."⁹⁵ By the late 1970s, the figure of the witch had started to mean more than just a symbol of social revolution. Witchcraft was

⁹³ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1979), 26-33.

⁹⁴ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 26, 31.

⁹⁵ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 31-32.

becoming linked with moral issues beyond the injustice perpetrated during the early modern trials, although this would remain its foundation through the early 1980s.

Starhawk returned to the topic of the “Burning Times” three years later in *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (1982). Although the early modern witch trials are placed in an appendix, Starhawk significantly expanded her ideas on them. The emphasis was no longer on how the witchcraft trials provide Wiccans with an historical precedent but concerned with the broader issue of how they affected Western social development as a whole. Starhawk argued that the trials represented the final effort towards the domination of women, the lower classes, and the natural world initially begun by patriarchy thousands of years before.⁹⁶

The persecution of witchcraft was specifically targeted toward the accomplishment of three goals: the expropriation of land, knowledge, and immanence. These expropriations were carried out through the enclosure of land by wealthy elites, the appearance of an educated class (specifically doctors), and the rise of a “mechanist” worldview. As in her earlier analysis, Starhawk also emphasized the persecution of women as a driving force behind the trials. For these new ideas Starhawk remained indebted to the same strain of thought expressed by Mary Daly mixed with a greater stress on Marxist analysis. New academic research into the trials that would have argued against such views was absent. As Ronald Hutton points out, “Starhawk had suggested

⁹⁶ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 189.

what *should* have happened in early modern Europe, while making no attempt to discover what really did happen.”⁹⁷

In *Dreaming the Dark*, Starhawk did attempt to alter the figure of the witch in one significant aspect: she attempted to tie witches to the average person. By arguing that witches were persecuted as part of the lower classes in early modern Europe she moved the witch away from Joan of Arc and America’s “founding fathers.” This humanizing approach was accompanied by stirring prose describing the horrors of torture and execution suffered by the accused meant to create sympathy for supposed witches.

Furthermore, the early modern witch is portrayed as a woman who put her community before her own interests.⁹⁸ This reinforced Starhawk’s political message in *Dreaming the Dark* of overcoming “estrangement” to build a new and better world. It was also a return to the emphasis on responsibility from *The Spiral Dance* and helped signal the growing importance of morality in witchcraft. Although Starhawk’s attempted linking of witches with the broader community wasn’t very successful, the focus on morality and political action would greatly influence Wiccan in years to come.

Both radical feminists and Wiccans sought a transformation of the witch during the 1970s from the villainous figures portrayed in early modern sources to heroines akin to the towering Joan of Arc. As Cynthia Eller argues, “By choosing this symbol, feminists were identifying themselves with everything women were taught not to be: ugly, aggressive, independent, and malicious. Feminists took this symbol and molded it—not into a fairy tale ‘good witch,’ but into a symbol of female power, knowledge,

⁹⁷ Hutton, 348.

⁹⁸ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, 184-185.

independence, and martyrdom.”⁹⁹ Radical feminists would help pave the way for Wiccans to reclaim the figure of the witch in a more culturally widespread fashion, although still limited compared with fantasy literature.

In many ways, Wiccans would become the truest successors of the radical feminist movement in the late 1970s. Cultural feminism largely replaced its radical counterpart by 1975 and many radical foundations were altered. Whereas radical feminism focused on opposition to patriarchy, activism, and social transformation; cultural feminism shifted to the creation of a female counterculture, became evasive rather than outwardly engaging, and focused on personal transformation.¹⁰⁰

However, many Wiccans like Starhawk continued to champion the radical agenda. Most Wiccans emphasized female empowerment within dual-sex environments and many were activists on a wide range of issues not limited to feminism. The work of social transformation was continued in its most obvious form via the coven. Larger outreach efforts were also pursued such as the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS) organized in the mid-1980s but with its origins as early as 1977. Starhawk and other leading Wiccans in California were highly political and engaged in civil disobedience that even led to conflicts with police at times.¹⁰¹ It may be that these activities were not always in the footsteps of earlier radical feminists but they were certainly along the same path.

⁹⁹ Eller, 55.

¹⁰⁰ Eller, 5.

¹⁰¹ David Burwasser, “A Brief History of CUUPS,” <<http://www.cuups.org/content2/aboutcuups/history.php>>, 1996-1997 [accessed 20 August 2008]. And Adler, 435. For political activism see Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, xxix-xxx.

A Moral Witch

Radical feminist Wiccans would make the final contribution in reclaiming the figure of the witch by arguing that Witchcraft is intimately bound with a system of morality. As noted above, Starhawk linked being a witch with a responsibility to stand against the type of social injustice that may lead to atrocities such as the early modern witchcraft trials. This stood in stark contrast to traditional views of witches who had been presented as the most immoral of people engaged in diabolism.

The shift toward a moral witch had begun with Gardner who linked Witchcraft with love in his version of “The Myth of the Goddess.” However, it was the Wiccan Rede that would provide the foundation for a serious ethical system in Wiccan. Although a seemingly simple code, the Rede masks a greater complexity that requires Wiccans to deliberate on the ethical consequences of any action and determine the morally right path on their own. In *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present* (1973), Doreen Valiente presented the Wiccan Rede in its simplest form: “Do what you will, so long as it harms none.”¹⁰² She stressed that this was not an endorsement of pacifism since allowing others to cause harm unchecked is the same as harming everyone.

The Wiccan Rede is often supplemented with the Rule of Three, which is derived from the Western conception of the Buddhist concept of karma. Starhawk stated that, “The Craft does not foster guilt, the stern, admonishing, self-hating inner voice that cripples action. Instead, it demands responsibility. ‘What you send, returns three times over’ is the saying—an amplified version of ‘Do unto others as you would have them do

¹⁰² Valiente, 36.

unto you.’”¹⁰³ Not all Wiccans accept the Rule of Three per se but most would agree that energy sent out will return in kind. The Rule of Three is often used as a deterrent against the use of black magic or the casting of harmful spells since the negative energy sent out would return in triple on the caster.

Both the Wiccan Rede and Rule of Three had their origins in the 1960s and were well known within the Wiccan community by the mid-1970s.¹⁰⁴ Radical feminist Wiccans often applied the Wiccan Rede and Rule of Three in the fight against patriarchy. Starhawk used these ethics with Gardner’s emphasis on love as a guiding principle to argue for the freedom of sexual expression and against rape. The founder of Dianic Witchcraft, Zsuzsanna Budapest, stated that the Wiccan Rede was the only rule “oppressed” women need follow when casting spells to combat patriarchy.¹⁰⁵ Wiccans almost unanimously pointed to this ethical system as evidence that their faith had no connection with diabolism or the contemporary Church of Satan established in 1966.

Although less important to radical feminists than other aspects of Wiccan like the emphasis on female empowerment, Wiccan morality could be used to make a strong statement against patriarchy. The oppression of women through social mechanisms or violent actions such as rape was clearly denounced as morally wrong by the Wiccan Rede. In addition, the rejection of pacifism and emphasis on fighting injustice supported an activist mentality. This increased the appeal of Wiccan to radical feminists, many of whom considered Christian ethics a driving force behind patriarchy and were ardent

¹⁰³ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ John J. Coughlin, “The Wiccan Rede: A Historical Journey,” <<http://www.waningmoon.com/ethics/rede3.shtml>>, 2 February 2002 [accessed 21 August 2008].

¹⁰⁵ Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women’s Mysteries* (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1980), 20-21 & 26. And Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 37.

activists. The divergence between traditional and Neo-Pagan views on the figure of the witch only became wider as Wiccans implemented their moral system into Witchcraft.

The Marriage of Radical Feminism and Witchcraft

In the late 1970s and early 1980s some radical feminists would attempt to reshape Witchcraft in an extreme way. Starhawk began down this path in *The Spiral Dance* but stopped short of a complete break with the mainstream Wiccan community. Cynthia Eller has called Starhawk a “translator and mediator” between Wiccan and feminism.¹⁰⁶ This would appear to be accurate given Starhawk’s wide appeal to women and men in the Craft even into the 21st century.

Zsuzsanna Budapest, who acted as a mentor for Starhawk, took a somewhat different approach in founding Dianic Witchcraft. For Budapest, Witchcraft was solely about the feminine and a resurrection of matriarchal order. In a complete reversal of Murray’s original ideas, the God (in this case Pan) was considered secondary to the Goddess to the point that the male deity was almost obsolete. This was overtly expressed through the exclusion of men from Dianic practice during the 1970s and 1980s. Budapest’s book, *The Holy Book of Women’s Mysteries* (1980), opens with a rallying cry calling women to adopt Witchcraft “in order to fight and win a revolution that will stretch for generations into the future.”¹⁰⁷ Issues associated with women such as menstruation, lesbianism, and rape were frequently and openly discussed.

¹⁰⁶ Eller, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Budapest, 1. For an account of how Budapest and Starhawk met see Budapest, xviii.

Budapest had fled Hungary as a youth following the revolution of 1956 (hence the adopted last name of that nation's capital) and traveled first to New York City. According to her account in *Drawing Down the Moon* (1979) she quickly encountered extreme sexism there, although it may be wondered how much her ethnicity or language ability may have contributed to these problems. Feeling that she faced an entrenched American patriarchy left her in a deep depression to the point that she attempted suicide before leaving for Los Angeles where she first encountered the women's movement and Neo-Paganism. She helped form the Susan B. Anthony Coven in 1971 to promote the goals of both the radical feminist and women's spirituality movements.¹⁰⁸ This essentially launched the Dianic tradition of the Wiccan faith and was the first real joining of radical feminism with Wiccan.

It was also the first joining of lesbianism with Wiccan as many of the women involved in the new Dianic tradition embraced the sexual revolution. This would cause a great deal of tension with the mainstream Wiccan community at first since many traditional groups were averse to homosexuality and bisexuality viewing it as a perversion of the sacred duality of gender represented by Goddess and God. Many Dianic groups initially remained isolated from the broader Wiccan community as a result, which mirrored the reaction radical lesbians faced in the feminist movement. Estelle B. Freedman notes how, "In response to attempts to exclude or closet them in mainstream

¹⁰⁸ Adler, 76-77, 121.

feminist organizations, lesbians formed separate consciousness-raising groups and caucuses.”¹⁰⁹ This was partly responsible for the unique path Dianic Wiccan took.

