

T.C.  
İstanbul Üniversitesi  
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü  
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Anabilim Dalı  
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bilim Dalı

Doktora Tezi

The Herbalist-Healer-Midwife-Witch  
in Contemporary English Novel

Buket Akgün

2502040008

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Esra Melikoğlu

İstanbul, 10 Haziran 2011



T.C.  
İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ  
MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ



### TEZ ONAYI

Enstitümüz **İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI BİLİM** Dalında ders dönemindeki Eğitim - Öğretim Programını başarı ile tamamlayan 2502040008 numaralı **BUKET AKGÜN**'ün hazırladığı "**THE HERBALIST-HEALER-MIDWIFE-WITCH IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH NOVEL**" konulu **YÜKSEK LİSANS / DOKTORA TEZİ** ile ilgili **TEZ SAVUNMA SINAVI** Lisansüstü Öğretim Yönetmeliği'nin 35.Maddesi uyarınca **10.06.2011 CUMA** günü saat:18.30'da yapılan sorulan sorulara alınan cevaplar sonunda adayın tezinin **Kabulü**ne (1) **GYERELİĞİ** **TOYÇUKLUĞUYLA** karar verilmiştir.

JÜRİ ÜYESİ	KANAATI(*)	İMZA
PROF.DR.ESRA MELİKOĞLU	Kabul	
PROF.DR.AYŞE DİLEK ERBORA	Kabul	
DOÇ.DR.MURAT SEÇKİN	Kabul	
DOÇ.DR.ALEV BULUT	Kabul	
YRD.DOÇ.DR.ÖZLEM ÖGÖT	Kabul	

## ÖZ

Bu tez, Atwood'un **The Robber Bride**'ındaki (1993) Zenia ile Karen/Charis ve Chevalier'nin **The Virgin Blue**'sundaki Isabelle'i (1997) erkeklerin belirlediği sosyal, fiziksel, doğa-doğa üstü ve yaşam-ölüm sınırlarını aştıkları ve bu nedenle varlıkları ataerkil toplumun otoritesine ve düzenine tehdit oluşturduğu için ezilen ve cadılıkla yargılanan pek çok ebe ve kadın şifacının edebiyattaki altsoyları olarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Cadı olarak yaftalanan böyle güçlü kadınlar feminizmde kadın kimliği ve söylemi olarak benimsenmektedir. Cadının altüst edici enerjisi yapısökücülük ve yapıbozumculuk yoluyla edebiyata ve postmodern söyleme akmaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın Giriş bölümü cadıların tarih, edebiyat ve edebiyat kuramındaki erkeklerin belirlediği ikili karşıtlıkları altüst etmesine ayrılmıştır. Birinci Bölüm Atwood'un **The Robber Bride**'ında Zenia'yı, arkadaşları Karen/Charis, Tony ve Roz'u kocalarının/partnerlerinin cinsel, fiziksel ve ekonomik sömürüsü ve eziyetinden kurtarıp, kadın dayanışmasıyla yaralarını iyileştirebilmelerine yardım eden özgürleştirici bir güç olarak betimlemektedir. İkinci Bölüm, iyileştirme/öldürme güçlerini anneannesinden miras alan, arkadaşlarının Zenia'nın başlattığı özgürleşme sürecini atlatmalarına yardımcı olan ve sonunda Zenia'yı özgürleştiren Karen/Charis üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Üçüncü Bölümde Chevalier'nin **The Virgin Blue**'sunda Isabelle'in yaşamı politik ve dini değişimlerin yansıması olarak tartışılmaktadır; Isabelle herbalist-şifacı-ebe olması yüzünden damgalanır ve eziyet çeker. Sonuç bölümünde, tıpkı cadılar gibi, feminist kuramcılarının ve edebiyat yazarlarının bu metafiziksel ikili karşıtlıkları altüst etmeleri ve kendi söylemlerini kurmaları vurgulanmaktadır.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at scrutinizing Zenia and Karen/Charis in Atwood's **The Robber Bride** (1993) and Isabelle in Chevalier's **The Virgin Blue** (1997) as the literary descendants of the many midwives and women healers persecuted and brought to trial for witchcraft because they crossed the male-set social, physical, natural-supernatural and life-death boundaries and hence their existence posed a threat to the authority and order of patriarchal society. In feminism such powerful women labelled as witches are adopted as a female identity and discourse. The subversive energy of the witch flows into literature and postmodern discourse by means of deconstruction and disruption.

The Introduction of the present study is devoted to the witches' disruption of male-set dichotomies in history, literature and literary theory. Chapter 1 portrays Zenia as a liberating force, saving her friends Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz from their husbands/partners' sexual, physical and financial exploitation and oppression, and helping them heal their wounds through female solidarity in Atwood's **The Robber Bride**. Chapter 2 focuses on Karen/Charis who, having inherited her healing/killing power from her grandmother, helps her friends survive the liberation process initiated by Zenia and eventually liberates Zenia herself. In Chapter 3 Isabelle's life, in Chevalier's **The Virgin Blue**, is discussed as an echo of the political and religious changes; she is stigmatised and tortured for being a herbalist-healer-midwife. In conclusion it is emphasised that just as witches, so feminist theorists and fiction writers disrupt these metaphysical dichotomies and establish their own discourse.

## FOREWORD

The objective of this study is to illustrate that Zenia and Karen/Charis in Atwood's **The Robber Bride** (1993) and Isabelle in Chevalier's **The Virgin Blue** (1997) are the literary descendants of the many midwives and women healers persecuted and brought to trial for witchcraft because, having control over life and death, they crossed the male-set social, physical, natural-supernatural and life-death boundaries and hence their existence posed a threat to the authority and order of patriarchal society. In feminism such powerful women labelled as witches are adopted as a female identity and discourse. The subversive energy of the witch flows into literature and postmodern discourse by means of deconstruction and disruption.

I would like to thank Professor Ayşe Dilek Erboru and Associate Professor Murat Seçkin for their kind interest in my studies and encouraging support. My indebted thanks to Professor Esra Melikoğlu for her benefic guidance and bewitching knowledge.

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction.....	1
1. Zenia as a Liberating Force and Herbalist-Healer-Witch.....	17
2. Karen/Charis as a Herbalist-Healer-Witch.....	41
3. Isabelle as a Herbalist-Healer-Midwife-Witch.....	63
Conclusion.....	86
Bibliography.....	90
Curriculum Vitae.....	104

## INTRODUCTION

**Yo non creo en brujarías, pero que las hay, las hay!**<sup>1</sup>

Hélène Cixous urges the “witch” women to return “from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond ‘culture’”.<sup>2</sup> In the 1970s, with the post-feminist emphasis on difference rather than equality, witches, the very emblems of women’s alterity, found their ways (back) into feminist literature and theory. Justyna Sempruch notes that the witch is “a privileged term for *herstorical* narratives.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, witches point to both the past and future: the forgotten origin of women in nature and the substitution of a collapsing and exhausted patriarchal culture with an alternative mode of existence. Barbara G. Walker emphasises the transformation from wise-woman into the witch and “from a sacred symbol of regeneration into a vessel of poison”.<sup>4</sup> From radical feminism onwards this transformation has been reversed as it is the wise-woman and the sacred cauldron that will regenerate culture. Luce Irigaray states that:

What we need is a general cultural mutation . . . Patriarchal culture is a culture founded on sacrifice, crime, war. [. . .] The people of men need others, who are persons in the full sense of the word, [des personnes à part entière] who will allow them to understand themselves and to find their limits. Only women can play this role. Women do not belong to patriarchal culture as genuinely responsible subjects. (*Sexes et parentés*, pp. 200-201; *Le Temps de la difference*, pp. 23-4)<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A Spanish saying. “I don’t believe in witchcraft, but they [witches] exist, they exist.”

<sup>2</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 1975, trans. Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4 (Summer 1976): p. 877.

<sup>3</sup> Justyna Sempruch, *Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature*, Indiana, Purdue University Press, 2008, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara G. Walker, *The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom and Power*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1985, p. 122.

<sup>5</sup> Luce Irigaray, qtd. in Introduction, *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, p. 11.

It is women who deconstruct an ailing patriarchal culture and possess generative powers through which they can heal it that are needed, that is, witches, in Diane Purkiss's words, "This 'feminine,' designating a restorative theory/fantasy beyond the signifiers of paternity and fecundity".<sup>6</sup> It is in particular the herbalist-healer-witch, previously demonised "as an evil crone who impersonates the mother, kidnaps and devours children",<sup>7</sup> who is reclaimed as the regenerative archaic mother and the feminist "heroine of the 1980s and 1990s, professional women who have beautiful country gardens, bake their own bread, make their own quilts and demonstrate sexuality at every turn."<sup>8</sup> The novels scrutinised in this dissertation, Margaret Atwood's **The Robber Bride** and Tracy Chevalier's **The Virgin Blue** present such herbalist-healer-witch characters that both disrupt patriarchal discourse and traditions and point the way to a better world. The two novels were written in the 1990s, which suggests that the process of reclaiming the witch and empowerment of women continues. Atwood's Zenia and Karen/Charis and Chevalier's Isabelle, literary descendants of witches, find themselves in a patriarchal world exploiting them financially, emotionally and sexually and/or curtailing their productivity and creativity. Ultimately, the patriarchy strives to monopolise the generative power, depriving the female of their claims on fertility and creativity.<sup>9</sup> The herbalist-healer-witches were rooted in the pagan cult of the Mother Earth/Goddess,<sup>10</sup> and inherited her control over life and death, rebirth and immortality and had the power to give and take life--a power attributed to God and his representatives on earth, the monarchs. In other words, the herbalist-healer-witch emerges as a reflection of the ambivalence and duality of nature, for she draws on the "Archetypal Feminine [who] is not only a

---

<sup>6</sup> Sempruch, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Diane Purkiss, **The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations**, London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2003, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Luce Irigaray, "The bodily encounter with the mother," trans. David Macey, **The Irigaray Reader**, ed. Margaret Whitford, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> M. A. Murray, "The Witch Cult in Palæolithic Times," **Man** 22 (Jan. 1922): p. 3. Murray traces the origins of the witch-cult to the Neolithic time and asserts that the drawings on cave walls relate witches with nature and fertility. It should be noted that the Neolithic age, referred to as the matriarchal golden age, was the age of the Mother Goddess. See Riane Eisler, "Messages from the Past: The World of the Goddess," **This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment**, 2nd ed., ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, New York, Routledge, 2004, pp. 449-461. Erich Neumann, **The Great Mother**, trans. Ralph Manheim, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963. Joseph Campbell, **The Masks of**

giver and protector of life but, as container, also holds fast and takes back . . . [who] is the goddess of life and death at once”<sup>11</sup> and has control over life and death. Ecofeminists, such as Carolyn Merchant, a professor of history of science, Maria Mies, a professor of sociology, and Starhawk (Miriam Simos), a Californian feminist writer trained by Gardnerians, adopted and revived the argument of Margaret A. Murray, a historian, claiming that “witchcraft was an ancient matrifocal religion” and “the women whom demonologists persecuted as witches were (according to this theory) practitioners of ancient fertility cults aiming to propitiate birth and reproduction”.<sup>12</sup> Eric Neumann states that “the patriarchal world strives to deny its dark and ‘lowly’ lineage . . . its own descent from the Dark Mother”<sup>13</sup>; therefore, as far as the patriarchal society was concerned, Victor Ferkiss writes that “the female sex, identified with the Earth Goddess, must be looked down upon, and kept under control lest man be dragged down to Earth with it.”<sup>14</sup> The male not only denied her, her generative powers but, anxiety-ridden before the duality of fluid, transgressive women and nature, imposed upon them a phallogocentric culture. The hierarchical structure of Western culture is built on the post-Cartesian dichotomies such as man-woman, father-mother, culture-nature, consciousness-unconsciousness and mind-body. Whereas the patriarchy represents civilisation and culture, witches represent nature and the attributes rooted in the earth. The herbalist-healer-witch thus turns upside down the nature-civilisation dichotomy, thereby re-introducing an invigorating state of chaos and hybridity into obsolescent culture.

Purkiss underlines the fact that even the very definition of the witch--thanks to its “extraordinary flexibility . . . as a signifier within all feminist discourse”<sup>15</sup>--disrupts the above-mentioned male-set dichotomies. Candace Savage defines the witch as “a negative space around which we give form to our selves.”<sup>16</sup> Heinrich

---

**God: Primitive Mythology**, London, Penguin Compass, 1991. Joseph Campbell, **The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology**, London, Penguin Compass, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Neumann, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Silvia Federici, **Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation**, Brooklyn, Autonomedia, 2004, p. 180.

<sup>13</sup> Neumann, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Ferkiss, **Nature, Technology, and Society: Cultural Roots of the Current Environmental Crisis**, New York, New York University Press, 1983, pp. 180-181.

<sup>15</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Candace Savage, Preface, **Witch: The Wild Ride from Wicked to Wicca**, Vancouver, Greystone Books, 2001, p. xiii.

Kramer and James Sprenger's claim in **Malleus Maleficarum** that women are deviant, cunning and twisted, referring to the etymology of the word "feminine"; **femina** is derived from the words "fe" and "minus",<sup>17</sup> which suggest deficiency. Purkiss says that:

terms like 'witch' and 'witchcraft' were not single or fixed, but highly unstable terms . . . figured in, and was refigured in, the discursive self-definitions of both absolutism and antityranny, both Puritanism and Counter-Reformation Catholicism, both colonialism and resistance to colonialism. It could be appropriated by patriarchy, profeminism, medicine, sceptical rationalism and radical religion. In villages and towns, witchcraft could become a central signifier in debates about power, employment, norms, values, property rights and land ownership.<sup>18</sup>

When women refashion an identity, a discourse and a world of their own by using the devalued ends of the male-set binary oppositions, such as irrationality, chaos and fragmentation, the male ruling elite persecutes women and tries to silence the feminine discourse, on the grounds that it is deficient of reason, order and unity. Just as witches, so feminist theorists disrupt the metaphysical, male-set dichotomies and establish their own system/order. Toril Moi explains that:

many French feminists reject labels and names, and 'isms' in particular . . . because they see such labelling activity as betraying a phallogocentric drive to stabilize, organize and rationalize our conceptual universe. They argue that it is masculine rationality that has always privileged reason, order, unity and lucidity, and that it has done so by silencing and excluding the

---

<sup>17</sup> Heinrich Kramer, James Sprenger, **Malleus Maleficarum, Or, The Hammer of Witches**, 1486, trans. Montague Summers, n.p., Forgotten Books, 2008, pp. 83-84. **Malleus Maleficarum**, meaning "The Hammer of Witches" in Latin, and written in 1486 by Heinrich Kramer, James Sprenger. It was published with the approval of Pope Innocent VIII and the bull of 1484, **Summis desiderantes affectibus** (Desiring with supreme ardour), as preface, with papal authorisation and support for the Inquisition. **Malleus Maleficarum** is one of the most famous medieval treatises on witches. Actually, Teofilo Ruiz mentions in his lectures that by the beginning of the sixteenth century both Protestants and Catholics, armed with the **Malleus Maleficarum**, went to the countryside and into the cities and began to identify and bring witches to trial. It is one of the main reasons why women, especially healer midwives, were mostly accused of being witches. Teofilo F. Ruiz, **Terror of History: Mystics, Heretics, and Witches in the Western Tradition**, The Teaching Company, The Great Courses Series, University of California, Los Angeles, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Purkiss, **op. cit.**, p. 93.

irrationality, chaos and fragmentation that has come to represent femininity.<sup>19</sup>

Women adopt the male discourse's depiction of the female as bent/bending, cunning, deviant and create a feminine discourse which, through challenging and revising the symbolic order, deconstructs the male discourse and disrupts the male-set binary oppositions. Cixous, for instance, tries to describe the female essence in deconstructive terms, in that she deconstructs the patriarchal logic by rejecting the Aristotelian logic that claims what is A cannot be B at the same time. Irigaray also argues that the feminine serves as the "specularization", the negative reflection of the masculine in Freudian theory and Western philosophical discourse. As far as Irigaray is concerned, women, "repeating/interpreting the way in which, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject, they should signify that with respect to this logic a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side."<sup>20</sup> Irigaray regards woman as reinvigorating chaos: "Indefinite, unfinished/in-finite, *form is never complete in her*. . . . This incompleteness of her form, of her morphology, allows her to become something else at any moment".<sup>21</sup> It is this fluidity of woman which threatens men "with distortion, propagation, evaporation, burning up [*consumation*], flowing away, in an other difficult to grasp"<sup>22</sup> and which women embrace as a means of imploding the patriarchal order: "isn't there a fluidity . . . that could shake this social order?"<sup>23</sup> asks Irigaray, which reminds us of the dualities contained by the image of the witch's cauldron, representing both womb and tomb, life and death, as an attempt to create a new world, discourse and language--"her language in which 'she' goes off in all directions leaving 'him' unable to discern the coherence of any meaning."<sup>24</sup> As

---

<sup>19</sup> Toril Moi, **Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory**, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 159-160.