Much of Budapest’s hard line concerning the exclusion of men may be attributed to the sexist reaction she and others faced both as women and witches. In a foreword to *The Holy Book of Women’s Mysteries* she describes how one of her coven’s meetings was disrupted by a group of largely male policemen. Budapest was currently on probation for marketing her Tarot skills, so another member, Helen Beardwoman in the story, pretended to lead the group. These officers were fascinated by Helen’s mild facial hair leading them to “question her about how she grew it, did she take hormones, and was she a man.”¹¹⁰

An interesting side note to this story is that Budapest was not the only woman openly discriminated against during the 1970s for practicing allegedly “occult” activities which were often still illegal on the books. An article in *The New York Times* from November 6, 1978 describes how a woman in Atlanta had been denied tenure at an art college there in 1976 because she was “an astrologer with a passing interest in other so-called mystic arts.”¹¹¹ The matter was only brought to the attention of the paper because this unnamed woman claimed she was fired due to her gender. She claimed that another faculty member was openly Wiccan and providing tarot readings in the student union but had suffered no similar reaction from the administration. Whether her claim was accurate or not matters less than the perception of gender bias such incidents convey. Women

¹⁰⁹ Freedman, 88.

¹¹⁰ Budapest, xix.

¹¹¹ Wayne King, “Suit on Tenure Cites ‘Warlock,’” *New York Times*, November 6, 1978, 20.

who had experienced this type of discrimination formed the ranks of Dianic Witchcraft and the exclusion of men made these groups particularly appealing to lesbians.

Given the type of patriarchal oppression Budapest and other women faced it isn't surprising they found inspiration from the idea of a matriarchal period in human history. Harkening to Merlin Stone, Budapest passionately argued that a more prosperous and moral matriarchal age had preceded the present patriarchy. During this ancient era women had controlled most of the power in society including the dispensation of justice and religious rites. Feminine power had begun when an avatar named Aradia was sent to this matriarchal society by the Goddess to teach witchcraft to the "oppressed," a situation with similarities to the 1970s:

Feminist witchcraft at the end of the twentieth century is a tame echo of the rage hidden behind the history of the survival of the witches: the rage expressed in ancient poetry of slaves, rage about conditions so horrifying that violent reprisal was warranted. And all the rage in the face of witch murders that were barely ending when Maddalena collected the folklore of Aradia for Leland. The religious war of the rich upon the poor, the direct attacks of the male-god priests against the Goddess-worshipping witches, has only been transmuted—it has not gone away.¹¹²

The term "religious war" coupled with a justification for violence is striking evidence that Dianic Witchcraft lay outside the usual boundaries of the Wiccan faith. For Budapest, witchcraft was inextricably tied to politics and history in the same way radicals had linked feminism with those subjects.

Other Dianic attitudes about sexuality would further divide them from mainstream Wiccan groups. The obscurity of the male aspect of deity was viewed as an affront by

¹¹² Budapest, 180.

Gardnerian and other traditional Wiccans, who argued that gender duality was necessary for rituals to work. The exclusion of men from Dianic covens only exacerbated this issue. Some Dianic witches felt that they encountered sexism within the witchcraft community or that certain practices were sexist in nature.¹¹³

Although many of Budapest's ideas about the figure of the witch have not been embraced by mainstream Wiccan groups, the Dianic representation of witchcraft did have an impact. Many Wiccans began to place their focus ever more directly on the Goddess during the 1980s and this continued into the next millennium. Sexual freedom and homosexuality were taken out of their demonological context and presented in a positive light during this same time period. Perhaps most importantly, the early tendency toward feminism by Gardner and Valiente was powerfully reaffirmed through the eventual acceptance that Dianic Witchcraft had a rightful place in the Wiccan community. By establishing a new extreme and fighting the remnants of sexism, Dianic Witchcraft helped draw mainstream Wiccan firmly into feminist territory where it remains to this day.

Synopsis

By 1982, radical feminism and Wiccan had largely merged to share similar outlooks on a variety of issues. As a result, the figure of the witch became increasingly feminist both inside and beyond the Neo-Pagan community. Margot Adler had estimated that there were approximately 10,000 Neo-Pagans in the United States as

¹¹³ Eller, 58-59.

of 1979. Having only just come to America in 1964, this represented substantial growth for a fledgling faith. As the torch-bearer of Neo-Paganism, Wiccan gained the most public attention and was the most capable of influencing popular opinion. Neo-Pagan faiths are now some of the fastest growing in the United States. Adler's original estimate has been dramatically increased in recent years with Sarah M. Pike placing the number around 200,000 and leading Neo-Pagans claiming their numbers in the "millions."¹¹⁴ A strong majority of these practitioners are still believed to follow one of the Wiccan traditions.

When the Wiccan faith arrived in the United States, the figure of the witch had made little progress in casting aside the old imagery of demonology. This may have been due to the strength of traditional views on witchcraft and the occult throughout American history. For instance, Jon Butler has shown how belief in diabolic witchcraft continued well into the 1700s despite the end of official executions over the charge, while belief in occult practices continued much later. He has argued that occult beliefs formed an important part of early American religious thought.¹¹⁵ It's possible such beliefs were maintained into the twentieth century, although there is no evidence for this beyond witchcraft's continued association with Satanism. Supposed Satanic cults falsely

¹¹⁴ For first estimate see Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1979), 107, 108. For second estimate see Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), dust jacket & 156. For third estimate see Wren Walker, "Wicca Here and Now: The View from an Internet Center," in *Witchcraft Today*, by Gerald Gardner (New York: Citadel Press, 2004), 174.

¹¹⁵ Jon Butler, "Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage, 1600-1760," *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (Apr. 1979): 317-346.

associated with witchcraft did occasionally cause media panics such as those throughout the US during the 1980s in spite of a complete lack of evidence for such activity.¹¹⁶

As seen in the first chapter, American popular culture did have some examples of different witches already but these were far from feminist in most cases. The history of witchcraft and the popular figure of the witch received a complete overhaul in the hands of radical feminist spiritualists. Witchcraft first became a symbol of female empowerment and then a serious lifestyle for these radical. Wiccans increasingly cast aside old assumptions about gender duality and sexist traditions to embrace feminism. By the 1980s the two had become nearly inseparable.

Like the early conflict between radical feminists and Wiccans, not all historians of the subject have found value in their eventual alliance. Leo Ruickbie has argued that, “feminist Witchcraft is a reactionary dead end: it demonizes half of humanity and alienates otherwise sympathetic men in a mistaken attempt to empower women by excluding others and isolating themselves.”¹¹⁷ Like many Wiccans in the 1980s he believes that Dianic Witchcraft stands in opposition to the Gardnerian principles of duality and gender equality. Apparently, Ruickbie finds little distinction between Dianic Witchcraft and the type of feminist Wiccan promoted by Starhawk. Amazingly for a history written in 2004, Starhawk is almost ignored with the exception of a few pages outlining her life and a brief jibe at her expense regarding her support for the creative interpretation of Wiccan.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Philip Jenkins & Daniel Maier-Katkin, “Occult Survivors: The Making of a Myth,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge (London: Routledge, 2002) 419-432. Also see Hutton, 372.

¹¹⁷ Ruickbie, 166.

¹¹⁸ Ruickbie, 122.

Ruickbie's overall interpretation of Wiccan is largely an attempt to discredit any deviation from Gerald Gardner's original word. Most Wiccans, the majority of whom stand outside the so-called "British Traditional" covens, would find many of his assertions contrary to their own perspective if not outright sexist. Regardless of the direction Gardner may have attempted to take Wiccan (and it seems likely he would have continued his support for feminism and creativity), the history of the faith became inextricably tied to that of the radical feminist movement in the United States.

The majority of Wiccans during the 1970s and through the present have embraced the relationship between feminism and Witchcraft. Gardner's original ideas weren't abandoned but reshaped in a feminist context. Starhawk's books have sold in the hundreds of thousands and continue to act as an introduction to the Craft for many seekers. Ronald Hutton rightly argues that *The Spiral Dance* "became the best-selling work on the subject yet written, and replaced *Witchcraft Today* as the model text for would-be witches."¹¹⁹ Witchcraft influenced by radical feminism was not a "dead end"—it was the Witchcraft of tomorrow.

In the United States, radical feminist Wiccan was the American public's first real introduction to the Craft. This wouldn't have an immediate impact on popular culture where *Bewitched* and *The Wizard of Oz* still held sway. But alongside the evolution of Wiccan, the figure of the witch was beginning to change outside of the Neo-Pagan community as well. Many of these changes were identifiably feminist. The next chapter

¹¹⁹ Hutton, 345.

will examine how these changes affected a fellow newcomer to America: fantasy literature.

CHAPTER III

As social upheavals like second-wave feminism began to reach their apogees in the late 1960s, fantasy literature was being born into the wider foray of American popular culture. Authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Peter S. Beagle, Terry Brooks, Piers Anthony, Stephen R. Donaldson, David Eddings, and Marion Zimmer Bradley contributed to a renaissance in fantasy literature between 1968 and 1983. This new fantasy genre often relied heavily on *The Lord of the Rings* for its inspiration and adhered to at least two of the three criteria outlined in chapter 1. However, as with most authors, the new fantasists incorporated ideas and themes prevalent in their own time into their works. One of these would be radical feminist thought and female characters in fantasy literature began to change as a result. Since witches were almost entirely associated with women they often took on new and sometimes surprising forms.

Even during the 1970s fantasy was already a diverse and sprawling genre with related media in role-playing systems, films, and computer games by the end of the decade. The focus of this study is on the figure of the witch, so I have only dealt with authors who placed witches in their novels. These people only begin to scratch the surface of fantasy literature but include some of fantasy's biggest names among them. Although authors interested in witchcraft do not represent a majority within the genre they make up a sizeable enough group that the influences and ideas promoted by these authors were likely common to the literature as a whole.

It may be questioned whether fantasy literature had any substantial affect on American popular culture during the time period under examination. As with most literary genres, the impact from fantasy was likely less than that of mainstream media. A good example dealing with witches would be the popular television show *Bewitched* that ran for eight seasons between 1964 and 1972. Samantha, the leading witch, was portrayed in a positive light compared with previous witches but within a fully patriarchal environment. She matched what Betty Friedan described as, “A strangely helpless, passive, not very bright, blonde little housewife [who] was the only image there was on television, in movies and in the women’s magazines” during the 1960s.¹²⁰ Samantha was the opposite figure sought by the radical feminist movement but prior to the 1970s she was the dominant one.

Although overshadowed by popular culture, fantasy literature had an impact in the mainstream. It has already been seen how *The Lord of the Rings* established a new market for fantasy products in the United States. *The Lord of the Rings* would further that success in 1978 when it was adapted as a major animated film. Few franchises would match its success during the time period of this study but many new fantasists did prosper under Tolkien’s influence. A sampling of major fantasists of the time who did *not* write about witches would include Roger Zelazny, Stephen R. Donaldson, Raymond E. Feist, and cross-genre author Stephen King. Piers Anthony was the first fantasist to reach the *New York Times* best-seller list in 1982 with *Ogre, Ogre*.¹²¹ *The Last Unicorn*

¹²⁰ Betty Friedan, “The Old Images Can Still Be Seen But the Media Increasingly Reflect the Various Realities of Women,” *Washington Post*, April 20, 1978, VA19.

¹²¹ Richard Matthews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 83.

(1968) by Peter S. Beagle was also adapted as an animated film in 1982 and remains popular through the present. The movement of fantasy literature and related media into the mainstream was gradual during the 1970s but became a full-on advance in the early 1980s.

Radical feminist thought would arrive in fantasy literature much earlier than mainstream acceptance. Two prominent examples of feminist fantasy were published at the borders of fantasy literature's renaissance: *The Tombs of Atuan* in 1970 and *The Mists of Avalon* in 1982. As radical feminist thought expanded into mainstream American culture and reshaped the Neo-Pagan movement, it was also influencing the future course of fantasy literature.¹²²

The Science-Fantasy Interim

Prior to the emergence of fantasy literature in the Tolkienian-vein several authors would begin to explore fantasy themes through a science-fiction setting. Although forerunners of fantasy literature, these works do not completely fit within the broader fantasy setting because they take place in a futuristic universe with a greater emphasis on technology than magic. Irwin's concept may be contested in these works as well since many of the seeming impossibilities of science-fiction are supposedly more plausible

¹²² I would like to note here that in the following interpretations of fantasy texts I have attempted to rely fully on evidence within the texts themselves. Oftentimes in literary studies scholars have been guilty of drawing on their own outside inspirations and knowledge base to make assumptions about the author's intent or draw allegories where none were meant. Where secondary sources are used I have attempted to ensure their assessment was based on the book under question and where interpretation is my own I have tried to only draw on other fantasy texts for a contextual basis. Wherever evidence is drawn from the authors themselves this has been presented in their own light.

than those found in fantasy literature. In spite of their divergence from most fantasy, these novels are relevant to this thesis because they dealt with witchcraft in some form as a major aspect of their plot. As predecessors to fantasy literature and the spread of Wiccan into the United States they may reveal a wider historical pattern.

In 1963 Andre Alice Norton published *Witch World*, a story that largely took place in a fantasy setting but relied on futuristic technology for some of its key plot devices. Although the beginning takes place in our own world, the main character (Simon) is transported to a medieval-fantasy land via a gateway through some ancient standing stones. Norton wrote that her favorite genre was “sword-and-sorcery,” which is a good description of the lands found in *Witch World*.¹²³ As the title implies, the protagonist encounters a nation of people besieged on all sides by hostile groups and whose leaders are powerful witches. Aside from Simon being an alien in this new world, there is little indication of science-fiction themes until the final chapters.

Norton’s depiction of witchcraft is an interesting combination of early modern ideas with archaeological theories on matriarchy. Norton’s witches are exclusively female and when Simon begins to develop similar magical abilities these are at first questioned because of his sex. Witches are capable of calling up storms, performing rituals to magically attack someone from a great distance, and numerous types of illusion magic. The country of Estcarp is a matriarchy in which final authority rests with those women who have devoted their lives to witchcraft. Advice given by prominent men is

¹²³ Andre Norton, “Andre Norton About Her Writing,” <<http://www.andre-norton.org/anorton/anwri.html>>, 14 July 2008 [accessed 17 September 2008].

considered by these matriarchs; particularly concerning warfare as all of the soldiers appear to be male.¹²⁴

The matriarchy of Estcarp is contrasted with that of their allies, the Falconers, who live in the mountains south of Estcarp. Falconer society is so radically divided by gender that women and men live apart from each other at all times, only coming together to breed. This is reminiscent of certain Native American tribes in which men and women largely lived apart, as well as the division of the sexes known in ancient Sparta. At one point in the book a group of Falconers refuses passage to the book's protagonists because one of them is a woman, although they had readily harbored the same men just a few days before. In spite of the Falconers extreme adherence to patriarchy Norton depicts them as brave warriors and generally good, if misguided men.

Women in the far southern land of Karsten appear to suffer far worse than those living in the mountains. The Lady of Verlaine is forced into an "ax marriage" in which she is married to a far off Duke she has never met before. A woman is generally referred to as a "wench" and men in the country are depicted as having no compunction with raping women.¹²⁵ Comparatively, Karsten is in the dark ages beside either the Falconers or Estcarp.

One very curious aspect of these witches is that their power is reliant on their virginity and loss of identity. If a witch has sex she may no longer tap into the Power used for magical ability. In the keep of Verlaine lives a former witch who was raped by the Lord of Verlaine explicitly to render her powerless and the same action is attempted

¹²⁴ Andre Norton, *Witch World* (New York: Ace Books, 1963), 35 & 201-202.

¹²⁵ Norton, *Witch World*, 150.

when another witch is washed ashore there.¹²⁶ In this regard, Estcarp is not so different from the extreme patriarchy of the Falconers and it is noted late in the book that Estcarp is in decline because so few of its women ever reproduce. Some feminists who believed that celibacy was the best way to find empowerment would have embraced this theme. However, many others would have found it contrary to the sexual liberation movement that often accompanied radical feminism.

Similarly, women must forsake their names when they become witches and so abandon their identity alongside their sexuality. Before the lead witch in the story can begin her own life she must reveal her name to Simon in the end of the book, foreshadowing a loss of power. This device would be reversed later by Ursula K. Le Guin where the destruction of a woman's identity by denying her name was the ultimate expression of her oppression and powerlessness. Radical feminists in general would have found the idea of sacrificing their self-identity in order to obtain power akin to tokenism and something to be scorned.

The matriarchal witches of Norton's *Witch World* may be interpreted in different lights as either strong feminist symbols in a world where women are otherwise oppressed or as women who obtain power through a different form of self-oppression. They are independent, empowered, claim positions of authority, and are actually above Estcarpian men in the social structure. However, their inability to maintain their own identity or have sex simultaneous with being empowered is counter to the radical feminist

¹²⁶ Norton, *Witch World*, 81.

movement. Norton's figure of the witch then is a mixed bag of radical feminist and alternative ideas that is somewhat unique in this history.

The Witches of Karres by James H. Schmitz provides a less confusing but equally fascinating depiction of witchcraft. The story began as a novelette written in 1949 but was expanded into a full novel published in 1966, of which the first two chapters were the original story. The book has become somewhat obscure in recent years but is considered a classic within science-fiction circles. Schmitz was originally from Germany but migrated to the United States during World War II where he made a home in the Los Angeles area.¹²⁷ Many of his novels featured strong women in leading roles.

Even though the setting takes place in a futuristic universe spanning multiple star systems, *The Witches of Karres* has much in common with fantasy literature. Those parts of the story that take place on various planets are written with the fantastic in mind and the main character even takes on the form of a ghost at one point. The political entities are less futuristic too with one overarching Empire and several smaller dictatorships at its fringes. Perhaps most notable is the story's rampant sense of humor, which is unusual in both science-fiction and fantasy literature.

In regards to this thesis, the most interesting aspect of *The Witches of Karres* is the numerous strong females found in the novel. Although a man plays the leading role (Captain Pausert), the three witch sisters Schmitz introduces in the first chapter steal the spotlight with Goth continuing to do so throughout the book. If not overtly radically feminist, Schmitz's witches are about as close as you could get. It is revealed early on

¹²⁷ Peter D. Tillman, "SF Site Reviews: The Witches of Karres," <<http://www.sfsite.com/02a/wk97.htm>>, 2001 [accessed 14 September 2008].

that these three child-witches freely left their home planet of Karres to explore the universe. This indicates a culture that respects women as strong and capable while also seeking to empower young girls to gain self-confidence and a sense of worldliness. Laura Willowes in the early 1900s would be green with envy.

Once the story reaches the witch world of Karres this radical feminist trend continues to be developed in the girl's broader family structure. Captain Pausert never knowingly meets the girls' father in spite of staying with the family for three weeks and living in the father's bedroom during that time. It is revealed later in the book that he had in fact met their father (his great-uncle) several times in the town but the important fact is that women are seen as equals in a relationship. The girls' father trusts his wife with a strange man living in his bedroom, while she trusts him to be gone for weeks working on "geological research."¹²⁸ Considering this part of the book was written in the 1940s, it is far ahead of its time in positively portraying an alternative lifestyle.

The witch world of Karres is also notable for its inhabitants' apparently environmental attitude. Although a sizeable world, only about eight thousand witches live there and these rely on the natural bounty for most of their products. Hunting is the main source of meat products and berries picked in the wild are used to make wine. With such a small population, the majority of the planet is wild with large herds of mammoth-like animals moving across its surface. There is no trace of industrialization and the only communal building is a theatre used as a magic amplifier to move the entire planet across the universe. Captain Pausert describes the witch settlement by observing

¹²⁸ James H. Schmitz, *The Witches of Karres* (New York: Baen Books, 1966), 42.

that, “it wasn’t a real town at all, the captain thought. They didn’t live like people, these witches of Karres—it was more like a flock of strange forest birds that happened to be nesting in the same general area.”¹²⁹ These witches are more akin to the Wiccan idea of ancient matriarchies that would be popularized around the time Schmitz’s original story was published.