<sup>20</sup> Luce Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," **The Sex Which Is Not One**, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Ithaca, Cornell University, 1985, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Volume Without Contours," trans. David Macey, **The Irigaray Reader**, ed. Margaret Whitford, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 64.

<sup>23</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order," trans. David Macey, **The Irigaray Reader**, ed. Margaret Whitford, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," **The Sex Which Is Not One**, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Ithaca, Cornell University, 1985, p. 29.

herbalist-healer-witches use cauldrons to boil the herbs and flowers to prepare herbal medicine, ointments and potions, the witches also owned a large cauldron apart from the familiars and brooms mentioned above. The image of the witch boiling dissected animal and insect parts, rare herbs and roots in a large cauldron sitting on an open fire is--like flying, backwards dancing and chanting--yet another metaphor for language. The cauldron itself is reminiscent of a vessel, the womb and hence represents a new world.<sup>25</sup> It represents fluidity, the umbilical water of the womb, and a new world without contours. Portraying woman as mana figure, Neumann writes that she “is the caldron of incarnation, birth and rebirth. And that is why the magical caldron or pot is always in the hand of the female mana figure, the priestess or, later, the witch.”<sup>26</sup> Celtic mythology also abounds with cauldrons with supernatural powers, such as healing, regeneration and providing infinite food. Raven Grimassi notes that not only are the fire and the vessel ancient symbols of transformation but also “The full round shape of the cauldron filled with liquid was much like the pregnant belly of a woman, from whom water bursts forth and ushers in the birth of an infant.”<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Purkiss states that the cauldron “is also a womb, a space from which metaphorical and actual children are born [as seen in **Macbeth**’s cauldron scene].”<sup>28</sup> The stories of witches’ Sabbath, however, turn the cauldron image upside down by associating cauldron with death, in which “unbaptised babies were said to be boiled [in cauldrons] to make flying-ointment.”<sup>29</sup> The image of cauldron, thus, reconciles opposites such as life and death, providing and holding fast, containing and overflowing.

Cixous dwells on the fact that this language **écriture féminine** reflects the “infinite and mobile complexity” of the sexuality and body of woman, which by “sweeping away syntax, breaking that famous thread” and “smashing yokes and censors, she lets . . . articulate the profusion of meanings that run through in every

---

<sup>25</sup> See Neumann, **op. cit.**, pp. 39-54.

<sup>26</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 288.

<sup>27</sup> Raven Grimassi, **Witchcraft: A Mystery Tradition**, Woodbury, Llewellyn, 2008, pp.25- 26.

<sup>28</sup> Purkiss, **op. cit.**, p.213.

<sup>29</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 211.

direction”.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz, drawing on Irigaray and Cixous, challenges the male-defined solidity of the body arguing that:

the female body . . . as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment – not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding the witch Purkiss comments that, “[Jules] Michelet’s sorceress, who for Michelet too metaphorises uncontrollable rebellious energy, is for [Hélène] Cixous the excess of a female desire that threatens to disrupt the male order of the selfsame.”<sup>32</sup> The witch’s disruption aims at dislodging these binary oppositions established by those in power, that is, in Western culture, the ruling male elite, which associates the threatening witch with what is defined as negative and evil in official culture and thus renders her as the horrific Other. This demonisation depicts, on the one hand, the elite’s implicit acceptance of the female as an overpowering force. The witch’s power to disrupt the male-set boundaries is, thus, acknowledged. On the other hand, the male elite also attempts to deny the very power and consequent importance of the Other by defining the female in terms of lack. For example, in **Malleus Maleficarum** Kramer and Sprenger explain why witches are mostly women by quoting the Bible, the Canons and the Scriptures, as well as numerous classical authors<sup>33</sup> and claiming that women “are feebler both in mind and body” and “more

---

<sup>30</sup> Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”, p. 885.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, **Volatile Bodies**, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 203.

<sup>32</sup> Purkiss, **op. cit.**, p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> Seneca as quoted in **Malleus Maleficarum**: “When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil.” See Kramer, Sprenger, **op. cit.**, p. 82. Also see the verses “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”; “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” **Holy Bible: King James Version**, London, HarperCollins, 1957, Exod., 22.18; 1 Sam., 15.23. It should be noted that James I, who authorised the new translation, had expressed his hatred of witches in his **Dæmonologie** (1597). For this reason, in the King James’ Bible, “his translators deliberately translated *kashaph* [‘poisoner’] as ‘witch’ in order to provide clear biblical sanctions for their execution.” Jeffrey B. Russell, Brooks Alexander, Appendix, **A New History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics & Pagans**, London, Thames & Hudson, 2007, p. 33. King James I, Foreword, **Dæmonologie** [1597], ed. G.B. Harrison, San Diego, The Book Tree, 2002, p. iii.

carnal”<sup>34</sup> than men. Elaine Showalter also states that “there was a strong belief that the female body was in itself an inferior instrument, small, [and] weak”.<sup>35</sup> Referring to Eve’s, not only being defined in terms of lack but also being devious and created from Adam’s rib in the Old Testament, Kramer and Sprenger add that:

there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to man. And since through this defect, she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives.<sup>36</sup>

The etymological origin of the word “witch”, too, is associated with bending and turning aside, in other words, disrupting. Jeffrey B. Russell and Brooks Alexander assert that the etymological origin of the English word “witch” is the Indo-European root **weik**<sup>4</sup>, which means “‘bending’, whence Old English *wican*, ‘to bend’, from which the modern English ‘weak’ and ‘witch-elm’ [are derived]. Related to *wican* are Old Saxon *wikan*, Old German *wichan*, Old Norse *vikja*, all meaning ‘to bend, or turn aside’.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the derivatives of the word **weik** suggest guile, sacrifice and prediction, which remind us of the witches’ cunning, deception, sacrificing new-born babies to the Devil and previsions.

The witch’s disruption of the boundaries can be traced in her grotesque hence out-of-the-ordinary appearance and/or her shapeshifting as well. The witches were supposedly ugly and mostly old women, with warts and third nipples. They were most often portrayed in black attire, wearing a black cape and a black hat trying to blend into the night and hide their ugly figures--bent shoulders and backs or

---

<sup>34</sup> Kramer, Sprenger, **op. cit.**, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup> Elaine Showalter, **A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing**, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 76.

<sup>36</sup> Kramer, Sprenger, **op. cit.**, p. 83.

<sup>37</sup> “The ultimate origin of the English word ‘witch’ is the Indo-European root *\*weik*<sup>2</sup>, which has to do with religion and magic. *\*Weik*<sup>2</sup> produced four families of derivatives: 1. *\*wih-l*, which yielded Old English *wiggle*, ‘sorcery’, and *wiglera* ‘sorcerer’, and, through Old and Middle French, modern English ‘guile’. Also Old English *wil*, Middle and modern English ‘wile’. 2. Old Norse *\*wihl-*, ‘craftiness’. 3. *\*wik-*, ‘holy’, whence Old High German *wīhen* and German *weihen*, ‘to consecrate’, Middle High German *wīch*, ‘holy’, and Latin *victima*, ‘sacrifice’. 4. *\*wikk-*, ‘magic, sorcery’, whence Middle German *wikken*, ‘to predict’, and Old English *wicca*, *wicce*, ‘witch’, and *wiccian*, ‘to work sorcery, bewitch’. From *wicca* derives Middle English *witche* and modern ‘witch’.” Russell, Alexander, Appendix, **op. cit.**, p. 199.

hunchbacks, crooked hands, fingers and noses. Not to mention that the colour black was associated with the Devil himself and death. The crooked noses, hands and fingers, bent figures and misshapen hoods and/or hats of the wicked stepmother disguised as a witch in the fairy tales “Snow White”, the cannibal witch devouring children in “Hansel and Gretel” and the Wicked Witch of the West in Victor Fleming’s **The Wizard of Oz** are examples to how the grotesque bodies and attire of witches also point to their crossing of physical boundaries. Moreover, in his essay “Out of Kansas” Salman Rushdie notes that, in the 1939 film version of **The Wizard of Oz**, the Wicked Witch of the West departs “[i]n a puff of shapeless smoke” and Glinda the Good Witch of the North tells Dorothy “Only bad witches are ugly”.<sup>38</sup>

Powerful women have always been associated with chaos and destruction, regarded as a threat to the patriarchal authority, demonised and portrayed as witches. Sandra Gilbert M. and Susan Gubar state that “Power itself does seem to be dangerous if not fatal, for women: unsupplied with any socially acceptable channel, the independent and creative woman is dubbed crafty, a witch.”<sup>39</sup> **Malleus Maleficarum** (1486) accuses witches of renouncing the Catholic faith; making a pact with the Devil to serve him; sacrificing unbaptised new-born to the Devil; engaging in orgies and having sexual intercourse with the Devil; causing infertility by infecting the cattle, the harvest and causing impotency and miscarriages or preventing conceiving.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in his **Dæmonologie**, James I says that “Witches can, by the power of their Master [the Devil], cure or cast on diseases”.<sup>41</sup> Murray states that “a witch was often condemned even though she had invariably used her skill for good and not for evil; for healing the sick, not for casting sickness. If it were proved that she had obtained her knowledge from the ‘Devil’ she had broken the law

---

<sup>38</sup> Salman Rushdie, **Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002**, London, Vintage, 2003, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, 2nd ed., New Haven, Yale Nota Bene, 2000, p. 433.

<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that in medieval Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth century such practices, mentioned above, were described as necromancy, that is, sorcery, not witchcraft. The church dismissed such accusations of necromancy or witchcraft or consorting with the Devil because it implied that these women had power and were organized and thus undermined the power of God. Again, as mentioned above, with the publication of **Malleus Maleficarum**, and with the bull of 1484 as its preface, the church not only acknowledges the existence of witches and witchcraft but also authorises the witch hunts and trials of the Inquisition. See Michael C. Thomsett, **The Inquisition: A History**, Jefferson, McFarland, 2010, pp. 104-107.

and must die.”<sup>42</sup> A sixteenth-century French lawyer, professor of Law at Toulouse University, philosopher, historian, judge and demonologist, Jean Bodin formulated one of the first definitions of the witch at the very beginning of his **De La Demonomanie des Sorciers (The Demonomania of Witches)** first published in 1580: “a witch is one who by commerce and close confederacy with the Devil, has a deliberate and a very determined intention of attaining his own ends.”<sup>43</sup> A seventeenth-century English jurist and Member of Parliament, Sir Edward Coke defines the witch as “a person, that hath a conference with the Devill, to consult with him or to do some act.”<sup>44</sup> Both definitions of the witch stress the deliberate and determined consort with the Devil of one’s own free will rather than the deed itself.

In feminism, however, these powerful women labelled as witches are adopted as an identity and a discourse of one’s self. Feminism goes back to witches to understand the status of and to empower contemporary women. Purkiss argues that due to “feminist silence and implicit separatism, English witchcraft studies have never engaged with feminist theory or with the complexities of writing about the feminine in the past.”<sup>45</sup> Purkiss blames historians for neglecting feminist and gender theories altogether when writing about the history of women on the grounds that history uses theories of other disciplines only when they are “useful”. However, she believes that the radical feminism of the 1970s also fails at appropriating the witch and uses Mary Daly’s theory of the Burning Times and Great Hags<sup>46</sup> as examples to underline her argument that such a myth that depicts women as mere victims at the

---

<sup>41</sup> King James I, The Preface, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret A. Murray, **The Witch Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology**, Oxford, Oxford UP, 1921, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> See Jean Bodin, *De La Demonomanie des Sorciers [The Demonomania of Witches]*, Paris, *Chez Estienne Prevosteau*, 1598, pp. 8-9; 49-50. Most importantly, Bodin claimed that the crimes of the witches were against God; therefore, not secular but divine laws applied to witches. Even the Prince himself had no right to pardon a witch. Bodin believes the countries not persecuting witches shall be punished by God: “And the country which shall tolerate this will be scourged with pestilences, famines, and wars; and those which shall take vengeance on the witches will be blessed by him and will make his anger to cease.” *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Coke, **The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England: Concerning High Treason, and Other Pleas of the Crown and Criminal Causes**, 1644, London, E. and R. Brooke, 1797, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Daly does not use the terms crones, Great Hags and the Burning Times for a specific group of women oppressed and persecuted by the patriarchal society in a specific historical period; for Daly, crones “are the survivors of the perpetual witchcraze of patriarchy, the survivors of the Burning Times.” Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

hands of the patriarchy to be tortured and murdered is far from empowering women and disrupting the patriarchal discourse unless it provides a solution instead of claiming women are bound to be eternally oppressed.<sup>47</sup>

Jeffrey B. Russell and Brooks Alexander state that feminists in the 1960s “claimed that original witchcraft had been an instrument of female power and independence, that it was accessible to all women simply by virtue of being female, and that it needed to be recovered by women today in order to (re)gain their power and freedom.”<sup>48</sup> However, Russell and Alexander state that it was Z. Budapest who managed to weave together feminism, pagan traditions and Gardnerian witchcraft.<sup>49</sup> Eventually, Starhawk suggested in her book titled **The Spiral Dance** (1979) that the coven could be transformed into a learning group in which not only women but also men are welcomed and re-educated.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, a group of feminist protesters marching for women’s liberation in New York on the Halloween of 1968 signed themselves as WITCH, the Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell. Savage asserts that “The witch was chosen as a revolutionary image for women, WITCH’s Chicago coven confirmed, because witches had struggled long and hard against their patriarchal oppressors.”<sup>51</sup>

Gilbert and Gubar state that patriarchal definitions associate creative women with monsters and that “a radical misreading of patriarchal poetics frees the woman artist to imply her criticism of the literary conventions she has inherited even as it allows her to express her ambiguous relationship to a culture that has not only

---

<sup>47</sup> See Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Russell, Alexander, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-174.

<sup>49</sup> Gerald Gardner (1884-1964) is credited as the founder of modern witchcraft. Gardner claims that he accidentally encountered a surviving coven, the New Forest Coven, practising the pre-Christian Witch-cult religion, and was initiated into “wica” in 1939. First, he wrote about the religion and practises of the coven disguised as historical novels; it was not allowed to write or publish about the craft because of “witchcraft rules”. Only after the repeal of the witchcraft laws, in 1951, Gardner published his **Witchcraft Today** (1954) and **The Meaning of Witchcraft** (1959). See Russell, Alexander, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-162.

<sup>50</sup> See Starhawk (Miriam Simos), **The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess**, 1979, rev. ed., San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1988.

<sup>51</sup> Candace Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 105. Purkiss deconstructs the abbreviation WITCH: “‘Woman’ names the witch as gendered, while ‘international’ asserts the ubiquity of witches, and ‘terrorist’ Marks witches as violent. ‘Conspiracy’ deliberately first with fears of a secret organisation of subversive women, while ‘from Hell’ draws attention to the origin of witches’ otherness while pointing to women’s oppression.” Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

defined her gender but shaped her mind.”<sup>52</sup> Rushdie maintains that “just as feminism has sought to rehabilitate old pejorative words such as hag, crone, witch, so the Wicked Witch of the West [compared with Glinda the Good Witch of the North] could be said to represent the more positive of the two images of powerful womanhood on offer here [in the 1939 film version of **The Wizard of Oz**]”.<sup>53</sup> The Wicked Witch is enraged by the death of her sister and demonstrates “a commendable sense of solidarity” whereas Glinda takes pride in her beauty “and denigrates her unbeautiful sisters”.<sup>54</sup>

Zenia and Karen/Charis in Margaret Atwood’s **The Robber Bride** (1993) and Isabelle (du Moulin) Tournier in Tracy Chevalier’s **The Virgin Blue** (1997) cross the male-set boundaries, and hence their very existence poses a threat to the authority and order of patriarchal society. Zenia and Karen/Charis and Isabelle are reminiscent of the herbalist-healer-witch and the hearbalist-healer-midwife-witch respectively. They are all forced into silence, submission and obedience. They are stigmatised, abused, tortured and even buried alive as in the case of Isabelle’s daughter. In Atwood’s **The Robber Bride** Zenia is a liberating force, playing the role of the herbalist-healer-witch to her friends Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz. She liberates them from their husbands/partners’ sexual, physical and financial exploitation and oppression; encourages them to subvert the male order; and helps them bond together so that they can heal their wounds and refashion themselves through identification with Zenia and female solidarity. Seemingly the most fragile and absent-minded of all her friends, Karen/Charis is the embodiment of the herbalist-healer-witch, crossing the life-death boundary, as well. Karen/Charis inherits her healing/killing power from her grandmother, which helps her survive, if not stop, the sexual abuse of her uncle when she was a child, and focus all her healing energy on her unborn daughter after her boyfriend Billy who has been sexually and economically exploiting her leaves her. Moreover, her boss Shanita teaches Karen/Charis how to erase bad memories, control the pain and heal herself through meditation, which helps Karen/Charis have more control over her previsions

---

<sup>52</sup> Gilbert, Gubar, **op. cit.**, p. 79.