Everywhere in *The Witches of Karres* women are portrayed as leaders and powerful figures. Goth, who teams up with the Captain, continually saves the pair from trouble through her magical ability and largely devises their very successful economic strategy. The girls’ mother, Toll, is revealed late in the novel to be an extremely powerful witch of the highest order. One of the main villains is a woman who runs a spaceship repair shop and controls two men in her employ. Occupying the gray space between good and bad, is a female agent of the Empire who at first attempts to steal the Sheewash Drive from the Captain but later becomes his most capable ally as they try to escape a strange planet. And at the end of the book, it is briefly mentioned that one of the few good people vying for control of the otherwise corrupt Empire is the Empress Hailie who the Captain chooses to work for in the conclusion. Schmitz’s worldview is one that radical feminists would have found appealing with women pursuing their own agenda and in every way the societal equals of men.

The figure of the witch given by Schmitz is very different from the evil image of the early modern period. The witches of Karres are the ultimate heroes who save the universe by waging war on the evil Worm World. Although the witches’ reputation

¹²⁹ Schmitz, 42.

within the Empire is uncertain other than their conflict with most of the ruling elite, they are clearly well respected by the leaders on independent planets. Toll and her husband apparently enjoy somewhat close relations with the ruler of the pirate planet Uldune who plays a crucial role helping the witches defeat the Worm World.¹³⁰ While witchcraft may be feared by many people, it is also respected and no mention is ever made that the witches' power comes from any sort of demonic source.

The Witches of Karres does not attempt to push a radical feminist message overtly but instead presents a universe that has already accepted those values. Schmitz's various witches are complete people with their own characteristics and attributes but are uniformly portrayed in a positive light. This may be the first novel in which witches play a heroic role and similar to *Lolly Willowes*, they have a strong if unexplained connection to the natural world. *The Witches of Karres* portrays a very different type of witch from that of either the early fantasists or the demonologists of the early modern period and represents a major shift in the figure of the witch.

Radical Feminism in Earthsea

The first influential fantasist to follow Tolkien would be Ursula K. Le Guin who released the first novel of her *Earthsea* series in 1968. Scholars appear to be unanimous that "Le Guin is unquestionably one of the most important modern authors of fantasy."¹³¹ The very fact that she has received some attention within academic circles is a testament

¹³⁰ Schmitz, 141 &158.

¹³¹ Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara, *From Homer to Harry Potter: A Handbook on Myth and Fantasy* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 169.

to this, as most fantasists are routinely ignored. Le Guin maintained Tolkien's form by grounding her stories in the impossible as fact, creating the alternate world of Earthsea for a setting, and focusing strongly on magic-users. The latter was so crucial that the debut book of the series was titled *A Wizard of Earthsea*, which told the story of a young man who discovers his magical abilities and eventually becomes a powerful wizard.

However, the similarities between Le Guin and Tolkien largely ended with genre as Earthsea had little in common with Middle Earth and Le Guin's primary protagonist (Ged) was a very different sort of hero from Tolkien's selfless hobbits. Returning to Dickerson and O'Hara's concept of scope, Le Guin also differed from Tolkien in scale. Whereas all Middle Earth was shaped by the fellowship, the first story of Ged is largely personal and a small act in the sagas of Earthsea. Le Guin is also differentiated by making a magic-user the main character, which would be largely emulated by future fantasists.

Of the greatest significance for this study, Le Guin was a self-professed feminist who would champion women's causes during the 1970s. She is perhaps most well-known in this respect as an advocate of a woman's right to have an abortion. Her science-fiction work, notably the award-winning novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), is overtly feminist.¹³² Although less explicit in its message, Le Guin's fantasy definitely conveys a subtle radical feminism in the first two books of the Earthsea series.

Le Guin's strong radical feminism was a significant departure from the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Some have mistaken Tolkien for promoting a toned-

¹³² Ursula K. Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 8, 75-79.

down feminism through the character of Eowyn. This is especially evident in the recent film adaptations in which Eowyn briefly adopts a feminist stance in *The Return of the King*. However, Tolkien's world-view was sharply defined by conservative Christianity and his opinion about women was a byproduct of this. Tolkien wrote in 1941 that:

Under [sexual] impulse they can in fact often achieve very remarkable insight and understanding, even of things otherwise outside their natural range: for it is their gift to be receptive, stimulated, fertilized (in many other matters than the physical) by the male. Every teacher knows that. How quickly an intelligent woman can be taught, grasp his ideas, see his point – and how (with rare exceptions) they can go no further, when they leave his hand, or when they cease to take a *personal* interest in *him*. [Italics are Tolkien's]¹³³

Following the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien would write that Ents had partially originated from his perceived difference between masculine and feminine conceptions of nature as “unpossessive love and gardening” respectively.¹³⁴

Some scholars have pointed out that Tolkien's ultimate goal in *The Lord of the Rings* is the restoration of a patriarchal order. Richard Matthews argues that Tolkien “establishes a patriarchal hierarchy as the highest spiritual, social, and political ideal.”¹³⁵ The reinstatement of a *male* as the king at the conclusion of *The Lord of the Rings* is the ultimate expression of this patriarchal emphasis. As seen in the previous chapter, such a promotion of patriarchy was precisely what radical feminists of the late twentieth century were fighting against. Unlike Wiccan or the women's spirituality movement, which

¹³³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 49.

¹³⁴ Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 212.

¹³⁵ Matthews, 78.

began with a feminist base, fantasy literature would require a new generation of writers to provide a feminist perspective for the genre.

Ursula K. Le Guin would take on patriarchy and champion women's rights throughout her career beginning with her literature. One of the first characters the reader meets in *A Wizard of Earthsea* is the witch of Ten Alders who is the aunt of the main protagonist and eventually teaches him the basics of magic. This witch is unlike either the traditional witch of the early modern period or the radical feminist witches found in the Wiccan faith with the important exception of being female. Le Guin describes her witch thusly:

There is a saying on Gont, *Weak as woman's magic*, and there is another saying, *Wicked as woman's magic*. Now the witch of Ten Alders was no black sorceress, nor did she ever meddle with the high arts or traffic with Old Powers; but being an ignorant woman among ignorant folk, she often used her crafts to foolish and dubious ends... Much of her lore was mere rubbish and humbug, nor did she know the true spells from the false. [Italics are Le Guin's]¹³⁶

Unlike a traditional figure, the witch of Ten Alders is not evil nor has she gained magical powers through a diabolic pact. Although somewhat unkempt Le Guin does not describe her witch as ugly or unpleasant to the eye. Similar to a radical feminist perspective, the witch of Ten Alders is independent and holds a relatively high social standing in the village. However, although this witch is empowered by her magic she does not fully comprehend that power or necessarily use it for the betterment of others. If the witch of Ten Alders is a radical feminist figure it is of an undeveloped variety.

¹³⁶ Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 5-6.

The witch of Ten Alders actually resembles the historical “cunning folk” of the early modern period more than any fictional or Neo-Pagan counterpart. The description of the witches hut full of herbs is reminiscent of folk medicine and Le Guin mentions her ability to heal villagers as well as curse them. In *Earthsea* seemingly every village has at least one magic user of lesser or greater ability and their skills are valued. Writing about Puritan New England, Richard Godbeer argued that witchcraft was considered “a vital resource in preindustrial English culture.”¹³⁷ As a preindustrial culture closely tied to sea traffic, *Earthsea* has many resemblances to early New England.

As Ged’s guide to the realm of magic, the witch of Ten Alders is presented in a sympathetic and positive light overall. The impression is not overtly feminist but that the witch of Ten Alders is a woman of a feminist inclination fighting for survival in a rigidly patriarchal society. This parallels the view of American society for many radical feminists of the time. With the witch of Ten Alders, Le Guin seemingly painted a picture of those domestic mothers of the 1950s that some young feminists were rebelling against while remaining sympathetic to their oppression in a patriarchal culture.

In the second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*, Le Guin offers a feminine perspective on the world of *Earthsea*. Although the protagonist is not named as a witch but called a priestess instead, Tenar deals with elements akin to witchcraft. Foremost among these is the strong emphasis placed on ritual; in this case to appease evil beings called the “Nameless Ones.” The murder of two political prisoners to honor the Nameless Ones is

¹³⁷ Richard Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 25. Also see Matthews, page 139 for a comparison with shamans/witch doctors.

somewhat reminiscent of sacrifices made during the witches' Sabbath for Satan. The strongest link between Tenar and the witches of Earthsea actually comes in the final book of the series, *Tehanu* (1990), where it is revealed that Tenar has been instructed in magic by Ged's mentor Ogion – the same magic used by the witch of Ten Alders and all magic-users in Earthsea.¹³⁸

Tenar is presented as the ultimate victim of patriarchal and societal oppression in the beginning of *The Tombs of Atuan*. At the young age of five, she is taken from her family and forced into the service of the Nameless Ones. However, the greatest symbol of domination is the stripping of Tenar's very name through a ritual meant to return it to the gods she is now enslaved to. Those around her refer to her as "Arha," the "Eaten One," which seems like a strong allusion to the societal exploitation most women have faced.¹³⁹ From this point through the introduction of Ged, the only power Tenar wields is the fear others feel of the Nameless Ones and her only independence comes in the darkness of an underground labyrinth.

After Ged is trapped inside the labyrinth Tenar eventually saves his life by moving him to a part of the labyrinth where a rival priestess will not be aware of his presence. Following this act, Ged shares her true name, which he has discovered through some magic and Tenar begins the process of liberation as her memory returns. Matthews writes that, "The reuniting of Tenar with her name—which is also a joining of interior

¹³⁸ It should also be noted that Le Guin, like most fantasists from 1968 through the present, uses the various terms for magic users as synonyms with the exception that certain terms depend on a person's gender. For instance, female magic users are labeled as witches, enchantresses, and sorceresses in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Given Tenar's magical ability in *Tehanu*, albeit a limited ability, and her skills in magical ritual in *The Tombs of Atuan* it seems fair to include this "priestess" among the witches examined in this study.

¹³⁹ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), 3-25.

and exterior, light and dark, male and female—begins a process of union and illumination.”¹⁴⁰

When Tenar chooses to escape from the Nameless Ones with Ged at the end she is fully freed from the patriarchy of the Nameless Ones: “You are free, Tenar. You were taught to be a slave, but you have broken free.”¹⁴¹ This could easily be a rallying cry for radical feminism. The story of Tenar is of a woman enslaved by patriarchy that is shown the possibility of freedom and seizes the opportunity. It is the original radical feminist fantasy.

Somewhat ironically, the original concluding book in the Earthsea series, *The Farthest Shore* (1972), had no significant female characters. This may partially be accountable to Le Guin’s temporary retreat from overt feminism during the 1970s following sharp criticism of *The Left Hand of Darkness* resulting in the eventual reformulation of her feminist thought. In the 1976 essay “Is Gender Necessary? Redux,” Le Guin attempted to argue that *The Left Hand of Darkness* was not focused on feminist issues but had simply been “about betrayal and fidelity.” A lesser example was her adamant defense of using he/him/his instead of she/her/hers or gender neutral terms. According to commentary in the essay (written in 1989), Le Guin felt that she had “opened a can of worms and was trying hard to shut it.” However the stance on pronouns “collapsed, utterly, within a couple of years” and it may be assumed the retreat from radical feminism followed.¹⁴² She attended a Planned Parenthood symposium in 1978

¹⁴⁰ Matthews, 143.

¹⁴¹ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 130.

¹⁴² Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, 8, 15.

and gave a stirring keynote address to the National Abortion Rights Action League in 1982.

By the late 1980s Le Guin was clearly writing with “what is a fairly new note for Ms. Le Guin: the note of feminist anger.”¹⁴³ In an essay titled “The Fisherwoman’s Daughter” (1988) Le Guin passionately wrote:

It seems to me a pity that more than fifty years have passed and the conventions, though utterly different, still exist to protect men from being shocked, still admit only male experience of women’s bodies, passions, and existence. It seems to me a pity that so many women, including myself, have accepted this denial of their own experience and narrowed their perception to fit it writing as if their sexuality were limited to copulation, as if they knew nothing about pregnancy, birth, nursing, mothering, puberty, menstruation, menopause, except what men are willing to hear...¹⁴⁴

This message was acted upon to a large extent in the final Earthsea novel, *Tehanu* (1990), in which Tenar was once again the protagonist and a clear radical feminist message returned to the fore. If Tenar may be considered a witch, which this study argues is legitimate, then she was the first fully radical feminist fictional witch in a leading role since Laura Willowes.

A Traditional Witch in an Untraditional Tale

In the same year that Le Guin released her first novel Peter S. Beagle published *The Last Unicorn* (1968), which was both a satire of and legitimate fantasy in its own right. The book is wonderfully playful with its genre, often using explicit self-reference

¹⁴³ Noel Perrin, “Father Tongue, Mother Tongue,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1989, BR18.

¹⁴⁴ Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, 228.

like stating how a character is “in the story with the rest of us now.”¹⁴⁵ As with Le Guin’s first two Earthsea novels, the story differs from Tolkien by focusing more on personal stories than epic causes. However, the ultimate goal of freeing the enslaved unicorns from their prison in the ocean is reminiscent of freeing Middle Earth from the power of Sauron, if possibly of less significance to the world at large.

Most things in *The Last Unicorn* retain a fairy tale essence with unicorns and heroes seemingly on the side of justice while witches and dragons appear as frightful beings. Yet, Beagle maintains a Tolkienian sense of pity toward supposedly evil beings. The novel’s chief antagonist King Haggard is ultimately more pitiful than despicable and the unicorn shows remorse at the slaying of a dragon. At the conclusion Schmendrick the Magician reveals the philosophy behind this attitude that “men can do nothing that makes any difference” whether they pursue good or evil.¹⁴⁶ The unicorn concurs with this idea, although noting that she prefers goodness, making it the guiding force behind the novel’s message.

This undoubtedly shapes Beagle’s witch, one of the more colorful characters throughout the story. Her name is “Mommy Fortuna” and she operates a “Midnight Carnival” of largely illusory mythical beings for those desperate to believe. She is described as old and unattractive but not particularly hideous. Although her powers are largely those of illusion, she clearly has some competence as she is both able to capture a harpy and trick the unicorn into believing she is the specter of Old Age. It should be

¹⁴⁵ Peter S. Beagle, *The Last Unicorn* (New York: ROC, 1968), 151.

¹⁴⁶ Beagle, 288.

noted too that the witch recognizes the unicorn for what she is in a world where most people mistake her for a white mare marking her as above the ordinary.

However, like the failed magician Schmendrick, Mommy Fortuna is not a successful witch. In a confrontation with the unicorn she angrily declares she will never free either the unicorn or harpy because holding their power is her own: “Trudging through eternity, hauling my homemade horrors—do you think *that* was my dream when I was young and evil? Do you think I chose this meager magic, sprung of stupidity, because I never knew the true witchery?”¹⁴⁷ The unicorn replies with a sort of jibe about what real witchcraft means causing Mommy Fortuna to weep a few grains of sand before leaving with a final taunt. Beagle leaves the nature of what drove Mommy Fortuna from true witchery unknown but his portrayal of the witch is almost sympathetic. When she is finally killed by the freed harpy, Schmendrick laments her death despite being instrumental in it.

The Last Unicorn does not attempt to promote a radical feminist message as a whole since it is primarily concerned with what one reviewer of the 1982 film called “the differences between myth and reality.”¹⁴⁸ It could be argued that Prince Lir’s ascension to kingdom following his father’s death is supportive of patriarchy. However, it should be remembered that the book is intentionally recycling many tropes from earlier fairy tales and a patriarchal kingship is one of these. On the other hand, Molly Grue’s abandonment of the outlaw Captain Cully could be interpreted as a refutation of

¹⁴⁷ Beagle, 37-38.

¹⁴⁸ Janet Maslin, “Screen: ‘The Last Unicorn,’ An Animated Fable,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1982, C10.

patriarchal authority. But again this seems more like an abandonment of failure to follow one's dreams than a feminist statement. Schmendrick's philosophy that people can accomplish nothing would likely find the institution of patriarchy as meaningless as a fight for radical feminism. After all, radical feminism would only matter if it mattered to you, as would patriarchy.

As for the witch, she is a periphery character largely providing a setting for the entrance of Schmendrick. The real effort appears to be the reinforcement of a theme on failure, which appears everywhere in the book from Molly Grue's failed life as an outlaw to King Haggard's failure to find happiness. Yet, unlike the book's protagonists who overcome their failings, the witch and other "villains" accept failure to their ultimate downfall.

Beagle then does not represent the emergence of radical feminist thought into fantasy literature as Le Guin does. However, he doesn't offer much in the way of social commentary either being more concerned with literary playfulness and the meaning of myth. *The Last Unicorn* was one of the first important works of fantasy to follow *The Lord of the Rings* and must be considered in that light. As something of a satire, *The Last Unicorn* is more interested in explaining the fantasy genre and offering a fresh breath of air than explicating on the social revolution of the 1960s.

Misogynistic Fantasy in Xanth

Piers Anthony began publishing the long running Xanth series in 1977 with *A Spell for Chameleon*. As with Le Guin, the book is heavily centered on magic-users with

the protagonist Bink seeking a way to reveal his own inherent magical talent. Unlike either of the earlier fantasists discussed above, Anthony places Xanth within our own world but magically cut off from “Mundania.” For instance, Xanth’s contour exactly resembles the American state of Florida where Anthony eventually settled.

A Spell for Chameleon is unusually vague in its definition of the various terms for magic-users. During a discussion of Xanth’s history in the second chapter a centaur refers to all the female magic-users in Xanth as “witches.”¹⁴⁹ This is the only use of that specific term found in the book but no other is offered for the average female magic-user. Particularly powerful women are dubbed “Sorceresses,” while powerful men are called “Magicians.” These titles seem to associate a person with a sort of magical ruling elite class but neither term appears to denote any actual change in the magic used aside from its strength. Therefore, it seems safe to assume that Anthony has for the most part followed the trend of modern fantasy in using the varying terms for magic-users indiscriminately and that his female characters may be classified as witches.

An immediate theme found in the Xanth series is Anthony’s obsession with female sexuality. The fifteenth book of the Xanth series is titled *The Color of Her Panties* (1992), in which one of the main characters desperate to find a husband faces the difficult task of choosing the color of her underwear. In *A Spell for Chameleon*, this focus is generally less overt but remains prevalent throughout the story. With the exception of a few chapters, Bink is largely meeting various women and judging their

¹⁴⁹ Piers Anthony, *A Spell for Chameleon* (New York: Del Rey, 1977), 45.

attractiveness. His entire quest to find his magical talent begins in an effort to remain engaged to a beautiful local girl of his home village.

A Spell for Chameleon may be the only fantasy book published during this study's time period to feature a mock rape trial. Taking place in a localized semi-medieval setting, this hearing is conducted anonymously to preserve the reputations of both the accused and accuser. This is done by having three women and three men sit across from one another during the proceedings with each party hidden as one of the three. Bink, who is passing through this village, takes the place of one of these three men in exchange for a night's lodging.

The hearing is extremely brief with no evidence presented by either side. All that we are told is that a woman walking near the Gap claims an acquaintance approached her, threatened to throw her over if she protested, and was subsequently raped. The men simply deny this allegation. The judge delivers a preliminary verdict called an "ifso" worth quoting in full:

Then I presume she would have fled him at the outset, had she disliked him—and that he would not have forced her if she trusted him. In a small community like this, people get to know each other very well, and there are few actual surprises. This is not conclusive, but it strongly suggests she had no strong aversion to contact with him, and may have tempted him with consequence she later regretted. I would probably, were this case to come up in formal court, find the man not guilty of the charge, by virtue of reasonable doubt.¹⁵⁰

After this, the women unanimously agree to drop the charge despite "looking betrayed." Reflecting on the trial Bink ponders how the beautiful woman who had sat opposite him

¹⁵⁰ Anthony, 57.

could have helped being raped if that had happened since she has “no other visible purpose than ra—than love.” This is typical of story which generally equates a woman’s value with her physical appearance.

This mock rape trial is one of the most disturbingly misogynistic aspects of *A Spell for Chameleon*. The judge’s rationalization appears to suggest that men are in control of such situations arguing that “he would not have forced her if *she* trusted him. [Italics mine]”¹⁵¹ The implication of such logic is bizarre and anything but humorous if that was the intent. Furthermore, the analysis requires women to enforce their own sexual safety instead of the law: if only the woman hadn’t tempted the man, he never would have raped her. The woman has brought rape on herself. This is a classic argument found in patriarchies to excuse rapists from their actions.

The misogynistic tendencies of this village are further revealed when the bailiff remarks to Bink that he wouldn’t blame the rapist for doing such to the especially attractive woman Bink sat across from. Bink makes no comment on this and given his previous reflection on the trial it may be assumed he shares the bailiff’s sentiment. Unfortunately, this is only the most blatantly sexist scene found in *A Spell for Chameleon*.