<sup>53</sup> Rushdie, **op. cit.**, p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> **Ibid.**

too. Karen/Charis plays both the healer and the killer to help her friends survive the enlightenment and empowerment process Zenia has initiated and at the same time to help Zenia return “to the Light”<sup>55</sup>, in Karen/Charis’s own words, after Zenia liberates the three women from male exploitation. Chevalier’s **The Virgin Blue** narrates the partly parallel lives of Isabelle du Moulin, who was the daughter of a peasant and a midwife in 16th-century France and Ella Turner, a descendant of Isabelle’s family and a midwife, trying to qualify to practise midwifery in contemporary France. Isabelle is only a child during the Protestant Reformation and grows up being scapegoated and persecuted for her red hair, reminiscent of Virgin Mary, and for her mother’s profession. Isabelle is also a herbalist-midwife herself, having always accompanied and helped her mother in midwifery. After she gets married, however, her husband and his family do not let her continue working because her mother has been accused of being a witch and held responsible for a series of deaths of mothers and new-born babies. On a smaller scale, Isabelle’s life echoes the economic, social, political and religious changes taking place such as the Protestant Revolution. Just as Isabelle’s mother and daughter are, so Isabelle herself is stigmatised and relentlessly tortured, physically and sexually abused by her husband since her childhood for crossing the physical, religious and life-death boundaries, respectively for having red hair and for helping women with birth and abortion.

Atwood’s Zenia and Karen/Charis and Chevalier’s Isabelle are the literary descendants of the many persecuted, the midwives and women healers, brought to trial for witchcraft. Adrienne Rich states that:

Eighty-five percent of the many millions executed as witches were women. They were charged with an imaginative variety of crimes, from causing a man’s genitals to disappear to bringing about the death of a neighbor’s cow; but wisewomen, healers, and midwives were especially singled out by the witch-hunters.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Margaret Atwood, **The Robber Bride**, New York, Nan A. Talese-Doubleday, 1993, p. 447.

<sup>56</sup> Adrienne Rich, **Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution**, London, Virago, 1977, p. 135.

Claudia Swan says that “herb women were among the more prominent denizens of the woods and forests – the uncharted or unruly landscapes – of Europe at the time and were often accused of witchcraft.”<sup>57</sup> Most of these women were old widows who lived at the outskirts of town and had very little income. They possessed the knowledge of the herbal lore and engaged in herbal medical practices. In the late medieval and early modern Europe the high rate of mortality of babies at birth or in early babyhood were blamed on the midwives who were accused of killing the babies as a sacrifice to the Devil.<sup>58</sup> One of the social changes that occurred in this period was the rise of modern medicine. Johannes Kepler explains that the knowledge and practices of the herbalist-healer-midwives were an inversion of contemporary scientific methods of studying nature.<sup>59</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English emphasise the distinction between the medieval healer-witch and the medical man saying that the witch was an empiricist who relied on her senses and used trial and error and cause and effect to draw conclusions; “She trusted her ability to find new ways to deal with disease, pregnancy and childbirth—whether through medication or charms.”<sup>60</sup> Regardless, these herbalist-healers “were regularly acknowledged in academic botanical publications of the time.”<sup>61</sup> Another reason for demonising the herbalist-healer-midwife was the new capitalist class rising on the subjugation of women, as Mies notes; “The case of the professionalization of male doctors who drove out and denounced women healers and midwives as witches is the best documentation of this onslaught on female productive activity.”<sup>62</sup> Ehrenreich and English express that “For the new, male medical profession, the ban on midwives meant one less source of competition. Women had been routed from their last foothold as independent practitioners.”<sup>63</sup> Mies also emphasises that:

---

<sup>57</sup> Claudia Swan, **Art, Science and Witchcraft in Modern Holland: Jacques de Gheyn II (1565-1629)**, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 199.

<sup>58</sup> See Ruiz, **op. cit.**

<sup>59</sup> Johannes Kepler, **Kepler’s Somnium: The Dream, or Posthumous Work on Lunar Astronomy**, 1630, trans., Edward Rosen, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1967.

<sup>60</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, Deirdre English, **Witches, Midwives, & Nurses: A History of Women Healers**, 1973, 2nd ed, New York, Feminist Press, 2010, p. 48.

<sup>61</sup> Swan, **op. cit.**, p. 199.

<sup>62</sup> Maria Mies, **Patriarchy & Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour**, 1986, New York, Zed, 1998, p. 70.

<sup>63</sup> Ehrenreich, English, **op. cit.**, p. 87. See Rich, **op. cit.**, pp. 141-142.

the attack of church and state against the witches was aimed . . . against their practises as abortionists and midwives. . . . Not only were women artisans pushed out of their jobs and their property confiscated by the city authorities, the state and the church, but women's control over the production of new life – that is their decision to give birth to a child or to abort – had to be smashed.<sup>64</sup>

It should be underlined that women's "aspiration" to godlike power over life and death had to be crushed. According to **Malleus Maleficarum** the witch midwives "surpass all others in wickedness" and "No one does more harm to the Catholic Faith than midwives."<sup>65</sup> Besides obstructing the generative powers of the male, causing impotency, preventing conceiving or causing miscarriage, the witch midwives are also accused of devouring the new-born babies or sacrificing them to the Devil.<sup>66</sup> While **Malleus Maleficarum** condemns the use of contraceptives such as potions and herbs as homicide, it declares that the witch midwives preventing women from conceiving or giving birth by witchcraft are to be punished by the extreme penalty, that is, death.<sup>67</sup> Contraception was an important issue in the reproductive rights, the suffragette movement and women's liberation. Reproductive rights in the middle of 1970s and the publication of the pamphlet of Ehrenreich and English titled **Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers** in 1972 stress the fact that the herbalist-healer-midwife-witches were persecuted mainly because of their knowledge and (self-)control over the female body and reproduction, that is, life and death. The middle-class women's movement, especially the left wing, strived for birth control, addressing the issues of ostracism of single mothers, the social causes of prostitution and sexual double standards. Around 1910 the second wave of feminism played a crucial role in birth control as well as women's suffrage. In the late 1960s and the 1970s the new women's movement demanded the right for abortion and free access to contraception as well as equality in the work place. The "Pill" meant "a comprehensive awareness of one's own bodily functions and

---

<sup>64</sup> Mies, **op. cit.**, p. 70.

<sup>65</sup> Kramer, Sprenger, **op. cit.**, pp. 79, 112.

<sup>66</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 111.

<sup>67</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 94.

processes” and “the ability to plan and control one’s own reproductive capacity”.<sup>68</sup> While George Drysdale “suggested that contraception presented ‘the only cure’ to the three evils of poverty, prostitution and celibacy”, Annie Besant, like many other Neo-Malthusians such as Alice Vickery, Florence Dixie and Jane Clapperton, “claimed that the birth rate was ‘a woman’s question’” and argued for contraception “in terms of allowing a woman a fuller life—that being a wife and mother does not ‘absorb the whole of the best part of her life’.”<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Robert Jütte, **Contraception: A History**, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008, p. 161.

<sup>69</sup> Lucy Bland, **Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality**, London, Tauris Parke, 2001, p. 205.

## CHAPTER 1

### ZENIA AS A LIBERATING FORCE AND HERBALIST-HEALER-WITCH

A rattlesnake that doesn't bite teaches you nothing.<sup>1</sup>

Margaret Atwood's **The Robber Bride** can be read as a crypto witch novel. Almost all the major female characters, namely Zenia, Karen/Charis, Tony, Roz and Shanita have characteristics that associate them with the witches. They all cross the male-set physical and social boundaries, mainly the boundaries between the male-female, nature-civilisation and natural-supernatural. As Sempruch says, "in the process of constructing a 'universal' feminist story, personal fears, hatred and solidarity are evoked on purpose".<sup>2</sup> Zenia as a liberating force and herbalist-healer-witch figure in the novel upsets the male-set order; enlightens her three old friends from the university, Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz; encourages them to subvert the male order; saves them from their husbands/partners' sexual, physical and financial exploitation and oppression; brings them together so that they can heal their wounds and refashion themselves through identification with Zenia herself and female solidarity, for the "healer-witch is someone to turn to as well as an image of how to be."<sup>3</sup>

The title of the novel is inspired by the fairy tale "The Robber Bridegroom", which is one of the fairy tales Roz and Tony read to Roz's twin daughters, Erin and Paula, in the novel. "The Robber Bridegroom" is the story of a robber who tricks

---

<sup>1</sup> Jessamyn West. Zenia is the rattlesnake that bites but at the same time teaches Karen/Charis, Tony, and Roz female solidarity and makes them aware of their strengths and wisdom. Zenia is a disrupter of male-set dichotomies and a woman of dualities, just as the poison of the snake can be both medicinal and deadly.

<sup>2</sup> Sempruch, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

young maidens with marriage proposals, pretending to be rich, and then, with the help of his crew, cuts into pieces, boils in a kettle of water and eats them. Upon arriving at the den of the Robber Bridegroom, the young maiden in the fairy tale is warned to escape from this murderer's house first by a caged bird and then by an old lady in the cellar. Escaping from the robbers with the help of the old woman, the young maiden tells her father the whole story. The Robber Bridegroom comes on the wedding day and asks the young maiden to tell a story like everyone else at the table. Only when she is asked to tell a story, does the young maiden start to tell her story claiming it is but a dream. At the end of her story, the robbers are caught, tried and executed.

Sharon Rose Wilson states that:

In the Grimm's 'The Robber Bridegroom,' disruptive female speech depends upon paternal and patriarchal absence or permission . . . Symbolically, like the caged bird, the old woman in the cellar becomes the voice of the girl's subconscious: the old woman is able to offer warnings and help only insofar as the robbers do not know about them.<sup>4</sup>

It is the absence of fathers or grandfathers in Atwood's novel then that allows room for disruptive female speech. The only present patriarchal authorities are Karen/Charis's rapist uncle and the three women's financially and/or sexually abusive husbands/partners who treat them as domestic slaves since "The modern individual family" as Frederick Engels writes "is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman"<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, Zenia plays the role of the Robber Bride, stealing away the husbands/partners of her friends to save them from male exploitation and oppression and to make room for disruptive female identity and discourse. Thanks to Zenia's encouraging and empowering influence on the three women and her creating a female solidarity, thanks to the healing/killing gift

---

<sup>4</sup> Sharon Rose Wilson, *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1993, p. 203.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Chippendale, Resistance Books, 2004, p. 80.

Karen/Charis inherits from her grandmother and uses to help herself and her friends, they heal and rebuild themselves after subverting the male order.

As it is a habit of Roz's twin daughters to change every fictional character into a female, they make Tony change "The Robber Bridegroom" to "The Robber Bride": "The Robber Bride, lurking in her mansion in the dark forest, preying upon the innocent, enticing youths to their doom in her evil cauldron. Like Zenia."<sup>6</sup> Even the way they dress up their Barbie dolls in bridal dresses and throw them over the stair railings or drown them in the bathtub to re-enact the death of the Robber Bride at the end of the fairy tale foreshadows the death of Zenia at the end of the novel by falling from the balcony of her hotel room into a pond. Regarding fairy tales, Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber argue that "a female character who acts as her own agent becomes the hated witch, condemned to die."<sup>7</sup> After the rewriting/retelling of the twins, the fairy tales abound with literary witches and violence, and mostly end with a character getting boiled in a cauldron. They also want one of the pigs to be boiled in the cauldron instead of the wolf because it was the pigs that were stupid in the "Three Little Pigs", which actually represents the story of Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz. The twins' rewriting of the fairy tale underlines the fact that the wolf (Zenia) only helps the pigs (Karen/Charis Tony and Roz) to see their mistakes and liberate themselves from the male oppression. The twin's favourite is "Mary Poppins", yet another witch-like literary character who crosses the natural-supernatural boundary by flying on an umbrella instead of a broomstick, performing spells and singing backwards.

To subvert phallogocentrism, the phallus-oriented patriarchal discourse and order, is according to Linda Alcoff, "to be that which cannot be pinned down or subjugated within a dichotomous hierarchy."<sup>8</sup> Zenia and Shanita, Karen/Charis's boss at the shop called the Radiance, are the very definition of the witch that the feminist theory strives to formulate:

---

<sup>6</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

<sup>7</sup> Jerilyn Fisher, Ellen S. Silber, "Fairy Tales, Feminist Theory, and the Lives of Women and Girls", *Analyzing the Different Voice: Feminist Psychological Theory and Literary Texts*, ed. Jerilyn Fisher, Ellen S. Silber, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998, p. 74.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13.3 (Spring, 1988): p. 417.

“the witch” as a trace of cultural un/belonging, of bodily margins “invested with power and danger” (as referred to by Douglas); a trace that is constantly present and absent in such Western figures as the Judeo-Christian Lilith, Eve, and Jezebel, and the Virgin Mary, or Mary of Magdelene.<sup>9</sup>

Just as Julia Kristeva sees in woman “something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies”,<sup>10</sup> so Jacques Derrida argues that “Perhaps woman – a non-identity, non-figure, a simulacrum – is distance’s very chasm, the out-distancing of distance, the interval’s cadence, distance itself.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Zenia and Shanita, who might as well be read as doubles as suggested by their rhyming names, cannot be culturally or physically defined. Not only do they present several narratives regarding their lineage and nationality but also their physical appearance constantly changes. Smart, practical, strong, beautiful and psychic, Shanita cannot be labelled, categorised and contained. She defies the physical and social boundaries. Physically she cannot be put into words; she is neither this nor that and hence is very much like Zenia. She looks over forty but she never tells her age. Instead, she says she is two thousand in her mind. Karen/Charis thinks that Shanita is probably tracing her age back to her female ancestors, which recalls Mother Earth, also associated with herbalist-healer-witches.

As a liberating force in the novel, Zenia crosses the social, sexual, physical and life-death boundaries. Both intrigued and intimidated by Zenia’s ambiguity, Tony thinks that “Zenia was a bad business, and should be left alone”<sup>12</sup> but she “is also a puzzle, a knot”.<sup>13</sup> According to Roz, Zenia is an example to women who “haven’t let themselves be molded into male fantasies”<sup>14</sup> but studied and used those male fantasies to their advantage. Zenia transforms herself through starvation,

---

<sup>9</sup> Sempruch, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Woman Can Never Be Defined,” 1974, *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, eds. Elaine Marks, Isabelle de Courtivron, Sussex, Harvester Press, 1981, p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spurs*, trans. Barbara Harlow, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

surgery and hairstyles. Her perfume is “dense and murky, sullen and ominous”<sup>15</sup> and smells like “scorched earth”,<sup>16</sup> reminiscent of the burning of the witches and foreshadowing her imminent death and cremation at the end of the novel. Purkiss notes that fire “affirm[s] the sexuality of the female body; being burned is a metaphor for a caress that accepts the body’s responsiveness, and pain a symbol of passion.”<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, when Zenia returns after her so-called death, cremation and staged funeral, she looks fatter and has larger breasts, thus a more voluptuous body whereas when Zenia finds Karen/Charis and claims to have cancer, she looks like a witch with her shoulders hunching inwards protectively, the corners of her mouth drooping downwards and her claw-like fingers. Linda C. Hulst too confirms this ambiguous form of the witch, emphasising that “Underneath [the seductive beauty] lurks the grotesque body of the crone with her implications of social disorder [and] formlessness”<sup>18</sup> and adds that “the fear of the witch’s formlessness and fluidity also manifested itself in the notions of the hardness and dryness of her body”<sup>19</sup> like Zenia looks when she tells Karen/Charis that she has cancer. Zenia’s black hair, porcelain skin, penetrating gaze and rebellious nature resemble Michelet’s portrayal of the witch who has “the beauty of Our Lady of Sorrows; her eye deep-set, tragic, and restless, her hair a dark untamable torrent, falling round her shoulders wildly like writhing snakes.”<sup>20</sup> Alongside witches, Zenia too is compared to part-human and non-human creatures, such as banshees, weasels, wolves, vampires, dragons, phoenixes, supernatural entities and forces of nature just like the herbalist-healer-witch “was persecuted as the embodiment of the ‘wild side’ of nature, of all that in nature seemed disorderly, uncontrollable”.<sup>21</sup> Tony has a mental image of Zenia with “bared incisors and outstretched talons and banshee hair”.<sup>22</sup> Zenia is like a poltergeist that needs to be exorcised; Roz believes she still lurks in her office building, that

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Linda C. Hulst, *The Witch as Muse: Art, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Europe*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Jules Michelet, *The Sorceress: Satanism and Witchcraft*, 1939, trans. Alfred Richard Allinson, np., Forgotten Books, 2008, p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> Federici, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>22</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

“tiny fragments of her burnt and broken soul infest the old woodwork like termites, gnawing away from within.”<sup>23</sup> The analogy is impossible to be missed of course. Zenia is ever-present within the consciousness of the three women, consuming them from within until they learn a lesson from their encounters with Zenia. The chapter titled “Weasel Nights”, which is based on Charis’s acquaintance with Zenia, further associates Zenia with darkness and death. Charis’s grandmother tells her that weasels kill for the pleasure of it; they do not eat the chicken but bite them in the neck and suck their blood, which also recalls vampires. Similarly, when Tony says they have forgotten something after Zenia’s staged funeral, Roz asks if what they have forgotten is “a stake through the heart”<sup>24</sup> of Zenia, again resembling Zenia to a vampire as well as alluding to the possibility of her returning from the dead. Furthermore, just like Zenia is when she appears in Charis’s yoga class, weasels are so thin that they can pass through the smallest crack. Her resemblances with weasels also associate Zenia with the cunning hero(ine) figure, for the word weasel means “a cunning sneaky person” and “to evade an obligation”, reminiscent of Zenia’s evading the male-imposed social responsibilities in her university college years and after, and “to be ambiguous”.<sup>25</sup>

According to the records, Zenia was never born. Her name is fabricated like all versions of her self-narrative. Tony tries to trace the meaning of the name Zenia to no avail:

*Xenia*, a Russian word for hospitable, a Greek one pertaining to the action of a foreign pollen upon a fruit; *Zenaida*, meaning daughter of Zeus, and the name of two early Christian martyrs; *Zillah*, Hebrew, a shadow; *Zenobia*, the third-century warrior queen of Palmyra in Syria, defeated by the Emperor Aurelian; *Xeno*, Greek, a stranger, as in xenophobic; *Zenana*, Hindu, the women’s quarters or harem; *Zen*, a Japanese meditational religion; *Zendic*, an Eastern practitioner of heretical magic . . .<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 95.