Shortly after the mock rape trial, Bink encounters the one known Sorceress living in Xanth, whose name is Iris, while attempting to get around the Gap Chasm. As noted above, in Xanth a Sorceress is really just an extremely powerful witch or enchantress. Iris is at first portrayed as a powerful and stunningly beautiful woman living in luxury in

¹⁵¹ Anthony, 57.

her own island palace. Using her incredible powers of illusion Iris leads Bink to believe he has been saved by her before taking him to an imaginary palace. At this point the basic patriarchal structure of Xanth is revealed as Iris seeks to claim the throne of Xanth from its ailing king but may not do so with legitimacy because the ruler must be male. She offers to marry Bink and using her powers of illusion save him from exile, if in return Bink will act as a figurehead king so she may rule Xanth as its queen. As Bink catches on to the meaning of her plan he notes, “Iris wanted power.”¹⁵²

Bink seriously considers Iris’s offer but then rejects it on the supposed basis that his fiancé would not approve. However, he quickly acknowledges that his fiancée really had little to do with the final decision “for Iris was as much of a woman as Sabrina, and much more magical.”¹⁵³ He realizes the true reason is that he could not betray the very institutions of Xanth that threaten to exile him. In spite of the king’s incompetence the patriarchal order had to be honored.

Iris reacts to this by attempting to terrify Bink with her amazing illusions. When this fails and Bink sees through her illusion he finds that she is actually living in a rundown building with no servants or actual power. Although Bink credits Iris with the ability to do great things with her power the ultimate verdict appears to be that the Sorceress is actually incapable of achieving her goals in a male-dominated Xanth.

Later in the book the Magician Humphrey sums up the book’s view of women by stating that, “Iris doesn’t need power half so much as she needs a good man” who is

¹⁵² Anthony, 91.

¹⁵³ Anthony, 99.

stronger magically so he can control her “machinations.”¹⁵⁴ This is of course exactly what happens in the novel’s conclusion when Iris marries the newly crowned Trent who becomes Iris’s “master.” Reversing Iris’s original intent, Anthony now has her appear as solely interested in the wealth and privilege of royalty.

The final witch to suffer is the title’s Chameleon, who is a woman that magically transforms by the phases of the moon from an extremely ugly girl with great intelligence into a beautiful woman who is “stupid,” with an in between stage of average qualities. She refers to this as a curse, although it is unclear if anyone has actually cursed her or if this is actually her magical talent. Bink meets Chameleon during each of her three stages before learning the truth judging her unacceptable in any form since he cannot stand one’s stupidity or the other’s ugliness and feels he would eventually tire of an “average” woman. However, once he knows about Chameleon’s curse he falls in love because she offers variety and whenever he tires of one aspect he can know she will change eventually to meet *his* needs. Ironically, Bink declares that Chameleon’s curse makes her fine just the way she is and they promptly make love in the middle of a duel with Trent.

The message of Chameleon’s curse seems to be that if a woman meets a man’s needs then she is acceptable. Chameleon’s own feelings about the curse, for instance having to be drained of her intelligence every third of the month, apparently doesn’t matter. In a stunningly sexist conclusion the story’s overall message is finally revealed,

¹⁵⁴ Anthony, 138-139.

“And at last Bink understood the meaning of his omen: he was the hawk who had carried away Chameleon. She would never get free.”¹⁵⁵

Anthony would likely disagree with the assessment that *A Spell for Chameleon* conveys a sexist message. He has stated that the *Xanth* series is primarily one of humor and so not to be taken seriously. Anthony is no stranger to charges of sexism having faced similar issues with his first novel *Chthon* (1967). In an interview from 2005 Anthony stated that:

I don't think feminists read Chthon. On occasion I would have battles with them in the fanzines (former printed amateur fan magazines). The essence of my response was for them to stop screaming about things like whether a woman should be addressed as Mrs. Miss, or Ms., and start fighting the way a woman was paid two-thirds as much for the same work as a man. They disappeared. I don't regard my fiction as anti-feminist. If a man gets hit, they seem to feel that's fine; if a woman gets hit, they say it's chauvinistic. I treat all my characters like real people. Judging by my mail, I have more (and more appreciative) female readers than male.¹⁵⁶

When directly faced with the charge of objectifying women in the *Xanth* series Anthony replied with the following:

You say later Xanths suggest that women are sexual objects who need males to rescue them? Have you read *Zombie Lover* or *Xone of Contention* and seen Breanna of the Black Wave's attitude? What about *Swell Foop*? More bluntly: are you doing an honest critique here, or merely attributing things that really are not in my books? So I guess my suggestion is that you try reading some of the titles I've named here with

¹⁵⁵ Anthony, 344.

¹⁵⁶ Kristen Brennan, “Xanthmaker: Interview with Piers Anthony,” <<http://www.moongadget.com/xanth/index.html>>, 12 November 2005 [accessed 27 October 2008].

an open mind; you may find more substance there than you expect, together with a greater appreciation of women as thinking, feeling creatures than you think.¹⁵⁷

Obviously this study is not looking at the extended *Xanth* series which has nearly 30 books to its name, nor would this be possible without turning this study into one solely on Anthony.

However, *A Spell for Chameleon* certainly does not reveal the “greater appreciation of women” Anthony claims for the series at large. Instead, it reveals a series of female characters that are degraded and eventually enslaved to men in various forms. Anthony’s argument that the series should not be taken seriously is typical of patriarchal attempts to obscure sexist messages by claiming women are being humorless or should focus on the “real” issues. While this thesis is not examining the full *Xanth* series it is worth pointing out that the above criticism concerned “later Xanths,” instead of the earlier books such as *A Spell for Chameleon*.

Perhaps more so than any other book examined in this thesis, *A Spell for Chameleon* directly associates its witches with a patriarchal worldview. Witchcraft and magic are an everyday part of life, so there is no single figure of the witch that stands out in the book since every female human is a witch. Patriarchy is celebrated and women who attempt to step outside its bounds like the Sorceress Iris are controlled. Women who accept the order lose their freedom as in the case of Chameleon. Given the publication date in 1977, the *Xanth* novels appear as a backlash to the radical feminist movement that thrived earlier in the decade.

¹⁵⁷ Slashdot, “Piers Anthony Unbound,” <<http://interviews.slashdot.org/article.pl?sid=02/07/14/1854209&mode=nocomment&tid=99>>, 15 July 2002 [accessed 27 October 2008].

The Wiccan-Fantasy Synthesis

Beyond Starhawk and Zsuzsanna Budapest there were few authors in the United States that had a large impact on the Wiccan community during the 1980s. One of those few was Marion Zimmer Bradley whose book *The Mists of Avalon* (published in 1983) described the spiritual conquest of the ancient Goddess religion in Britain by hostile Christian forces. The novel was a huge success holding a spot on the New York Times best seller list for four months and winning the 1984 Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel. Ronald Hutton describes *The Mists of Avalon* as “the most significant book” on feminist witchcraft in the 1980s that wasn’t published by Starhawk or Budapest.¹⁵⁸ Given its large impact in the popular market the novel is also one of the most significant books of fantasy literature.

The Mists of Avalon shares the themes and vision of Wiccan practitioners like Starhawk but places them in an Arthurian context. Unlike previous incarnations of the legend, Bradley provides a radical feminist perspective revealing the women’s side of the story while maintaining much of the original plot. However, Bradley’s Britain is initially one under the sway of a matriarchal Goddess religion centered on the holy isle of Avalon. Sarah M. Pike has pointed out the similarity between Bradley’s Avalon and Margaret Murray’s argument for an Old Religion in Britain eventually suppressed by Christianity. In addition, Bradley has acknowledged the influence of Merlin Stone on *The Mists of Avalon* and her own knowledge of the Neo-Pagan movement.

¹⁵⁸ Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 355. And Jonquil Wolfson, “Arthur Through Women’s Eyes: The Mists of Avalon,” <http://www.space.com/sciencefiction/marion_zimmer_bradley_avalon_991022.html>, 22 October 1999 [accessed 03 October 2008].

It should be noted that Bradley claims to be a Gnostic Catholic with no Neo-Pagan association beyond a shared feminist interest in women's spirituality. In fact, Bradley's view of Neo-Paganism is somewhat condescending as a "viable alternative for people, especially for women, who have been turned off by the abuses of Judeo-Christian organized religions" but that misses the point "that Spirit is One and that they are, in worshipping the Goddess, worshipping the Divine by whatever name."¹⁵⁹ Many polytheistic Neo-Pagans and Wiccans would ardently disagree with Bradley's assertion that they are missing the big picture.

In many ways, *The Mists of Avalon* is less about the Arthurian legends than it is about the clash between a matriarchal Goddess religion and patriarchal Christianity. The result is a prevailing conflict between priestesses of the Old Religion (also referred to as sorceresses or witches) and patriarchal Christian priests who have recently attained power.¹⁶⁰ In between these two extremes are the male Druids who seek a compromise between these two competing factions with little success but are none the less depicted as the wisest of all.

The figure of the witch-priestess is largely portrayed throughout *The Mists of Avalon* by Morgaine and in the first section by her mother Igraine. These two women

¹⁵⁹ Sarah M. Pike, *New Age And Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 125. And Marion Zimmer Bradley, "Thoughts On Avalon," <<http://mzbworks.home.att.net/thoughts.htm>>, 1986 [accessed 04 October 2008]. It is unclear if Bradley's Gnostic Catholic church is the same as that associated with Aleister Crowley's Ordo Templi Orientis and so a part of the British occult tradition or if this is a separate Gnostic group.

¹⁶⁰ At one point in the book Morgaine distinguishes herself from a witch but it is later revealed that she possesses the same knowledge and abilities she attributes to witchcraft. See Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (New York: Random House, 1982), 306 & 443. The average person in the book does not appear to share this distinction, nor do any other major characters. Given the close ties to Neo-Paganism it is likely that this represents the conflict within the Wiccan community as to whether the word "witch" should be championed in homage to those persecuted under the term or abandoned as overly charged with negative meaning.

have intimate ties to the hidden isle of Avalon where the Old Religion continues to be practiced under the Lady of the Lake. At Avalon women are taught to read and write, gain confidence in their ability, and assume a position of equality with the male Druids who also occupy the isle intermittently. The priestesses of Avalon have so much power over the Celtic tribes still in Britain that each new king must be tested by them and proven to be of the royal blood of Avalon. Bradley wrote that part of “the purpose of the book was to express my dismay at the way in which religion lets itself become the slave of politics and the state.”¹⁶¹ The ensuing power struggle between Avalon and the emerging Christian forces for control of Arthur’s loyalty reflects this goal.

Bradley describes several rituals and spells during the course of the novel that have much in common with Wiccan practice. Near the beginning of the book, Igraine casts a spell to summon the Sight that is reminiscent of Wiccan scrying techniques.¹⁶² Igraine performs the ritual naked (called skyclad in Wiccan), which was emphasized by Gerald Gardner as important for raising magical power. Similarities with Starhawk include an emphasis on scrying through a mirror or water (in this case combined) and overcoming a fear of failure.¹⁶³ Bradley has taken the core elements of scrying from Wiccan sources and added literary flourishes.

This process is most vividly seen in Bradley’s descriptions of the Great Rite ritual. In the Great Rite, Morgaine takes on the role of the Goddess in the anointment of a new “King Stag” by offering up her virginity to Arthur who has temporarily become the

¹⁶¹ Bradley, “Thoughts on Avalon,” [accessed 04 October 2008].

¹⁶² Scrying is a form of divination magic most commonly associated with seeing the future in a crystal ball.

¹⁶³ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 83. Also see Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1979), 179.

Horned One (Pan). Although the Great Rite is often passed over by Wiccans or turned into a purely symbolic act, Dianic Wiccans have outlined a modern example. Budapest offered a ritual through which the Great Rite could be done in a group of women culminating in lovemaking between all the participants similar to the male/female joining of Bradley's Great Rite. It should be noted though that in a somewhat comical admission Budapest had never actually tried such a ritual since her coven was still "too hung up" by contemporary condemnation of free love.¹⁶⁴

While most Wiccans only symbolically perform the Great Rite its actual expression was promoted in a supposedly non-fictional piece *Heather: Confessions of a Witch* (1975) recorded by Hans Holzer. Regardless of the story's authenticity, much of the information about Witchcraft practices was factual. In this case the Great Rite is only practiced on Beltane (May Eve) and involves each male/female pair in the coven to join sexually, although in the case of an uneven gender distribution only the high priestess and high priest actually perform the ritual. This is similar to how Bradley has the people of the old tribes pair up to celebrate Beltane while the priestesses of Avalon symbolize the Goddess. The anonymous "Heather" argues that the Great Rite is "a spring fertility ritual and these people were merely expressing symbolically that nature had been reborn and that life was starting over again."¹⁶⁵ There is nothing sinister in these sexual practices because they are sacred to the Goddess.

Sexuality in general receives a reevaluation as the sexual freedom of witches condemned by demonologists is celebrated in *The Mists of Avalon* as a natural part of

¹⁶⁴ Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1980), 120.

¹⁶⁵ Hans Holzer, *Heather: Confessions of a Witch* (New York: Pocket Books, 1975), 167.

life. Morgaine has sexual relations with five men throughout the novel including two blood relations. Although three of these partnerships result in dissatisfaction, the reasons have to do with their lack of commitment or guilt from Christian ideas instead of a condemnation of promiscuity. Morgaine is a liberated woman who views sex as a sacred rite in celebration of life and her Goddess.

The strong willed and independent witch-priestesses of Avalon are in contrast with the submissive Gwenhwyfar and the Christian priests that guide her. These characters promote patriarchal authority and the supposed sinfulness of women resulting from Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden. When Morgaine and Arthur (who are brother and sister) first realize they have made love in the Great Rite they are filled with self-loathing because of the Christian doctrine they were taught as children. According to Morgaine this shouldn't be the case since the two "are not brother and sister here, we are man and woman before the Goddess, no more."¹⁶⁶ It seems doubtful that most Wiccans or radical feminists would condone incest even under these circumstances. However, the point is that sex is not something to be ashamed of but celebrated, which both Wiccans and radical feminists would wholeheartedly agree with.

As with *Lolly Willowes* and *The Witches of Karres*, the priestess-witches of Avalon have a deep connection with the natural world. One example of this is how the lead character is known as Morgaine of the Fairies, who are the elusive people that continue the Old Religion in the forests and are driven away by the sound of church bells. Gerald Gardner devoted two full chapters of *Witchcraft Today* to Wiccan's links with the

¹⁶⁶ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 181. On original sin see 268.

“little people.” These pixies (Gardner believed there was some connection with the Pictish peoples) eventually bred with larger people in the countryside to become the original pagans and heathens who held to the Old Religion long after Christianity came to dominate urban Britain.¹⁶⁷ Bradley has taken a page out of Wiccan revisionist history with her “little folk.”

As the Queen of the Fairies late in the novel, Morgaine becomes the priestess who performs rituals such as the Great Rite in honor of the natural cycle. She relearns how to judge the movements of the seasons and stars while becoming acquainted with the power of some standing stones. At each full moon she joins with her lover Accolon in the Great Rite, coming together “in that solemn joining which swept away the individual and made us only Goddess and God, affirming the endless life of the cosmos, the flow of power between male and female as between earth and sky.”¹⁶⁸ As in the Wiccan holidays which mark the turning of the seasons, Bradley’s witch-priestess observes natural changes in the world.

In *The Mists of Avalon*, the representation of witches is firmly associated with the Wiccan figure. As with radical feminism, patriarchal Christianity becomes the oppressive force disempowering women and spreading guilt through the doctrine of original sin that must be challenged. Although Morgaine reaches a sort of truce with Christianity in the conclusion, it is only because the Goddess continues her presence in disguise: “That is the Goddess... And I know it, and even if they think otherwise, these women know the power of the Immortal. Exile her as they may, she will prevail. The

¹⁶⁷ Gerald Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (New York: Citadel Press, 1954), 56-81.

¹⁶⁸ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 590.

Goddess will never withdraw herself from mankind.”¹⁶⁹ This could be read as having a sort of revolutionary flavor that the Goddess will eventually return to remove patriarchy and Christian misconception; a sentiment that many radical feminists in the women’s spirituality movement would find appealing. Bradley’s figure of the witch-priestess is the truest expression of a radical feminist Wiccan witch to be found in a fantasy work.

¹⁶⁹ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 875.

CHAPTER IV

As shown in chapter 1, aspiring fantasists found fertile ground in the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien for a fantasy renaissance. Tolkien had already established a new market for his brand of fantasy that included the traditional impossible as “fact” mechanism along with the new emphasis on magic-users and creation of alternate worlds. Fantasists writing from 1968 to 1983 were able to take advantage of Tolkien’s market to establish a new literary genre. As this genre expanded it gained greater significance in American popular culture through related media like film and role-playing games.

In chapter 2, the arrival of Wiccan in the United States and its subsequent merging with the radical feminist movement was outlined. Wiccan had already done away with the early modern figure of the witch replacing it with a positive figure with historical ties to matriarchal societies and an inclusive role for women. Radicals who entered the Wiccan faith introduced feminist thought by addressing women’s issues and pushing the focus toward the Goddess. By the early 1980s the figure of the witch had become strongly associated with both the Wiccan faith and radical feminist thought outside of mainstream American culture.

Chapter 3 focused on how the Wiccan and radical feminist figure of the witch was expressed or rejected in fantasy literature and by extension in American popular culture. There were some authors who promoted a backlash against radical feminism in their books as seen in *A Spell for Chameleon*. As noted below, fantasy media also had a strong strain of misogynist attitude among the fantasy role-playing community. Whether this

was part of larger belief among readers of fantasy literature is hard to ascertain since no data from the time period appears to exist and role-players constituted a small minority out of the fantasy readership. Other fantasy authors may have echoed the misogyny found in *A Spell for Chameleon* and some role-playing groups.

However, among those authors who did approach the topic of witchcraft the majority adopted a radical feminist and Wiccan message. Le Guin and Bradley provided powerful feminist priestess-witches fighting against patriarchal orders in a fantasy setting. Although Beagle's witch was more typically early modern his book was obviously satirical. The science-fantasists Schmitz and Norton who preceded fantasy literature both presage radical feminism, albeit with some caveats in the latter's case.

The new witch of fantasy literature had little in common with the figure depicted by early modern demonologists. Gone were the Wicked Witch of the West and White Witch who mirrored many aspects of the early modern but divorced the witch from overt Christian diabolism. By the 1970s witchcraft was increasingly associated with women's liberation, sexual freedom, and environmental concern. As the new witches of fantasy literature were radically feminized they also took on many traits first expressed by Wiccans.

The culmination of all these trends was *The Mists of Avalon*, which was overt with its radical feminism while relying on Wiccan ideas about faith and matriarchal history. Given the book's tremendous commercial success, American popular culture was prepared to accept a new feminized version of witchcraft by 1983. Efforts by earlier fantasists, particularly Le Guin, contributed to this reshaping of the witch from 1963 to

1983. During that time the representation of witches changed from a sinister or comical caricature into a radical feminist and Wiccan figure. These changes weren't universal but had enough of a lasting impact to alter American conceptions about the figure of the witch. By 1983, the traditional figure of the witch was not fully supplanted but could be challenged in a popular context.

By the late 1970s, this feminization of witches and of fantasy literature in general was no longer going unnoticed in popular culture. Writing in April 1978 pioneering feminist Betty Friedan observed these changes in an article for *The Washington Post*. She argued that, "Today, the image of women in popular culture reflects more accurately the various realities of women moving—and the reactions against that movement—because many more women are involved in creating these images."¹⁷⁰ This was certainly true in fantasy literature where authors like Andre Alice Norton, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Marion Zimmer Bradley all contributed to the shifts in popular culture towards a radical feminist perspective.

Writing about both science-fiction and fantasy literature in *The New York Times* in May 1982, Susan Schwartz observed that so many women had entered the two genres by the 1960s that women were able to do away with masculine pseudonyms such as Andre Norton had done and openly use their own first names. This mirrors Le Guin's concern that the loss of a name also reflected a loss of identity and empowerment. Indeed Schwartz continued, "the women infiltrating these genres transformed them" from

¹⁷⁰ Betty Friedan, "The Old Images Can Still Be Seen But the Media Increasingly Reflect the Various Realities of Women," *Washington Post*, April 20, 1978, VA19

rigidly patriarchal ones into areas open to feminist thought.¹⁷¹ Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this article is the positive portrayal of feminist fiction, with Schwartz lamenting the sexist cover art accompanying much fantasy and science-fiction. As seen below, this would be a major problem with fantasy role-playing games as well.