<sup>24</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> “Weasel,” *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*, Random House, Inc., 21 Apr. 2009, <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/weasel>>.

<sup>26</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 457.

The numerous meanings of her very name not only render Zenia as the Other but also point to her being culturally non-definable. Just as her mother provides Zenia with different stories about her father, so Zenia tells the three women different stories about her family and past. Zenia tells Charis that her mother was a Roumanian gypsy and her father was a Finn, and they were both communists before the war but his father was killed in the Winter War by the Russians and her mother was stoned to death during the war. Some villagers, who believed Zenia's mother had the evil eye and was hexing their cows, stoned and clubbed her to death because they did not want to waste their bullets. Zenia says that her mother was also a clairvoyant and knew what would happen to her; therefore, she sent Zenia to a friend in another village to protect her because it was believed that such powers as evil eye and clairvoyance ran in the family. Jean-Michel Sallmann explains that the magic of the people was:

practiced by illiterate women of humble extraction, healers and prostitutes. Their knowledge was passed on orally from mother to daughter or from neighbour to neighbour. . . . Theirs was the knowledge traditionally attributed to women. Inevitably they also became soothsayers, learned how to ward off the evil eye, and were naturally suspected of casting spells.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly Federici says that “Historically, the witch was the village midwife, medic, soothsayer or sorceress” and the typical healer’s “tools were natural oils and powders as well as devices apt to cure and protect by ‘sympathy’ or ‘contact’”,<sup>28</sup> which reminds us of Zenia’s liberating and healing her friends through identification with her (sympathy) and female solidarity (contact). Then, Zenia tells Tony that her mother was a White Russian who first went to Poland and then to Paris, where Zenia grew up eating garbage and cats. Her mother claimed to be a Russian countess. She had no skills and could not get a job; so, in order not to starve to death, she started prostituting herself and Zenia, recalling the healers, prostitutes and soothsayers, who,

---

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Michel Sallmann, “Witch,” **A History of Women in the West: III. Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes**, eds. Natalie Zemon Davis, Arlette Farge, Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 456.

Sallmann says, inherit magic from their mothers or neighbours. It should be noted that prostitution was supposedly a part of the witches' Sabbath; the witches were believed to have sexual intercourse with Satan and their familiars as well as orgies. Her mother started to make Zenia have sex when she was eleven or twelve. As far as her father is concerned, Zenia was provided with three different stories but the same photograph for all three men in the different stories by his mother. So, she guesses her mother might have been raped by some soldiers or had a German lover and that is why she makes up those stories about Zenia's father--a minor Greek royalty, a general in the Polish cavalry and an Englishman of good family. Then, Zenia tells a completely different story to Roz, in which Roz's father helps Zenia and her aunt escape from Berlin. According to the Nuremberg laws, Zenia's mother, although she was a Catholic, was classified as a *mischling*, a mixture, because two of her four grandparents were Jewish. Zenia's father was treated as a Jew because he was married to one. Zenia claims to have her nose and breasts done. The first because she was ashamed of what had been done to her and her family in Berlin, the latter because she was working as a stripper. One common element in all the stories Zenia fabricates is that in all of them she is the Other, crossing the national, religious and sexual boundaries and therefore being persecuted for posing a threat to the patriarchal order by transgressing its clear-cut boundaries.

Just as the "witch is linked with . . . the disruption of language, [and] with forbidden words", so Zenia used a lot of slang and curse words when they were in the university and when she lives with Charis and Billy, Zenia "creates a circle . . . of language, with Zenia and Charis on the inside of it and Billy on the outside"<sup>29</sup> by speaking of Billy in the third person even when he is present in the room. The language Zenia creates is akin to Irigaray's "idea of a specific woman's language which she calls 'le parler femme' or 'womanspeak'" and which "emerges spontaneously when women speak together but disappears again as soon as men are present."<sup>30</sup> More importantly, Zenia, by referring to Billy in the third person even when he is in the room, is making it possible for womanspeak to exist in male

---

<sup>28</sup> Federici, *op.cit.*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>29</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>30</sup> Moi, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

presence as well. Reading the Tarot cards is yet another means of subversive language. Both Zenia and Shanita, Karen/Charis's boss, can read Tarot cards. After the pendulum she gave to Karen/Charis gives a warning and foretells a message to be conveyed, Shanita decides to see what is to come in the Tarot cards, which confirm the pendulum's warning. It should be noted that the pendulum also points to the ambiguity of Zenia. On the day the three women will see Zenia at the Toxique, Karen/Charis's quartz pendulum, which she uses to learn whether it will be a good day or not, swings drawing an ellipse instead of moving round and round or back and forth, respectively meaning yes and no. According to Shanita, it is a warning of something sudden and unexpected: "Maybe . . . some entity, trying to get a message through"<sup>31</sup>, heralding Zenia's return from her staged death to shed some light on the lives of the three women. The Tower confirms the suddenness of the encounter and the Priestess confirms that something that was hidden so far will be revealed. The Knight of Swords, similarly, is a messenger. The Empress represents a strong woman, whom Karen/Charis thinks could be Shanita but is actually none other than Zenia. Death stands for a change, possibly a renewal. Lastly, the Moon means illusion, which echoes one of the epigraphs at the beginning of the novel. It is suggested in the novel that Zenia does away with Tony's "willed illusion of comfort and stability."<sup>32</sup> Zenia creates illusions of her own such as her self-narratives; only to make these women realise the illusions they live. Karen/Charis's reading the Bible is very much alike her reading the Tarot cards. When they see Zenia at the Toxique several years after they attended her funeral, Karen/Charis comes home, randomly opens a page and picks a verse. It is about Jezebel, the embodiment of sexual transgression in the Bible, being thrown from the tower and being eaten by dogs.

Richard Dunn asserts that the ruling elite in patriarchal societies "had a desperate need for scapegoats, among them witches, to meliorate the impact of social disasters for which they had no remedy: poverty, disease, crime, famine, plague, wartime carnage, and revolutionary upheaval".<sup>33</sup> Zenia is scapegoated her many historical ancestors who were accused of witchcraft for anything that went wrong,

---

<sup>31</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

from natural calamities to governmental issues, because the patriarchy needed scapegoats to blame for that which they could not prevent. However, “the witch is not solely or simply the creation of patriarchy. . . . women also invested heavily in the figure as a fantasy which allowed them to express and manage otherwise unspeakable fears and desires”.<sup>34</sup> Zenia’s seeming return from the dead, on October 23, 1990, Tuesday, is marked by worldwide social unrest and the very beginning of global warming, and for that reason, sets the best possible example to the impact of social disasters Dunn lists. To start with, the sun moves into Scorpio, regarding which Kevin Burk avers that “The sun in Scorpio . . . is motivated to explore what is hidden, dark, and forgotten” and “involves the death of the ego, which enables us to merge with another individual on a fundamental, emotional, and spiritual level.”<sup>35</sup> Zenia, too, was hidden, dark and forgotten until she seemingly returns from the dead and initiates a process of female identification and solidarity, which is marked by the sun moving into Scorpio. October 23 marks the date of many rebellions, battles, wars, and seizures in history. All goes wrong, starting with the destruction of the geographical boundaries: “[t]he Soviet bloc is crumbling, the old maps are dissolving, the Eastern tribes are on the move across the shifting borders.”<sup>36</sup> Not to mention the trouble in the Gulf, the global warming and the crashing real estate market, all of which is because Zenia has returned. Similarly, Llewellyn Barstow draws attention to the connection between the witch charges and loss of wealth and property: “hapless peasants, discovering no matter how hard they worked they ended up with less, blamed their poverty on the witchery of neighbours”.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Zenia, whose seeming return from the dead upsets the patriarchal order, is depicted as the harbinger of chaos and death.

Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz are informed of Zenia’s so-called death by her lawyer. After praising the good qualities of Zenia, her courage being on the top of the list, the lawyer explains that she was blown up in a terrorist attack in Lebanon, Beirut

---

<sup>33</sup> Richard S. Dunn, **The Age of Religious Wars: 1559-1715**, 2nd ed., New York: W.W. Norton, 1979, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Purkiss, **op. cit.**, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Kevin Burk, **Astrology: Understanding the Birth Chart**, St. Paul, Llewellyn Worldwide, 2001, p. 99.

<sup>36</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 4.

and that she was not the target but an innocent bystander. Tony has a hard time believing a word of it, as “*innocent* was never Zenia’s favourite adjective for herself, and bystanding was not her typical activity,”<sup>38</sup> pointing to Zenia’s disruptive nature and reminding us of the definition of the witch as “the rebel woman who talked back, argued, swore, and did not cry under torture.”<sup>39</sup> The original name of the city Beirut is the Canaanite word for “well,” which is reminiscent of the witches’ cauldron and Celtic cauldrons of rejuvenation since Zenia returns from the dead as well as the execution of many women by being thrown in a well which was afterwards filled with stones. Roz imagines Zenia as the embodiment of seven deadly sins and as “an incandescent Venus, ascending not from a seashell but from a seething cauldron”,<sup>40</sup> which combines Zenia’s transgression of both sexual and life-death boundaries, whereas Tony pictures her as “a silver and miraculous bird, rising triumphant and unscathed from the cinders of burning and plundered Europe.”<sup>41</sup> This analogy between Zenia and the phoenix depicts not only Zenia’s being supposedly cremated but also her seeming return from the dead, hence crossing the life-death boundary. Moreover, Zenia has asked her ashes to be interred under a tree in the Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Zenia’s preference suggests a return to nature and thereby rebirth although Zenia’s ashes were in a sealed canister and they were not sprinkled. It should also be noted that “Radical feminist witches *always* burn; they are never hanged.”<sup>42</sup> Thus Zenia is associated with the herbalist-healer-witches with the cauldron analogies while her so-called death, staged cremation and returning from the dead are reminiscent of the alleged witches’ being burned at the stake as well as the herbalist-healer-witches’ control over life and death.

After the staged funeral, Tony suggests performing a sacrifice, shedding blood, making a sacrifice to show their gratitude that they survived Zenia’s liberation:

---

<sup>37</sup> Anne Llewellyn Barstow, **Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts, Our Legacy of Violence Against Women**, London, Pandora, 1995, p. 65.

<sup>38</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Federici, **op. cit.**, p. 184.

<sup>40</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 105.

<sup>41</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 165.

<sup>42</sup> Purkiss, **op. cit.**, p. 17.

for a thousand of years, when people died – especially powerful people, especially people who were feared – the survivors . . . slit the throats of their best horses, . . . buried slaves and favourite wives alive, . . . poured blood into the earth. It hadn't been mourning, it has been appeasement. They wanted to show their good will, however spurious, because they'd known the spirit of the dead one would be envious of them for still being alive.<sup>43</sup>

This first ritual performed by the three friends foreshadows the imminent death, or rather sacrifice of Zenia at the end of the novel. Margaret A. Murray and Carlo Ginzburg attempt at creating archaeology of such rituals going back to ancient, pre-historical societies, tries to link them with agrarian cults and all kinds of vegetation beliefs. The circle of Zenia's staged death, return from the dead and imminent death at the end of the novel associates Zenia with the Mother Earth, the giver and taker of life, who, like Zenia is supposed to die each fall and be reborn with each spring. Moreover, the apartment Zenia used to live in with West associates Zenia with the moon goddess, one of the many manifestations of Mother Earth. It is painted glossy, hard enamel black all over--the walls, the floors, the ceilings, the windows, the light fixtures, the refrigerator, the oven, the bathroom, the toilet and the sink. It is dark too because instead of electricity the apartment is lit by candles stuck in Chianti bottles. White chrysanthemums in silver juice cans are placed all over. Zenia is dressed in white and resembles the moon, surrounded by people in black in the dark, black room. Not to mention that like the tripartite moon goddess--representing virginity (Artemis), motherhood (Diana) and the Terrible Mother, darkness, death as well as wisdom (Hecate)--and the many phases of the moon, Zenia transforms herself constantly as mentioned above. Karen/Charis imagines Zenia might as well have such knowledge that would enable you to walk through the walls even:

although any such knowledge must have been acquired by her in a sinister way. Something involving chicken blood, and the eating of still-alive

---

<sup>43</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

animals. The collection of other people's toenails, pins driven in. Pain for someone.<sup>44</sup>

Obviously, Charis is referring to voodoo and to the fact that people used to bury their toenails and faeces fearing that they might be used in witchcraft. Teofilo Ruiz explains that it was believed that evil and illnesses could be transferred to other people or animals. People would cleanse themselves from all evil, illness and sins and transfer them onto an animal to be sacrificed later or onto a wax figurine representing a person. Zenia takes away not only her friends' husbands/partners but also their pain and suffering through transference and then has to die for the healing process to be complete. That each woman identifies herself with Zenia in one way or another and each one either dreams about or has visions of herself turning into Zenia points to the projection and transference of all male-inflected pain, suffering and wounds onto Zenia. Roz admits she is envious of Zenia--her looks and forwardness and that sometimes she would like to be Zenia. It is the strongest in Tony's case because she identifies Zenia with her imaginary twin sister she named Ynot (a Satanic reversal of Tony, her own name) and thereby renders Zenia her double dark. It is again Tony who is the first to invite Zenia "like a long-lost friend, "like a sister."<sup>45</sup> That is why when Tony looks at Zenia, she sees her own reflection, "herself, as she would like to be. *Tnomerf Ynot*. Herself turned inside out."<sup>46</sup> She also mistakes Zenia for her mother the night Zenia crawls into her dorm room through the window. There is also a part of Tony that admires Zenia and that wants to cheer on and encourage her, "[t]o participate in her daring, her contempt for almost everything, her rapacity, her lawlessness."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Karen/Charis regards Zenia as Karen (Charis's real name) whom she has repressed alongside her memories of being sexually abused and raped by her uncle when she was nine years old. When they see Zenia is alive, Karen/Charis asks herself what Zenia is doing on this side of the mirror. Zenia is actually none other than the combination of the three friends; accordingly, at the Toxique, Roz sees Zenia as a product of Frankenstein doctors.