Feminism's growing connection with fantasy literature was made explicit in other areas. A February 1984 article in *The New York Times* lists the magazine *Aurora* as a leading publication for fantasy literature where new authors could make a name for themselves. The author notes, "Aurora (which specializes in feminist s.f./fantasy)."¹⁷² Another example of this specialization was *Analog* (also mentioned in the article), which focused on "hard" science-fiction dealing with technology. In other words, *Aurora* was not an attempt to isolate feminist writers but recognition that their brand of fantasy and science-fiction had become well-established. Marion Zimmer Bradley contributed to this effort by editing a series of popular *Sword and Sorceress* anthologies (started in 1984) that focused on bringing feminist protagonists into the previously hypermasculine "sword & sorcery" subgenre.

The acceptance and popularity of feminist witches in fantasy literature reveals a growing acceptance of radical feminist and Wiccan thought in popular culture. Much of this was likely attributable to the rise of cultural feminism upon the successes of radical feminism. As Echols notes, the apparent decline of the feminist movement in the late 1970s was largely due to its success: "If younger women see feminism as irrelevant, it is partly because the movement has managed to change the world, especially for those

¹⁷¹ Susan Schwartz, "Women and Science Fiction," *New York Times*, May 2, 1982, BR11.

¹⁷² R.W., "Future Stock," *New York Times*, February 5, 1984, BR27.

white middle-class women who have traditionally made up the bulk of its ranks.”¹⁷³ By joining with Wiccans to recreate the figure of the witch, radicals were able to promote a feminist message with enough appeal that this new figure eventually spread to the popular culture through fantasy literature.

Ironically, around the time this trend started to gain recognition and attain some success, a major backlash against the feminist movement was taking form in American popular culture. This negative reaction to feminism’s progress was first detailed by Susan Faludi in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991). Faludi observed that this backlash had historical precedent and that every time women made or were perceived to have made “progress” a corresponding backlash occurred. This has already been shown in this thesis with the backlash against New Women and suffragists following the Second World War. Faludi charts the most recent backlash as beginning on the fringes of popular culture in the late 1970s before moving into politics with the election of Ronald Reagan and into the mainstream in the mid-1980s.

According to Faludi, the particular form of this backlash was a form of doublespeak in which feminist “progress” was painted as women’s loss. She describes it as such:

This counterassault is largely insidious: in a kind of pop-culture version of the Big Lie, it stands the truth boldly on its head and proclaims that the very steps that have elevated women’s position have

¹⁷³ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 293.

actually led to their downfall... women's "liberation" was the true contemporary American scourge—the source of an endless laundry list of personal, social, and economic problems.¹⁷⁴

Faludi concludes that the cause of this backlash is not that women have actually achieved great progress but that being on the verge of such success American society launched a "preemptive strike" on the women's movement. This attack on feminism was expressed vividly through various pop-culture avenues that portrayed men in a "hypermasculine dreamland" and women as "teenage angels and unwed *witches*." [Italics mine]¹⁷⁵

It is likely no accident that during the 1980s the Wiccan community suffered a similar backlash as the same "evangelical right" attacking feminism also attempted to revive the early modern relation between witchcraft and Satanism. As noted above, there is no evidence for such a connection and little even for the existence of Satanic cults. Although Faludi does not address Wiccan in *Backlash* she subconsciously draws a link between the two noting that, "New Right politicians condemn women's independence, antiabortion protesters firebomb women's clinics, fundamentalist preachers damn feminists as 'whores' and 'witches.'"¹⁷⁶

The figure of the witch undoubtedly suffered from these sexist attitudes alongside the feminist movement and Wiccan faith. However, the continued impact of a novel like *The Mists of Avalon*, published in 1983 after the backlash was already in full swing, must have thwarted this to some extent. The radical feminist witch was too firmly entrenched by the 1980s to be relegated to the past and as the Wiccan faith prospered in the next two

¹⁷⁴ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991), xviii.

¹⁷⁵ Faludi, 138 & 140.

¹⁷⁶ Faludi, xxi.

decades it has only become more appealing to a wider audience. Feminist witches may have adopted more cultural traits in the decades to come but as in the feminist movement they can thank their radical predecessors for securing their place in popular culture.

Future Research

Fantasy role-playing games (FRPGs) were one of the first forms of media used by the fantasy genre beyond literary expression. The first FRPG was the tabletop game *Dungeons & Dragons* released in 1974 by Tactical Studies Rules, Inc. A tabletop FRPG is one in which a group of players gather together, presumably around a table, to act out an adventure following a set of rules in which the success or failure of actions is determined by the roll of dice. *Dungeons & Dragons* proved a success and was quickly followed by other FRPG tabletop games such as *Tunnels & Trolls* (1975) and *RuneQuest* (1978). FRPGs soon moved into digital worlds created with computers that provided a visual depiction of an alternate world while allowing the player to explore this virtual space. This type of FRPG was popularized in games like *Ultima: The First Age of Darkness* (1980) and *Wizardry: Proving Ground of the Mad Overlord* (1981).

On paper many of these FRPGs seemed to offer an equalizing opportunity for women and men to act out any role they liked without facing a restriction because of their sex. For instance, in *Dungeons & Dragons* female and male characters may take on any “class” of character (warrior, mage, etc.) and develop that class without any limitations imposed because of gender. A female warrior may become as powerful as a male one, while a female mage may learn all the same spells that can be learned by a male mage.

Romantic actions were similarly open as a player could freely act as heterosexual, lesbian, or asexual depending on their preference.

Most role-playing games were also cooperatively based: all the players work together toward a common goal. This differs from many other types of games that are competitively based either having all the players striving against each other or teams competing for a mutual goal only attainable by one side. Success does not come from vanquishing fellow players but by rising through an “experience point system” to meet ever greater challenges.¹⁷⁷ A player benefits from having their fellow players rise through the same system so that they can better help in meeting these future obstacles. The exception to this would be the “Dungeon Master” (DM) or arbiter of the game who decides what difficulties will challenge the other players. However, the DM doesn’t directly compete with the other players and if they do their job correctly the other players should ultimately succeed. It would stand to reason that games with such a cooperative basis would be attractive to activists in the feminist movement who relied on cooperative action to accomplish their goals.

However, players brought their preconceived biases and gender roles to the table, as did the games’ creators. Artwork found in rule books and advertising depicted women as underdressed sex objects with singularly bulging chests. Female warriors often wore revealing armor that would have been useless in actual combat while female magic-users looked more like nymphs than wizards. Male players already accustomed to such ideas from American culture accepted them in their alternate worlds by relegating female

¹⁷⁷ Ian Livingstone, *Dicing with Dragons: An Introduction to Role-Playing Games* (New York: New American Library, 1983), 6.

characters to subservient positions. As Kevin Schut observes about *Dungeons & Dragons*:

This tendency to treat women as poster-girls is particularly interesting in light of the supposedly interchangeable nature of gender in the *D&D* rules: whether male or female, the character is statistically the same. Yet, the functional empowerment of women is undercut by the swimsuit-model artwork that appeals to masculine sexual fantasy. As in so many other digital games and gaming culture in general, women can join the show as long as they do not interrupt rough masculine fantasies of sex and power... a woman is allowed to kick some ass as long as she herself has a nice one.¹⁷⁸

The feminist opportunities in the FRPGs of the 1970s and early 1980s were undermined by the sexist artwork associated with the games.

By relying on a Freudian psychoanalysis, Michelle Nephew has argued that “drawing on fantasy tropes, pseudo-historical background, and the work of biased writers like H.P. Lovecraft, role-playing games in this way disempower women either by masculinizing them or by positioning them in the roles of devalued and extraneous non-player characters (NPCs) who are manipulated by the GM [Dungeon Master].”¹⁷⁹ This assessment is reinforced with observations by the sociologist Gary Alan Fine who noted that women’s low levels of participation were partly due to structural issues in some games. In particular his observations of masculine hostility toward a feminine presence, with some players going so far as to role-play rape, indicate that during the time period of this thesis women were unwelcome in the FRPG community.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Kevin Schut, “Desktop Conquistadors: Negotiating American Manhood in the Digital Fantasy Role-Playing Game,” ed. J. Patrick Williams (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006), 112.

¹⁷⁹ Michelle Nephew, “Playing with Identity: Unconscious Desire and Role-Playing Games,” ed. J. Patrick Williams (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006), 132.

¹⁸⁰ Gary Alan Fine, *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 62-71.

Although unrelated to role-playing, an interesting side note uncovered while researching this thesis was the game *Custer's Revenge* (1983) in which the player attempted “to cross a stream in order to rape a naked Indian woman tied to a tree.”¹⁸¹ The developers reportedly claimed the whole program was “a joke.” This would seem to indicate a high level of misogynistic attitudes within the gaming community at large if other such examples could be found.

Potential links with occult groups like the Ordo Templi Orientis, or Neo-Pagan faiths like Asatru, might prove beneficial to explore in connection with male magic-users in these games. These groups have generally been considered more masculine-inclined, or even misogynistic, by the wider Neo-Pagan community. They may reveal a shared attitude toward women with the role-playing community of the 1980s along similar lines as the impact of radical feminist Wiccan on fantasy literature.

Feminism's impact on fantasy role-playing games and computer games seem to be an uncertain topic then. On one side were the games' open-ended approach that allowed men and women to act on a level playing field. On the other side was the strongly anti-feminist artwork and games produced by many publishers, and the players who brought misogynistic attitudes to the table. Role-playing games of the time seem to largely represent the backlash against feminism prevalent in the 1980s and it would be interesting to see if these trends continued or if a similar infusion of feminist thought eventually reshaped them as happened with fantasy literature. Witches and other magic-users are a common link between fantasy role-playing games and radical feminist Wiccan

¹⁸¹ Ellen Goodman, “The 1983 Equal Rites Awards,” *Washington Post*, August 25, 1983, A21.

just as they were for fantasy literature. This would be an excellent area for a feminist analysis and to the author's knowledge no historian has yet published a history on the topic.

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