---

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

Each of the three women has dreams/visions in which she becomes Zenia. Karen/Charis does not believe she is “altogether clean inside: shreds of Zenia cling to her still, like dirty spangled muslin. She sees the name *Zenia* in her head, glowing like a scratch, like lava, and draws a line through it with a thick black crayon.”<sup>48</sup> Karen/Charis complains that Zenia makes her sick of herself, most probably not only because she strongly identifies with Zenia but also because she feels guilty for scapegoating Zenia, blaming her for Billy’s leaving. Then again Karen/Charis is the one who invites Zenia after her so-called death, “risking her body, because Zenia will be searching for a new flesh dress.”<sup>49</sup> This open invitation for Zenia to take over her body underlines Karen/Charis’s strong identification with Zenia. To further illustrate this idea of identification, after seeing Zenia in *Toxique*, Karen/Charis feels like Zenia has “taken a chunk of Charis’s own body and sucked it up into herself.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, when Karen/Charis randomly opens her grandmother’s Bible, closes her eyes and pokes on the page with the pin in her hand, the verse she rests her hand on reads: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face”.<sup>51</sup> The Biblical meaning of the verse is that we can only have a limited knowledge of God; only after death can we attain complete knowledge. Likewise, Karen/Charis views death as “a learning experience . . . you learn—how to be better next time.”<sup>52</sup> However, seeing “through a glass, darkly” can also be interpreted as the incomplete narrative of Zenia. The three women learn more about her through the different narratives of each. Furthermore, seeing Zenia through a glass, just like they watch her through the mirror at *Toxique*, strengthens their identification with Zenia, who is nothing but their own image they see reflected in the glass, in the mirror. Additionally, Karen/Charis has the “unpleasant idea” that “If everyone is a part of everyone else, then she herself is a part of Zenia.”<sup>53</sup>

Zenia is the embodiment of the collage of the herbalist-healer-witch and the fantasy superwoman heroine of the 1980s and 1990s that Purkiss depicts, in that she

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>51</sup> *Holy Bible, King James Version*, Cor. 13:12.

<sup>52</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

is a professional woman working for Roz's magazine and grows her own herbs, cooks marvellous and inventive meals, makes excellent coffee thanks to her wooden coffee grinder, playing the role of the witches' cauldron, "with a handle and an enchanting pull-out drawer"<sup>54</sup> and reeks of sexuality at the same time. Zenia, like the herbalist-healer-witch, grows pots of herbs on the windowsill. Purkiss states that:

The herbalist-witch represents a fantasy of a profession which blends into rather than conflicting with the ideology of femininity constructed for and in the domestic sphere; more simply, it expresses a fantasy in which domestic skills are valued in the community as if they were professional skills.<sup>55</sup>

Zenia not only befriends Tony but also acts like a surrogate mother and hardens her off. First, Zenia changes Tony's hair and wardrobe; Tony looks like Audrey Hepburn. When all the other girls go home for the holidays, Zenia stays behind like Tony and invites her over to her apartment and cooks for her. She teaches Tony about recipes, shortcuts, wrinkles, and twists. After being refashioned by Zenia, Tony feels almost accepted, for the girls in the dormitory no longer ask her to entertain them. When Zenia goes in and out of Tony's life this time taking away with her Tony's husband West too, Roz moves in with Tony and takes care of her, that is to say, Roz takes over Zenia's role as protector and nurturer, forming a bond of female solidarity, which draws a sharp contrast with the relationship of Tony and her husband West and enables Tony to notice she is being exploited as a domestic slave. Since Tony and West first met, Tony has been the only provider in their relationship. When they went to the same university, Tony used to share her lecture notes with West and do his chores, which did not change after they got married. However, when West returns to Tony after being left by Zenia for the second time, Tony "strangely feels detached from him."<sup>56</sup>

Zenia also lifts the mist of Billy surrounding Karen/Charis's life and frees her of deadweight. "Charis believes that when you are ready to learn a thing the right

---

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.160.

<sup>55</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

teacher will appear, or rather will be sent to you.”<sup>57</sup> She admits the reason why she is not learning anything currently is because she is very busy taking care of Billy. At the Furrows Food Co-op, where Karen/Charis works voluntarily, they were helping the draft dodgers find places to stay and Karen/Charis took in Billy out of hospitality and soon realised that she was also expected to sleep with him. When Billy feels secure, he starts abusing Karen/Charis’s hospitality and treating her like a domestic slave. He is supposed to feed the chickens but it is always Karen/Charis who feeds them. Karen/Charis always prepares Billy’s breakfast. She cooks eggs and bacon for him although she herself is a vegetarian. Karen/Charis never knows whether to wake Billy up or not. Sometimes he gets mad at her for waking him up and sometimes for not waking him up. When Zenia stays with Karen/Charis, he starts having sex with Zenia and gets verbally and physically more aggressive with both Karen/Charis and Zenia. Susan Brownmillar and Andrea Dworkin suggest that “patriarchy’s continued existence” is the result of “systematic sexualised violence against women, which in turn was the result of a fear of female sexuality.”<sup>58</sup> Billy’s verbal and sexual aggression, which gets worse with Zenia’s moving in, depicts not only his fear of but also his desire to suppress the female sexuality. While having sex, Billy slaps or pinches and hurts Karen/Charis but she never mentions this to him. She feels “like a trampoline with someone jumping up and down on it”<sup>59</sup> because she cannot relax and enjoy sex for she was sexually abused by her uncle when she was a child. Like she did when her uncle was raping her, she detaches herself from her body, floats her soul to one side and re-enters her body once Billy is done. Not only do Billy and Zenia block her vision and energy but also they affect the fertility of the garden and the chicken. She is the only one working although she is pregnant. Karen/Charis also considers Billy’s butchering the chicken before he leaves with Zenia as an act of violation. After Zenia and Billy leaves, she directs all her white light, energy, to her baby, whom she believes is Karen being reborn--to the right mother this time. In other words, Zenia hardens her off just like she hardened off Tony. Zenia teaches her to be stronger and wiser, to set her priorities right. Most importantly Zenia teaches

---

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>58</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 15. See Andrea Dworkin, *Woman-Hating*, New York, Dutton, 1974.

<sup>59</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

her of female solidarity; Karen/Charis wants help from Tony and Tony calls Roz. Tony finds a lawyer for Karen/Charis to get what she inherited from her mother and grandmother, some of which her aunt and uncle claim to have used for her education. Roz helps her invest her money after she buys the house in which she lives. Karen/Charis is thereby freed from Billy's verbal, physical, sexual and financial exploitation, claims her inheritance and focuses on August(a), her daughter to be born, who represents the third-wave feminism in the novel.

When Zenia enters Roz's life, Roz is already a very successful businesswoman running her own magazine, she makes donations to charities, all of which help to the victimised women: battered Women, rape Victims, Homeless Moms, Abandoned Grannies. With her magazine **WiseWomanWorld**, Roz is trying to create a new world for the wise women, to enlighten, educate and encourage them. Accordingly, the name of Roz's magazine **WiseWomanWorld** is almost a synonym for the witches' cauldron, in that the herbalist-healer-midwife-witches used to be called wise-women in the middle ages and the witches' cauldron represents a new world as well as the vessel and the womb, which is discussed in Chapter 2. Zenia claims to have written numerous political articles under men's names as she was afraid of the reaction she might get. When Roz offers her a job at her magazine, Zenia takes on the advertising department and gradually takes over the whole magazine. Zenia starts with changing the name and contents of the magazine. Now called **Woman**, the magazine, which once used to be about the achievements of women, sexism and health care, eventually becomes all about fashion, cosmetics and relationship advice and tests. Although Roz feels like something is missing, she owns that thanks to the changes Zenia suggested they started to make a lot of money, a big amount of which Roz donates to charities for women. So, Zenia turns the **WiseWomanWorld**, that is, the witches' cauldron, into a fountain of wealth to financially support women's causes.

Zenia, then steals Roz's husband Mitch, who has been making Roz's life harder for she has subverted the male-female dichotomy and thus undermined his patriarchal authority. "Being a woman doesn't mean Roz has to tread less softly around Mitch. She has to tread more softly, she has to diminish herself, pretend she's smaller than she is, apologize for her success, because everything she does is

magnified.”<sup>60</sup> Roz’s teeth are her best features, “Only recently has she begun to think they may not always be where they are right now, namely inside her mouth.”<sup>61</sup> This reference to vaginal teeth and the male’s fear of castration emphasises that Roz turns upside down the male-female dichotomy, which positions the female as the passive and submissive recipient. **Vagina dentata** (vagina-with-teeth) represents the universal fear of the castrating female and female nonconformity. In feminist theory:

the witch (or woman’s alterity) becomes a central strategic signifier, a crucial metaphor for *herstorically* transmitted “female” values. The body contours, metaphors and parodies providing reference for these formulations are the Middle Ages and Renaissance projections of the witch either as an evil crone who impersonates the mother, kidnaps and devours children or as a powerful and dangerous seductress, the mythical *vagina dentata*.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, Zenia, who used to be the only girl at the university who spoke about sex, initiates the sexual liberation of Roz, who was brought up as a devout Catholic by her mother. Anne Llewellyn Barstow notes that “the witchcraze took place during a period when women were perceived as sexually omnivorous.”<sup>63</sup> The “language of the witch-hunt ‘produced’” women, especially women without men, like Zenia, as “more carnal and perverted by nature”<sup>64</sup> and hence more prone to seduction by Satan. Concerning the public torture of Anna Pappenheimer, a Bavarian wife, mother and beggar, in Munich, Llewellyn Barstow says that “cutting off Anna’s breasts dewomanized her, said that the most dangerous thing about this evil woman was her sexuality, that her only hope of salvation lay in becoming not a woman.”<sup>65</sup> As a woman grows older and her sexuality or motherhood is no longer in the foreground, there emerges the “problem” of old, wise women including herbalist midwives, folk healers and diviners as in the case of Zenia’s mother and Karen/Charis’s grandmother, discussed in Chapter 2. The church “ceaselessly

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>62</sup> Sempruch, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Llewellyn Barstow, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>64</sup> Federici, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>65</sup> Llewellyn Barstow, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

opposed wise women and female healers”<sup>66</sup> and was determined to diminish the social roles of women and take away the control of women over their bodies, reproduction and life and death.

Federici argues that sexual passion undermined both male authority over women and man’s capacity for self government: “A sexually active woman, then, was a public danger, a threat to the social order as she subverted a man’s sense of responsibility, and his capacity for work and self-control.” Therefore, “female sexuality had to be exorcised . . . by means of torture, death by fire, as well as the meticulous interrogations,” which Federici calls “sexual exorcism and psychological rape.”<sup>67</sup>

Mitch, however, is not afraid of asserting his masculinity and sexuality; he has series of affairs and expects Roz to rescue him from each one and deal with the “other” woman when he gets bored and moves on to another affair. If Roz does not put him and some of his lawyer friends on the board of directors of her businesses, he sabotages Roz’s business. As far as Roz’s friends are concerned, he thinks Tony is a weirdo and Karen/Charis is a nut. He calls Roz’s friends at work “a bunch of man-hating hairy-legged whip-toting feminists” and has even tried to tell them how to be “good feminists”, which does not stop him from trying to have an affair with one of them, of course, only to fail miserably. Mitch’s bashing of Roz’s feminist colleagues echoes the male-oriented media’s bashing of the second-wave feminists labelling them as deliberately unattractive man-haters and the argument of the radical and early feminists that “sex is the basis of women’s oppression at work as work is the basis of proletariat’s oppression”.<sup>68</sup> Finally, Mitch has an affair with Zenia and leaves Roz. Nevertheless, when he is found drowned after Zenia leaves him, Roz blames herself for his death, or rather his suicide as she believes. She believes she failed as a wife by not standing by her man, not letting Mitch back in her life after Zenia left him. The feeling of guilt leads Roz to attempt suicide taking a handful of sleeping pills with whiskey. She is found and saved by her son Larry and nursed by Karen/Charis and Tony, which completes the circle of female solidarity among the

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>67</sup> Federici, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>68</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 27n3.

three friends. Zenia shows the three women, entrapped by the male-set male-female dichotomies and imposed on submissive roles, that they “are not lacks, voids awaiting sustenance, plenitude, fulfillment from the other.”<sup>69</sup>

The regular lunch dates of Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz, originally started for solidarity after the staged funeral of Zenia, are reminiscent of the witches’ Sabbath. The witches’ Sabbath is yet another example to the way the witches turn the conventions of the patriarchal order and civilisation upside down, by crossing physical and sexual boundaries as well as the natural-supernatural and human-animal boundaries. Meeting again at the funeral of Zenia, many years after graduation, the three college friends decide upon meeting once a month for lunch; “over time they’ve developed a loyalty to one another, an *esprit de corps*.”<sup>70</sup> “[T]hey’ve continued to meet regularly, like war widows or aging vets, or the wives of those missing in action. As with such groups, there are more present around the table than can be accounted for.”<sup>71</sup> Zenia is present too although they do not talk about her any more. “As Charis says, talking about her might hold her on this earth.”<sup>72</sup> They start “whispering, like conspirators”<sup>73</sup> when in of their monthly lunch dates they see Zenia. “They feel caught out, they feel trapped, they feel guilty. It should be Zenia who feels like that.”<sup>74</sup> Karen/Charis says Zenia does not frighten her but makes her sick of herself probably because the three women act like witch hunters. The name of the restaurant is, at the same time, the name of two chapters in the novel. The chapter titles follow a circular pattern and, if we count out the “Onset” and the “Outcome”, the novel finishes right where it has started: at the Toxique. The name of the restaurant they meet is significant in itself. **Toxique** is the French word for “toxic” meaning “[c]apable of causing injury or death, especially by chemical means; poisonous”<sup>75</sup> and hints at what the three friends are capable of doing to Zenia or

---

<sup>69</sup> Irigaray, “When Our Lips Speak Together,” **The Sex Which Is Not One**, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Ithaca, Cornell University, 1985, p. 209.

<sup>70</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 29.

<sup>71</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>72</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>73</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 32.

<sup>74</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>75</sup> “Toxic,” def. 2, **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition**, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004, 21 Apr. 2009, <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Toxic>>.

anyone who poses a threat for them. This associates Tony, Karen/Charis and Roz with both witches and witch hunters. They can be associated with the many victims who were accused mainly of poisoning in Scandinavian witch hunts.<sup>76</sup> In **The Scapegoat**, René Girard discusses the stereotypes of accusations made against the Jews and all other scapegoats during the plague and mentions the frequent reference to poisoning as one of these stereotypes. This strengthens the association of Tony, Karen/Charis and Roz with witches. Girard states that “[t]hanks to poison, it is possible to be persuaded that a small group, or even a single individual, can harm the whole society without being discovered.”<sup>77</sup>

Ruiz states that the witches’ Sabbath does not really originate from the Jewish Sabbath but from a *Sabatius*, a Phrygian deity of bacchanalia and excess. There would be a great feast but without any salt, as salt was the symbol of eternity, incorruptibility and immortality, and they would drink sweet wine. Likewise, the first thing Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz do on these lunch dates is to order a bottle of white wine and a bottle of Evian water. Even the grotesque dresses, leopard-skin tights and silver boots, of the waitresses contribute to the Black Sabbath reference. The witches attending the nocturnal gatherings were also clad in animal skin usually dressed as goats, as representatives of the Devil.<sup>78</sup> “Roz finds the Toxique denizens fascinating, but also a little scary. Every time she goes to the ladies’ she is afraid of opening the wrong door down there, by mistake, and stumbling upon some kind of unholy rite. Orgies! Human sacrifices!”<sup>79</sup> Llewellyn Barstow mentions that women were accused of flying to the nocturnal gatherings, called the witches’ Sabbath, “on phallic broomsticks, being seduced by demon lovers, joining in orgiastic dances, . . . copulating indiscriminately with men, other women, relatives, demons, or the devil himself, and giving birth to demon children.”<sup>80</sup>

At the end of the novel, Not knowing Zenia is dead, Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz perform another ritual at the Toxique this time to thank for surviving the

---

<sup>76</sup> Llewellyn Barstow, “Epilogue,” **op. cit.**, p. 86.

<sup>77</sup> René Girard, **The Scapegoat**, trans. Yvonne Freccero, Boston, Brill, 1989, p. 16.

<sup>78</sup> See Francesco María Guazzo, **Compendium Maleficarum: A Handbook on Witchcraft from the 1600s**, ed. Montague Summers, San Diego, The Book Tree, 2004. Alan McFarlane, **Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A regional and comparative study**, 2nd ed., Introduction by James Sharpe, London, Routledge, 1999, pp. 214-215.

<sup>79</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 98.

liberation process Zenia has initiated. Karen/Charis calls the ritual a libation whereas Tony thinks if it was three hundred years ago, they would be burned at the stake for it but starting with Zenia:

[Karen/Charis] lifts her wineglass, in which there is an inch of white wine left, and she pours a thimbleful onto the pink remains of her Assorted Sorbets. Then she bows her head and closes her eyes briefly. "I ask for help," she says. "For all of us. Now you." She also asked for forgiveness, for all of them too. She feels this is right, but she can't say why, so she doesn't mention it.<sup>81</sup>

Then Roz and Tony pour some wine too. Karen/Charis also sprinkles a little salt into the candle flame and suddenly sees, in the candle, Zenia falling into water and dying. Zenia does actually die because, as discussed above, she has to be sacrificed to be able to heal the male-inflicted suffering of her friends and to liberate them. While Zenia is planning to leave to country to escape from the drug dealers who are after her, Tony, Charis and Roz, all three, visit her at the Arnold Garden Hotel where she stays on the very day she dies. Karen/Charis's dark double Karen almost certainly murders Zenia, pushing her down the balcony of her hotel room. When Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz go to Zenia's hotel to see if she is really dead like Karen/Charis has seen in her vision, they find her in the fountain. Reading Zenia's death as it has been prophesied by the chapter about the Whore of Babylon, Karen/Charis thinks they, Karen/Charis herself, Tony and Roz, are the dogs licking Jezebel's (Zenia) blood. Karen/Charis organises a funeral ceremony to set free Zenia, to liberate her like she has healed and liberated them. Throwing Zenia's ashes into the sea is exactly what Zenia advised Tony to do with her mother's ashes. Starhawk also emphasises the unity between life and death:

Life and death were a continuous stream . . . in lowland pools, reindeer does, their bellies filled with stones that embodied the souls of deer, were

---

<sup>80</sup> Llewellyn Barstow, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>81</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

submerged in the waters of the Mother's womb, so that victims of the hunt would be reborn.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, Zenia told Tony that keeping her ashes meant letting her mother still have a hold on her. The next evening at twilight Tony and Zenia were on the ferry to the Island and when they were halfway across, Tony threw the canister with her mother's ashes into the sea. The funeral ceremony at the end of the novel illustrates yet again that Zenia has accomplished to create a female solidarity, which finally embraces its initiator, Zenia, too: Roz pays for the cremation and Tony takes charge of the ashes until Karen/Charis comes up with a funeral ceremony for Zenia. Zenia's death, like her birth, marks social and economical unrest--worldwide recession and atrocities; famine in Africa; and the Gulf war is over but both sides are losers. She dies on a Monday, on November 11, 1991, at eleven o'clock in the morning. Karen/Charis thinks that November is the "Month of the dead, month of the returning".<sup>83</sup> Tony chooses the Remembrance Day as the date for the funeral not only because she wants to remember Zenia but also she feels like she owes it to Zenia. This also echoes the reason why feminists study the witch hunts: to remember the many women persecuted by the patriarchal society and its institutions not only during the Witch Craze but throughout the centuries and not to let it happen again. The three women have plastic poppies pinned to the front of their coats: "The flower of sleep and forgetting. Petals of spilled blood."<sup>84</sup> They all take the ferry and stand at the back. They all wear black and, to comply with Karen/Charis's wish, put Zenia's ashes in a handmade ceramic flower vase. Strangely enough, the vase cracks by itself and splits in two right before Karen/Charis is about to throw it into the sea, once again to suggest that Zenia's fluidity and boundless form cannot be contained or defined. The pieces of the vase fall into the sea and the ashes of Zenia trail of, like smoke. After the ritual, they eat at Karen/Charis's home. Karen/Charis prepares the meal, Roz makes a speech and Tony takes a sprig of Queen Anne's lace from Karen/Charis's backyard for her scrapbook to remember Zenia because Zenia was

---

<sup>82</sup> Starhawk, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 463.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 462.

waging an “unofficial war, a guerrilla war, a war she may not have know she was waging, but a war nevertheless”, seeking to avenge some past wrong.<sup>85</sup> The flower Tony chooses to remember Zenia by is a beneficial weed used as a contraceptive and hence reflects Zenia’s role as the herbalist-healer-witch, her power over life and death, while the lace referring to her role as the Robber Bride. Ironically, after Zenia’s death, it is revealed that she has had ovarian cancer and six months to live. In other words, Zenia’s growing herbs, cooking for Tony, reading the Tarot cards, fabricating herstorical self-narratives, creating a female language to leave out the male substitute for her not being able to reproduce. Not to mention she plays the role of the surrogate mother to her friends Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz; she nourishes, enlightens, hardens off, heals and eventually liberates them. Karen/Charis’s cooking, Roz’s speech and Tony’s scrapbook represent women’s reclaiming their domestic and social functions and productivities as well as subversive female languages. Zenia plays the role of the herbalist-healer-witch to the three women; she plays the role of what Daly calls the witch-crone, the archetype of female powers, to create Hag-ography, that is, female solidarity.

---

<sup>85</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 465.

## CHAPTER 2

### KAREN/CHARIS AS A HERBALIST-HEALER-WITCH

Double, double toil and trouble:  
Fire, burn; and, cauldron, bubble.<sup>1</sup>

Purkiss states that the myth of the witch “offers to identify oppression, make it noticeable” and “is often linked with another lapsarian myth, the myth of an originary matriarchy, through the themes of mother-daughter learning and of matriarchal religions as sources of witchcraft.”<sup>2</sup> Having inherited her healing/killing power from her grandmother, Karen/Charis is the embodiment of the herbalist-healer-witch. First, she uses her healing powers when she was a child to survive the sexual abuse and rape of her uncle and her killing power to give her uncle small heart attacks. Then, she helps her friends survive the liberation process initiated by Zenia and liberates Zenia herself eventually. It is most probably the dark double Karen who kills Zenia and helps her return “to the Light”.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, her boss Shanita teaches Karen/Charis how to erase bad memories, control the pain and heal herself through meditation, which helps Karen/Charis have more control over her previsions too. Everything about Karen/Charis from the way she looks to the way she dresses reflects her character: absent-minded and free-spirited. She has long, straight, grey-blond hair parted in the middle. Although her daughter August(a) wants Karen/Charis to get her hair cut and dyed, Karen/Charis does not want to be

---

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, **Macbeth (Arden Shakespeare: Third Series)**, ed. Kenneth Muir, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2004, 4.1.10-11. Written in tetrameter, these lines are from the cauldron scene in **Macbeth** in which the three witches boil poisoned entrails, eye of newt and toe of frog in a large bubbling cauldron and chanting an incantation. In **The Robber Bride** are also four female whose lives are so intertwined that the three of them decide to meet at regular lunch dates. It is also noted that the three women feel that Zenia, the fourth friend, is always present at these meetings although she is not physically there. Unlike the three witches who try to cause double toil and trouble, however, the women in the novel meet in order to further solidarity--all four try and help one another.

<sup>2</sup> Purkiss, **op. cit.**, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 447.

entangled with yet another responsibility. Karen/Charis doesn't wear a bra either and dresses in motley colours representing her free spirit. Not wearing a bra is a very strong statement in terms of feminism: "the image of the bra-burner was . . . inadvertent outcome of one of the earliest and most iconic events that brought the second wave feminist activism to public awareness."<sup>4</sup> Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon state that "The protest symbolically enacted the rejection of oppressive ideals of womanhood, and was an attack on the male defined femininity and on the notion that women were objects to be consumed."<sup>5</sup> Given her physical description and absent-mindedness, Karen/Charis reflects not only the stand of second-wave feminism but also the negative image of feminists the media constructed based on the bra-burning protests: "deliberately unattractive", "braless bubbleheads".<sup>6</sup> She is "healthful, but verging on the antique" and "earnest and distracted, and with an inner light. It's the inner light that gets her in trouble."<sup>7</sup> She is so absent-minded that she always misplaces her reading glasses, does not remember ordering at all when the waiters serve her what she ordered at a restaurant. Sometimes she does not even remember if she thought about something or said it out loud. She would misplace and lose her stuff, because things would fall out of her woven or embroidered bags. Tony describes her as amnesiac or willowy. The willow tree was believed to be the witch's tree and the witch's tool. Judika Illes says that since the willow tree loves moisture, it is associated with the moon, "the planetary body that rules water, women, and fertility"; since its branches and leaves resemble the slithering of the snake, it is associated with the snake and its regenerative powers; since it was planted in Celtic graveyards to keep the dead peaceful and in their graves, it is also associated with death.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the willow tree is the embodiment of the boundary-crossing duality inherent in the figure of the herbalist-healer-witch who has control over life and death and the power to heal and kill.

---

<sup>4</sup> Stéphanie Genz, Benjamin A. Brabon, **Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories**, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>6</sup> Susan J. Douglas, **Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media**, New York, Three Rivers Press, 1994, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Judika Illes, **The Element Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Complete A-Z for the Entire Magical World**, London, HarperElement, 2005, p. 183.

It is believed that witchcraft is taught by other witches in the family, mostly grandmothers, or by friends, and “healing and midwifery are presented as innately feminine skills . . . healer-witches are never men”.<sup>9</sup> Purkiss argues that:

The sense of connection with a lost past is important to modern witches in part because they see themselves as the recoverers of the values lost to modern industrial society . . . It is not a fantasy of otherness, but a description of a lost maternal continent presumed to be actual rather than imaginary . . . This myth of a Minoan matriarchy offers a prelapsarian utopia of ordinary unity which replicates the blissful mother-child dyad even as it celebrates a society with no visible differences.<sup>10</sup>

Karen/Charis’s mother Gloria says that Karen/Charis takes after her grandmother; moreover, it is Karen/Charis, instead of her mother, who inherits her grandmother’s healing/killing powers. While Karen/Charis’s mother, Gloria, crosses the boundary between sane-insane, it is her grandmother, the healer-herbalist-witch, who crosses the physical boundaries by living at the outskirts of the town and by looking like an old crone; religious boundary by marrying a Mennonite--a Christian Anabaptist, committed to non-violence and believing in both the ministry and mission of Christ; natural-supernatural boundary by having predictions and previsions; the body-soul boundary by visiting Karen/Charis although her body is still lying on her bed at the farm; and the life-death boundary by having healing/killing powers. Gloria escaped from her mother’s farm when she was twelve to become a teacher because she couldn’t get on well with her mother and hated the farm. She is psychologically disturbed and has tried to kill herself three times. Therefore, she has had shock treatments and also an operation. Karen/Charis is used to staying with her Aunt Voila (Vi) and Uncle Vern for a couple of nights or for the whole summer because of her mother’s nervous breakdowns. Gloria hits the backs of her legs with one of her shoes, the pancake flipper or the broom handle and says if her father was still alive, he would be the one hitting her. Since beating is the only

---

<sup>9</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

function ascribed to her dead father, she feels relieved he was killed during the war before she was born.

Karen/Charis meets her grandmother only at the age of seven. Her grandmother heals the wounds at the back of Karen/Charis's legs simply by laying her hands on them: "first it hurt more, and then Karen got warmer and warmer, and then cool, and after that she went to sleep."<sup>11</sup> She sees a blue light coming out of her grandmother's hands as she says something and heals someone else. However, when her grandfather was killed because of a tractor accident, her grandmother was not able to heal him because she cannot heal broken bones. Karen/Charis's grandmother's neighbours do not talk to her because her husband used to be a Mennonite and gossip behind her back. Nevertheless, they still come to her when they need a healer. Karen/Charis herself is part Scottish, part English and part Mennonites. She gives up Christianity not only because "the Bible is full of meat" but also because "there is too much blood", "there are too many slaughters, too much suffering, too many tears."<sup>12</sup> She finds "the standard God with his . . . lamb sacrifices and death angels barbaric".<sup>13</sup> She has been a Buddhist for a while but then she has discovered Buddhism has many hells and she does not appreciate the stress on punishment in religions.

As Sallmann notes, many of the alleged witches were "the oldest, the ugliest, the poorest and the most aggressive women who inspired the greatest fear" as well as "women alone, without husbands, sons, brothers, and their property, in default of heirs, was not subject to the usual rules of inheritance."<sup>14</sup> Karen/Charis's grandmother, being old, ugly and looking aggressive, is feared by the villagers too. She looks like a witch with her large and sunburnt hands and face, nest-like whitish grey hair, wiry eyebrows, blue eyes and very large and white teeth. While her dishevelled hair and eyebrows suggest the chaotic nature of the witch disrupting the patriarchal boundaries and order, the emphasis on the large teeth recalls not only the Big Bad Wolf, disguising as the grandmother of the Little Riding Hood, but also the belief that witches sacrifices and devoured babies at nocturnal gatherings. Finally,

---

<sup>11</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

she has lost her husband and her daughter never visits the farm and her granddaughter Karen/Charis is underage, which makes Karen/Charis's aunt and uncle's usurping her inheritance.

Barbara G. Walker states that:

The ancient view was somewhat more eco-logical, more egalitarian, and certainly more compatible with modern knowledge of natural process. In the Crone's cauldron, "soul" becomes synonymous with "life force" characteristic of all organisms rather than the exclusive property of humans. Matter was one with its creatress and linguistic derivate, *Mater*, Mother, the *Material* of everything.<sup>15</sup>

Karen/Charis is likewise one with nature and crosses the boundary between the self and the outside world. Reminding us of witches leaving their beds at night to join the nocturnal gatherings, Karen/Charis is a sleepwalker but even when she is not sleepwalking she was always in danger of being run over because she could not separate her aura from the auras of things around. Karen/Charis can see auras although she cannot see them lately as often and easily as she used to do when she was Karen, a child. Now she can see them at moments of stress only or sense them instead. Actually, as a child, Karen/Charis did not know where the edges of her body ended and where the rest of the world began. That's why she always bumped into things and was considered to be utterly clumsy. In the classroom, Karen/Charis could become invisible by focusing hard. "All she had to do was to suck in the light around her body"<sup>16</sup> and the gaze of the teacher would go through her to that student who was sitting behind her. It is as if she is formless, without any physical presence of her own but as a part of everything. Moreover, becoming invisible by focusing hard means that she can cross the boundary between existence and non-existence. Similarly, feminist theorists define woman as the source of life, power and energy and the body of the witch as ambiguous, which introduces a new feminine language

---

<sup>14</sup> Sallmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 448, 449.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara G. Walker, *Man Made God: A Collection of Essays*, Seattle: Stellar House Publishing, 2010, p. 289.

<sup>16</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

to disrupt the phallogocentric discourse which privileges metaphysical presence. Purkiss argues that “the contingency of the witch – her scattering of herself across space, the leakage of fluids across her bodily boundaries . . . makes her a symbol of that lost maternal space”; therefore, Karen/Charis’s aura blending into the auras of the things around her represents the very “rupture [that] signifies the feared, desired return to the pre-ego Imaginary unity with the mother.”<sup>17</sup>

It should also be noted that the Old English word **wican** meant “to bend” while Old Saxon **wikan**, Old High German **wichan** and Old Norse **vikja** meant “to bend, or turn aside”,<sup>18</sup> all of which once again underlining the fluidity of the witch and her bending, non-containable and disruptive power. Karen/Charis detaches herself completely from her violated body (Karen) and renames herself as Charis and transforms herself through yoga and meditation, to gain physical and spiritual flexibility and fluidity, so that her aura can blend into the aura of anything else, so that she can focus and become invisible. She picks the name Charis, which is derived from the word “charity”, from the Bible, randomly with a pin. The name suggests the herbalist-healer-witch’s social and cultural contribution to her community. Karen remains a child but Karen/Charis grows up more serene because all the nightmarish experiences of her uncle’s sexually abusing and raping her when she was nine years old are left with Karen. Charis’s floating out of Karen’s body and roaming about freely is very much like the witch’s body remaining in bed sleeping while the soul of the witch flies to the witches’ Sabbath. Also in the ferry, listening to the sound of the motor and rocking with the gentle sway, she steps into the spiritual world and puts on her astral form.

The flying of the witches on a broom, at the back of the Devil or their familiars is a transgression in itself. Flying is associated with escape and perspective; the free roaming of the spirit; and the separation of the body and soul, in that the witches’ souls were believed to leave their bodies to fly to the witches’ Sabbath. Moreover, flying is associated with women’s writing. The French word for “fly”, **voler** means both “to fly” and “to steal” and hence associates flying metaphors in

---

<sup>17</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>18</sup> Russell, Alexander, Appendix, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

literature with “stealing the language”.<sup>19</sup> Ann-Janine Morey argues that “Women’s writing–flying–is a deliberate transgression of accepted physical and verbal boundaries, and flying is not just a metaphor in women’s writing, but a way of speaking about women’s writing.”<sup>20</sup> Cixous states that:

Flying is woman’s gesture–flying in language and making it fly. . . . for centuries we’ve been able to possess anything only by flying; we’ve lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. . . . women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds. They go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down.<sup>21</sup>

Both witches’ flying and women’s writing are means of escaping and disrupting the patriarchal society and male discourse. Accordingly, Zenia plays the Robber Bride, liberating Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz from the sexual, physical and economical exploitation of the male in their lives. Karen/Charis sometimes feels uncomfortable being confined within a body:

Some days . . . having a body is an inconvenience . . . The body may be the home of resistance, the malign contagion of the material world. Having a body, being in the body, is like being roped to a sick cat.<sup>22</sup>

Karen/Charis’s sleepwalking, like her grandmother’s, can be considered as the witch’s travel to the witches’ Sabbath as well as a transgression of the body-soul boundary. That is the reason why Karen/Charis does yoga; she wants to lighten her body to the degree that she can almost float, by getting rid of all the heaviness caused

---

<sup>19</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, **Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde**, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> Ann-Janine Morey, **Religion and Sexuality in American Literature**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 207.

<sup>21</sup> Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” pp. 887.

<sup>22</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 198.

by her being abused as a child. It is also the reason why she teaches yoga; she wants to help other women to achieve that lightness. Her yoga students are mostly women, which makes us think that it is still mostly the women who are being abused and who need to get rid of the heaviness caused by the male's physical and sexual violence. On that note, the forever 9-year-old Karen's floating out of her body while her uncle rapes her is at the same time her reclaiming the feminine discourse and rebelling against her uncle and aunt's forbidding her to speak about her being sexually abused and raped, and thus silencing her. **Malleus Maleficarum** also condemns women's speech as a disruptive means of spreading evil, claiming that women "have slippery tongues and are unable to conceal from their fellow-women those things which by evil arts they know; and, since they are weak, they find an easy and secret manner of vindicating themselves by witchcraft."<sup>23</sup> Karen, the repressed consciousness, the nightmarish memories of her being sexually abused by her uncle, cannot speak, even though she wants to because it is Karen/Charis who takes all the words with her; for this reason, Karen cannot talk until Charis sucks her back, that is, until the floating Karen returns to Charis's body. As in the fairy tale "The Robber Bride", it is the patriarchy--represented by the rapist uncle--that oppresses and silences Karen, the disruptive female speech.

Andrea Dworkin makes use of the image of the literary and historical women witches as figures for the women victims of pornography while discussing social and sexual inequality. Purkiss notes that:

Domestic and sexual violence against women were foregrounded as the representative crimes of patriarchy. . . Sexuality was to be identified as the site of women's oppression in the sense that property was for Marx the site of class oppression. Rape, sexual violence, pornography, wife-battering and (eventually) child sexual abuse became the central signifiers of patriarchy. .

<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Kramer, Sprenger, **op. cit.**, p. 82.

<sup>24</sup> Purkiss, **op. cit.**, p. 15.

Uncle Vern stops sexually abusing Karen/Charis after two years when she grows breasts and pubic hair, probably for fear that she might become pregnant. Llewellyn Barstow states that “Menstrual blood was believed to have magical effects, bewitching a lover, serving as an aphrodisiac, assisting in conception; an extreme fear was that the intercourse during menstruation would kill the man.”<sup>25</sup> Then, Karen/Charis starts using her killing power on her uncle. She can give him little heart attacks simply by looking at him. Karen/Charis’s relation with Zenia brings to the foreground how she constantly crosses the life-death boundary as well. When Zenia shows up in one of her yoga classes crucially thin and with a black eye, Karen/Charis wants to nurture her and provide her with vitamins and herbs and sunlight. When she learns Zenia has cancer, she wants to heal Zenia right there but she knows she is not that powerful. Although “Compassion to all living things” is a reminder Karen/Charis chants to herself to make herself have compassion for Zenia, she continues to have a mental picture of herself pushing Zenia off a cliff or some other high place, which again foreshadows the dark double Karen’s murdering Zenia. It should be noted again that Karen’s murdering Zenia is narrated as an act of liberation, as Charis/Karen’s helping Zenia to go to the light after Zenia’s liberating her old college friends from male exploitation, for Karen/Charis believes that the dead cannot cross your threshold unless you invite them and that she has summoned Zenia from the dead. Now that Zenia’s mission is completed, Karen/Charis needs to set her free.

Just as the herbalist-healer-witches’ houses and her grandmother’s house, so Karen/Charis’s house is outside the city. After Zenia and Billy leaves and she buys the house, she makes it hers by exorcising their fragments, burning sweetgrass. Moreover, August(a)’s birth in itself serves as an exorcism. Her house on the Island is her source of calm and peace. Not to mention the significance of water sources in the cult of Mother Earth. The view from her bedroom soothes her and the air on the island is much cleaner than that in the city. “Her house is the end one in the row, then comes the grass and then the trees, maple and willow, and through a gap in the trees the harbour.”<sup>26</sup> The house itself, having the bathroom off the kitchen because it was

---

<sup>25</sup> Llewellyn Barstow, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

added on later, violates the physical boundaries. Moreover, due to the slanting floor, the bathroom is coming away from the rest of the house, which causes cracks and drafts. She does not use the front door, which is nailed shut and insulated with plastic sheeting and a hand-woven bedspread. Karen/Charis's "not yet fully organized house"<sup>27</sup> clearly indicates that she is not keen on cleaning or housekeeping as well as reminding us of Hulst's description of the witch as "the ultimate 'disorderly woman'".<sup>28</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis claims that such representations of disorderly women "preclude fanciful release from, or criticism of, hierarchy."<sup>29</sup> She does not clean, dust, wash or hem the curtains. "You should make use of what is naturally provided",<sup>30</sup> Karen/Charis believes. So, she scavenges dead wood and uses the leftover boards from building the henhouse and the odd dead branches of her apple tree for her cast-iron cookstove. That wood stove, very much like that of the witch in "Hanzel and Gretel", was one of the reasons why she wanted this house. Furthermore, she intends to trade her sewing machine for a loom. The loom not only reminds us of the medieval women but also of another literary witch from classical literature, Circe, who is depicted as working on her loom and singing to bewitch Odysseus and his crew. Karen/Charis, being deliberately unattractive like the second-wave feminists and having no sexual desires or pleasures, draws a contrast to "the seductive ancient witch Circe" who "represented the emasculating power of sensual pleasure" as well as "the 'perilous' and unlicensed power to destabilise the relation between fiction and truth."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the loom represents not only her desire to be like Zenia, who is the very embodiment of "the vanity of worldly pursuits and the lust embodied in the Circean figure"<sup>32</sup> as discussed in Chapter 1 but also another subversive mode of communication alongside Circe's singing, reminding us of Roland Barthes's analogy between (readerly) text, texture and music.

Cixous and Clément argue that the witch "is mixed up in dirty things; she has no cleanliness phobia – the proper housecleaning attacks . . . She handles filth,

---

<sup>27</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 49

<sup>28</sup> Hulst, *op. cit.*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1975, p. 133.

<sup>30</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>31</sup> Hulst, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

manipulates waste, buries placentas, and burns the caul.”<sup>33</sup> Mary Douglas points to the fact that “it is supposed to be a mark of primitive religion to make no clear distinction between sanctity and cleanliness” and claims that although according to patriarchal Western civilisation “dirt is essentially disorder . . . there is no such thing as absolute dirt.”<sup>34</sup> Hulst, likewise, says that the concepts of dirty and polluted are the “social concepts signalling disruption of some arbitrary order and capable of being represented by bodies or orifices, bodily fluids or excretions.”<sup>35</sup> Karen/Charis likes to be clean but “There’s clean outside and there’s clean inside, her grandmother used to say, and clean inside is better.”<sup>36</sup> Yoga, meditation and Charis replacing Karen are Karen/Charis’s attempts at being clean inside. Accordingly, her grandmother wears dirty overalls and lets her pig Pinky enter the house and eat, with the dogs, from the same dishes they use for meals. Like her grandmother, Karen/Charis’s boss Shanita did eat a handful or two of soil every spring too, because it is good for you, which can be regarded as “the image of the woman healer in tune with body and nature.”<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, Karen/Charis loves working in the garden without gardening gloves:

. . . kneeling in the dirt, with both hands deep in the ground, rummaging among the roots with the earthworms slipping away from her groping fingers, enveloped in the smell of mudpies and slow ferment and thinking about nothing. Helping things grow.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the fact that in North American suburbia the lawn is considered as the male domain, Karen/Charis wants to transform Tony’s lawn “into a miracle of bloom”<sup>39</sup> into a “nourishing”<sup>40</sup> garden. In addition to planting in her garden, she also gives Tony a spring-water dispenser, which represents life and knowledge. She

---

<sup>33</sup> Hélène Cixous, Catherine Clément, **The Newly Born Woman**, London, I.B. Tauris & Co., 1996, p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Douglas, **Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo**, London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 7-8, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Hulst, **op. cit.**, p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Purkis, **op. cit.**, p. 25

<sup>38</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 51.

<sup>39</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>40</sup> **Ibid.**

insists to plant a flower border on Roz's back walk, which Roz's Japanese minimalist gardener takes as an insult; "now there's a little plot of Roz's yard that will be forever Charis."<sup>41</sup> Her own garden is in a much better condition than her house although there is still a lot that needs to be done. She also has a furnace in which she keeps some carrot and beet roots buried in a box of sand, which she learned from her grandmother. Like medieval women and the herbalist-healers, she grows vegetables and flowers--carrots, tomatoes, chrysanthemums and snapdragons. In November her garden abounds with marigolds, nasturtium leaves, broccoli and tomatoes. She plants too many species without thinning out, weeding or staking tall spikes but plans to organise her garden better by having less colour and planting the tall ones in the back. However, the soil is rich because of the henshit and she is carefully keeping it composted every spring and fall.

Karen/Charis's grandmother is not her only teacher. Shanita, her boss, teaches her how to erase bad memories, control the pain and heal herself. Karen/Charis's talking to herself when she is at home, alone, might as well be interpreted as enchantments to soothe herself. Not to mention the Morning Miracle tea she drinks every morning to clear her mind and to focus. Gilbert and Gubar assert that "While prevision and clairvoyance seem first like curses, these women [with previsions] eventually convert such powers to subversive modes of communication."<sup>42</sup> Karen/Charis has such a means of communication with her grandmother and Zenia. As yet another means of spell casting, which reminds us of voodoo practices, her grandmother saves wishbones and gives one to her when she leaves to stay with her aunt and uncle. After being raped for the first time by Uncle Vern, Karen/Charis breaks the wishbone and wishes for her grandmother. Although her grandmother has had a stroke and been lying on her bed at the farm, she visits her that night and passes on to her "Her healing power, her killing power. Not enough to get Karen out of the trap, but enough to keep her alive. She looks at her hands and sees a trace of blue."<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>42</sup> Gilbert, Gubar, **op. cit.**, p. 148.

<sup>43</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 260.

In accordance with the previsions and clairvoyance of the witch, one etymological origin of the word witch, Middle German **wikken**, means “to predict.”<sup>44</sup> Just as her grandmother could predict the weather due to the pain in her bones much more accurately than the weather report, so Karen/Charis, when she was a child, could feel the distant lightning running up her arms, hear the phone before it rang and sense the pain before her mother beat her and knew her mother would die three weeks ahead. Karen/Charis also has strong intuitions, telling her of the future. Sometimes nothing comes out of them; so, she does not find them dependable. Shanita says it is the Solomon’s Cross on her palm that gives her those intuitions about the future but it has “too many wispy hairlines”<sup>45</sup> making her pick up “a lot of stations”<sup>46</sup> and disabling the accuracy of the intuitions. For example, she has a “sinking feeling”<sup>47</sup> the day they see Zenia in Toxique several years after her death. She can also picture the responses of other people, and yet, as it is with the intuitions, they do not always reciprocate. Moreover, she feels like she is attacked by ions and menacing energy waves as soon as she enters the Toxique the day they see Zenia there. She chooses a table near the mirror, for mirrors deflect. Most importantly, she has her own light, white light, which she has been saving for years. Karen/Charis’s white light to which she resorts in times of need recalls the folk healers, also known as white witches, who “continued to practise until the eighteenth century, when they were finally put out of business by medical licensing”<sup>48</sup> as well as Robert Graves’s White Goddess who “was the young maiden of the new moon, the glorious lady of the full moon, and the wise old crone of the waning moon.”<sup>49</sup> She uses her inner light to protect and claim her body, wrongly assuming that now that Zenia has returned from the dead she might need a new body. Michelet also emphasises the facts that “women, being a repository of the secret formulas of folk medicine, therefore became a prime target of inquisitors and secular judges who believed that they could have learned these secrets only from the devil.”<sup>50</sup> Actually, main reason for the

---

<sup>44</sup> See Russell, Alexander, **op. cit.**, p. 199.

<sup>45</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 51.

<sup>46</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>47</sup> **Ibid.**, pp. 50-51.

<sup>48</sup> Savage, **op. cit.**, p. 42

<sup>49</sup> Doreen Valiente, **The Rebirth of Witchcraft**, London, Wash, 1989, p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Sallmann, **op. cit.**, p. 449.

persecution of the herbalist-healers was because they had control over life and death both; that the herbalist-healers had the power to heal also implied that they had the power to harm, to kill, too. Hence the “gradual shift from white magic to black magic, or from what English-speaking historians often call witchcraft to sorcery . . . in treatises on demonology.”<sup>51</sup> By tracing the source of herb lore to the Devil and by claiming that the herbalist-healers use their knowledge to harm and/or to kill, the state and the church demonised and persecuted these women--known as wise-women, cunning women and white witches--devalued and cut down their social roles and eventually put them out of practise because of the competition and rivalry discussed earlier.

Henrietta Leyser claims that the amulets and similar objects are signs of cunning women possessing special powers such as “beneficent magic, healing, protecting, and divining the future” and that the spirit of prophecy was believed to reside in Germanic women who had amulets and crystal balls for prophecy.<sup>52</sup> Karen/Charis too has a quartz pendulum which she keeps in a blue Chinese silk drawstring bag because “silk conserves the vibrations.”<sup>53</sup> She stands in front of the mirror and holds the pendulum over head. “‘Will this be a good day?’ she asks it. Round and round means yes, back and forth means no.”<sup>54</sup> Karen/Charis also uses her grandmother’s Bible, which she inherits along with the farm after her death, for the same purpose, to know what is to come, which is reminiscent of fortune telling. The way she makes use of her Bible is very much like reading Tarot cards. She randomly opens a page in the Bible, closes her eyes and pokes at the pages with a pin. It is also significant that she always gets Revelations 2:22 as it is highly reminiscent of the witches’ Sabbath: “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which callest herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”<sup>55</sup> Lastly, to ward off bad dreams, she wants the amethyst geode, which is from Nova Scotia and sold at Radiance where she works.

---

<sup>51</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>52</sup> Henrietta Leyser, **Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450-1500**, London, Phoenix Giant, 1999, pp. 17, 57.

<sup>53</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> **Ibid.**

The image of the herbalist-healer-witch boiling herbs in her cauldron is yet another attempt at self-expression, which renders the cauldron and the herbs as the media of communication. Moreover, the witch, through the image and use of cauldrons, is associated with reproduction and death at the same time. Purkiss argues that:

The witches' cauldron is a reminder of women's control over production. . . . [Witches] use this power to reverse it; instead of transforming the natural into cultural, they produce the unnatural. . . . the sole point is to transgress the boundaries of the acceptable and clean.<sup>56</sup>

Accordingly, Grimassi mentions "The Legend of the Descent of the Goddess", a tale in which the Goddess descends into the Underworld to seek "enlightenment and wholeness through the integration of the feminine and masculine polarities within" which "is sometimes referred to as retrieving the cauldron within."<sup>57</sup> Kristeva borrows from Plato the term **chora** to write about the acquisition of language. **Chora** means "enclosed space", "womb", "matrix" in Greek; therefore it is reminiscent of the witches' cauldron. "The mother's body is", for Kristeva, "what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*, which is on the path of destruction, aggressivity, and death."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Irigaray draws a parallel between water and woman's language, which is "continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductive, diffusible".<sup>59</sup> Woman represents all the bodily fluids, such as milk, blood and amniotic fluid as well as the natural water sources such as the sea, the rivers and the waterfalls. Kristeva uses the term **chora** to define the earliest stage, the first six months, in the psychosexual development of a human being. According to Kristeva during the **chora** stage, the self is not yet distinguished from the mother or the world

---

<sup>55</sup> **Holy Bible, King James Version**, Rev. 2.22.

<sup>56</sup> Purkiss, **op. cit.**, p. 212.

<sup>57</sup> Grimassi, **op. cit.**, p. 289.

<sup>58</sup> Julia Kristeva, **Revolution in Poetic Language**, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984, pp. 27-28.

itself but takes in every pleasurable experience without knowing any boundaries. Then, **chora** stage is like the pre-patriarchal period of the Mother Earth mentioned above. The child's being one with its mother and the world around and receiving everything is also similar to healer midwives' being one with nature and Mother Earth and knowing its secrets, such as herb lore. Kristeva states that "the semiotic *chora* is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him."<sup>60</sup> That is to say, just like the witch and the witch's cauldron, **chora** combines all polarities, dichotomies in itself, in that it both generates and negates the subject. The subversive energy of the witch thus flows into literature and postmodern discourse by means of deconstruction and disruption.

**The Robber Bride** abounds with objects that recall the witches' cauldron due to their shapes and functions. The name of Roz's magazine **WiseWomanWorld**, written like a single word but made up of three words--"wise", "woman" and "world"--plays the role of cauldron as well as suggesting an incantation given the repetition of the sound "w". Actually, the name of the magazine could have been Witch's Cauldron instead of **WiseWomanWorld**, in that wise women of the middle ages, who inherited the herbal lore and knew ways of contraception and abortion since the Neolithic times, were stigmatised and persecuted as witches in the fourteenth century<sup>61</sup> and the witches' cauldron is associated with the vessel, womb and new world. Roz is trying to create a new world for the wise women, to enlighten, educate and encourage them. Moreover, after her old college friend Roz's suicide attempt, Karen/Charis buys numerous capsules and extractions from the health food store; some she feeds to Roz and some she rubs onto her. She gives Roz foot massages with mint essence and rose oil and rids Roz of all her grief and runs baths for her with cinnamon sticks and leaves floating in them. Roz's bathtub thereby takes on the role of the herbalist-healer-witches' cauldron, which reminds us of the Celtic cauldrons with healing, restoring and rejuvenating powers. To tranquilize Roz too runs baths for herself and puts in what Karen/Charis provides from the Radiance, the

---

<sup>59</sup> Irigaray, "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids," **The Sex Which Is Not One**, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Ithaca, Cornell University, 1985, p. 111.

<sup>60</sup> Kristeva, **Revolution in Poetic Language**, p. 28.

shop she works: “Ground-up leaves, dried flowers, exotic roots, musty-hayfield aromas, snake oil, mole bones, age-old recipes brewed by certified crones.”<sup>62</sup> It is nothing short of a recipe out of witchcraft book given the cauldron-like tub, hot water and ingredients. Likewise, Karen/Charis takes long baths at night to cleanse herself of all negative emotions. Also the round oak kitchen table she has since her daughter’s birth replaces a cauldron not only because of its shape but also because of its function. The table serves as a cauldron when Karen/Charis draws on her friends, Tony and Roz, and her grandmother to strengthen herself spiritually when she decides to see Zenia at her hotel room right before her death. She meditates for twenty minutes twice a day on objects gifted to her by her grandmother and her two best friends Tony and Roz: a pair of leather gloves with real fur cuffs, a Christmas present from Roz; Tony’s book **Four Lost Causes** and her grandmother’s Bible. She puts them on a small table under the main window in her living room where the sunlight shines in on them and dispels their negative aspects. Karen/Charis also adds her amethyst geode and a lump of earth from her garden to this combination and surrounds all the objects with marigold petals. She strives to attain Tony’s mental clarity, Roz’s planning abilities and “high-decibel metabolism” and “smart mouth”,<sup>63</sup> her grandmother’s blue healing light and the earth’s underground power. The marigold petals and the amethyst geode would contain and channel the energies of all these objects. Moreover, Karen/Charis uses Karen as a vessel reminiscent of a cauldron, as a “leather bag”,<sup>64</sup> which contains all the wounds and poisons of the past and which she throws into Lake Ontario. In a manner of speaking, Karen/Charis drowns Karen, that is suppresses all the memories of her childhood. Also, she uses Karen as the ingredients a witch boils in her cauldron, which is Lake Ontario in this case.

Furthermore, Karen/Charis and her daughter August(a) communicate through exchanging food more often than not--especially if they had a row and wanted to make peace. Karen/Charis “cooks nutritious meal[s], with leafy greens and balanced

---

<sup>61</sup> Barbara G. Walker, **Man Made God: A Collection of Essays**, pp. 226, 277.

<sup>62</sup> Atwood, **op. cit.**, p. 105.

<sup>63</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 414.

<sup>64</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 262.

proteins”<sup>65</sup> for August(a). “She gives August(a) small presents, sachets stuffed with rose petals, sunflower-seed cookies to take back to school with her. But they never seem to be the right things, they never seem to be enough.”<sup>66</sup> Similarly, she used to cook breakfast for Billy. Eggs and bacon although Karen/Charis herself is vegetarian. Most importantly, August(a)’s peace offerings are food as well. For instance, August(a) brings a loaf of bran bread and some dried figs when she feels guilty, and, Karen/Charis, in return, gives her an extra hug, makes her zucchini muffins and a hot-water bottle for her bed. The ending of Karen/Charis’s relationship with Billy, who has been financially and sexually exploiting her, at the same time marks a new beginning as she becomes pregnant with her daughter August(a) the same year Billy leaves Karen/Charis for Zenia. Billy leaves on a Wednesday in the first week of November of 1970. November is “the month of the dead, and also of regeneration. Likewise, “A zero always means the beginning of something and the end as well, because it is omega.”<sup>67</sup> Also zero resembles a circle, which has no beginning or end. Seven is composed of two threes and a one; “threes are graceful pyramids as well as Goddess numbers”.<sup>68</sup> Sun sign Scorpio, governed by Mars, colour deep red. Sex, death, and war. Synchronicity.”<sup>69</sup> The venom of the scorpion, which is both deadly and used as a cure, can also be associated with the herbalist-healer-witch’s power to heal and kill. Likewise, the Egyptian Scorpion Goddess, one of the many manifestations of Mother Goddess, is associated with midwifery and healing. She needed Billy to get pregnant with August(a). The end of the relationship, thus, represents both death and copulation/birth/rejuvenation. Karen/Charis performs August(a)’s baptism ceremony herself because there is no church that would do it the way she wants. She has a very potent round stone from the beach, a bayberry candle and some spring water in a bottle along with her grandmother’s Bible. She asks her old friends from the university, Roz and Tony, to be the godmothers and to promise to watch over August(a) and protect her spirit. She knows her two friends can teach August(a) to stand for herself. There is a dark godmother Zenia, too. Even

---

<sup>65</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 41.

<sup>66</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>67</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 199.

<sup>68</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>69</sup> **Ibid.**

August(a)'s name rhymes with Zenia's after she adds to the end of her name the letter "a" and changes it as August(a). After setting free Zenia, Karen/Charis can see the light around her daughter. That is to say, the war between mother-daughter ends and they enjoy synchronicity only after the three women liberate Zenia.

Alongside teaching teaching yoga and working as a volunteer at the Furrows Food Co-op. Karen/Charis works at Shanita's shop called the Radiance, which illustrates the history of feminism with all the changes it goes through in time. The Radiance sells crystals, essential oils, incense, organic body creams, bath gels, sachets of bark and herbs and dried flowers, Tarot cards, jewellery, wild rice, non-caffeine teas, seeds and stones from all over the world as well as tapes of New Age music, CDs of nature sounds and books on spirituality and health. The shop was called The Blown Mind Shoppe in the sixties and Okkult in the seventies and used to sell books on demonology, women's ancient religions and Wicca. Now Shanita thinks of changing the name and the concept because of the Recession. It will be called Scrimpers and they will sell "stuff about how not to buy stuff".<sup>70</sup> The one such item Karen/Charis remembers selling is significantly a cookbook titled *Pot Luck: Penny-Pinching Soups & Stews*, which echoes the boiling cauldrons and creating one's own language analogy. The items sold at Radiance can be described as modern witchcraft as they are obviously reminiscent of the ointments and cures provided by herbalist-healer-witches.

Lastly, the building the three women stayed at when they went to the university and where Tony works now as a professor, too, is an illustration of women in history. Tony's office at the university is in the McClung Hall. She also stayed there for six years when she was a student and the hall was a women's residence. It is named after Nellie McClung (1873-1951), a Canadian author, feminist, politician, activist and suffragette. Being a first-wave feminist, McClung struggled not only for women's right to vote and to run for office, but also for married women's property rights, mothers' allowances, equitable divorce laws, and for reforms in education, workplace, professions and healthcare.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, the red-brick building, named

---

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>71</sup> See Margaret MacPherson, *Nellie McClung: Voice for the Voiceless*, Canada, XYZ éditeur/XYZ Publishing, 2003.

after her, was “darkened to purple-brown by weather and soot”,<sup>72</sup> as purple, along with green and white, is a suffragist colour.

The McClung Hall was referred to as McFungus by some students because it smelled whereas “for Tony it was a haven, and she remains grateful.”<sup>73</sup> Considering the connection between the building and the person it was named after, the condition of the building and the criticism thereof is closely linked to Nellie McClung. It is reminiscent of the definition of the witch as an anti-housewife that the building, which is named after a woman,

[...] smelled – it still smells – like a damp pantry suffering from dry rot, with sprouting potatoes forgotten in it. At the time it also had a lingering, queasy odour that filtered up from the dining room: lukewarm cabbage, leftover scrambled eggs, burnt grease.<sup>74</sup>

Respectively, it is significant that the Comparative Religion Department takes over the building, named after a woman, in the seventies before it is eventually turned into offices. As mentioned above “the church cut deeply into women’s traditional roles”<sup>75</sup> because they feared and felt threatened by the power the female healers. It was mostly the church that carried on witch hunts; the public executions “through the elaborate procession of ecclesiastical and secular officials, displayed the absolute power of the state over the individual, of the church over Satan *and* the individual, of public law over the private realm of the family.”<sup>76</sup> Tony’s gratitude for the building, on the other hand, reminds us of the reason why feminist theorists choose to study witchcraft, to show that they still remember the names of those who were hunted down and tortured and murdered because they were claimed to be witches acting on the orders of the Devil.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, Zenia has an excellent

---

<sup>72</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>77</sup> See Llewellyn Barstow, Epilogue, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

memory, which is indeed the gist of the story of Zenia, not to forget what happened and not to let it ever happen again.

The History Department is likened to a Renaissance court with “whispering, gangings-up, petty treacheries, snits, and umbrage.”<sup>78</sup> Since Tony does not take sides and tries to stay away from any dispute, she is suspected by everyone. The dispute is carried on to the wall of one of the cubicles in the women’s washroom:

someone has scratched a new message, above *Herstory Not History* and *Herstectomy Not Hystectomy: FEMINIST DECONSTRUCTION SUCKS*. The subtext of this [...] is that there’s a move afoot to have McClung Hall declared a historic building and turned over to Women’s Studies. *HISTORIC NOT HERSTORIC*, someone has added off to the side.<sup>79</sup>

Sempruch notes that “*herstory* emerges as a form of feminist mythology and constitutes a challenging alternative to the established (Western) male-centered master-story.”<sup>80</sup> Just as the feminist theorists regard the ambiguity, boundlessness and fluidity of female body and discourse as means of disrupting the phallogocentric male discourse, so Derrida argues that woman may upset the discourse of what he calls logocentrism: “Out of the depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity, of property.”<sup>81</sup> Feminist deconstructionism adopts the witch figure to represent the plurality of social and cultural herstory. Mary Poovey claims that “deconstructive strategies could enable feminists to write a history of the various contradictions within institutional definitions of woman that would show how these contradictions have opened the possibility for change”<sup>82</sup> because deconstruction dismantles the male-set discourse of binary dichotomies, devaluing femininity. In **Revolution in Poetic Language** Kristeva argues that the acquisition of a new language brings with itself the emergence of a new ideology. Hence the use of subversive modes of communication

---

<sup>78</sup> Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>80</sup> Sempruch, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>81</sup> Derrida, *Spurs*, p. 51.

<sup>82</sup> Mary Poovey, “Feminism and Deconstruction,” *Feminist Studies* 14.1 (Spring, 1988): p. 58.

provided by the flight, cauldron, previsions and clairvoyance of the witch to offer a feminine space and to represent a female language and discourse as well as to break out of and to turn upside down the phallus-oriented male discourse and oppression.

## CHAPTER 3

### ISABELLE AS A HERBALIST-HEALER-MIDWIFE-WITCH

Witches knew all about flowers and weeds.  
How to use all their roots and their leaves and their seeds.  
When people grew weary from hard-workin' days,  
They made 'em feel better in so many ways.

When women had babies the witches were there  
To hold them and help them and give them care.  
Witches knew stories of how life began.  
Don't you wish you could be one? Well, maybe you can!<sup>1</sup>

Tracy Chevalier's novel **The Virgin Blue** intertwines the stories of the 16th-century French herbalist-healer-midwife Isabelle du Moulin, who is accused of and persecuted for being a witch like her mother, and her descendant Ella, a contemporary Californian woman who has recently moved to Lisle-sur-Tarn, France due to her husband's job as an architect for a firm in Toulouse. The novel begins with Ella trying to get pregnant and learn more about her ancestors and ends with her giving birth not only to a baby but also to a narrative; she pens the Tournier history or rather herstory, that is, the story of Isabelle. The structure of the novel allows for Isabelle's story to intersperse with Ella's story. Although at first the stories of the two women are presented in separate chapters, they are braided within the same chapters as the novel progresses and as the bond between and the identification of the two women grow stronger, particularly in Chapter 9 titled "Chimney" and in the Epilogue, both unravelling the two intertwined plots, if not necessarily providing any resolution for Isabelle. Like her ancestors Isabelle and Isabelle's mother, Ella is a midwife, trying to qualify to practise in France. While she is investigating her French

---

<sup>1</sup> Bonnie Lockhart, "Who Were the Witches," **Dreams, Drums & Green Thumbs**, MP3, Bonnie Lockhart, 30 March 2002. As the lyrics of Bonnie Lockhart's nursery rhyme suggests herbalist-healer-midwives were accused of being witches and persecuted because the patriarchal society was afraid of women having control over their bodies, over reproduction and abortion, over life and death.

ancestors, her family history is at the same time haunting her in recurrent nightmares in blue. As soon as she and her husband move to France and decide to have a baby, she starts dreaming of Isabelle's past in flashes of visions in blue and also of a painting of another ancestor of hers, depicting the Virgin Mary in a robe of the very same blue of her nightmares. The leitmotif of the Virgin Mary is also significant, in that the Virgin Mary "acts as midwife and career of children [and] she also stands in for the sacristan of a convent who has run off with her lover"<sup>2</sup> all of which remind us of the story of Isabelle. Cixous asserts that women "Muffled throughout their history . . . have lived in dreams, in bodies (though muted), in silences, in aphonic revolts."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the silenced and repressed Isabelle returns centuries after and demands her story to be heard by haunting Ella's dreams. Isabelle's story can be interpreted as the semiotic, which according to Kristeva, can disrupt the symbolic order, which can be traced in language in the form of ruptures, absences and gaps. Moreover, that Isabelle's story breaks into Ella's demanding her story to be heard recalls the "explosive, *utterly* destructive, staggering return [of the repressed], with a force never yet unleashed and equal to the most forbidding of suppressions"<sup>4</sup> as Cixous writes.

Historians argue that witchcraft persecutions were the result of anxieties during intense social transformation.<sup>5</sup> As suggested by the Spanish saying, "I don't

---

<sup>2</sup> Leyser, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>3</sup> Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," p. 886.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> See Alan McFarlane, **Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A regional and comparative study**, 2nd ed., Introduction by James Sharpe, London, Routledge, 1999. Bronislaw Malinowski, "Gedanken zum Problem des Zauberwesens," **Die Dynamik des Kulturwandels**, Vienna, 1951, pp. 185-196. Christian Pfister, "Climatic Extremes, Recurrent Crises and Witch Hunts: Strategies of European Societies in Coping with Exogenous Shocks in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," **The Medieval History Journal** 10.1-2 (2007): pp. 33-73. Wolfgang Behringer, "Weather, Hunger and Fear: Origins of the European Witch-Hunts in Climate, Society and Mentality," **German History** 31.1 (1995): pp. 1-27.

In his lectures titled **Terror of History: Mystics, Heretics, and Witches in the Western Tradition**, Teofilo F. Ruiz focuses on witch hunting craze in Europe between 1000 and 1700 and underlines the fact that the persecution of witches coincides with the religious wars. Referring to Benedict Anderson's **Imagined Communities**, Ruiz discusses the birth of the Inquisition and creating Otherness--separating Jews, Muslims, heretics and lepers. In the early thirteenth century in the medieval West there was a growing sense of a national and collective identity, a growing sense in people that they were different from others, which can be traced in the segregation of the Jews and the lepers from society. See Benedict Anderson, **Imagined Communities**, London, Verso, 2003. By creating Otherness, the Church and the Papacy not only monitor and control the population but also benefit financially by confiscating the properties of the alleged heretics. Ruiz, *op. cit.* The victimised Other serves as spectacles of power, as everyone attends the public executions of those scapegoated,

believe in witchcraft but they [witches] exist, they exist!” throughout humanity the male elite rulers were eager to start witch hunts to find scapegoats they could blame for any social and economic changes that caused distress, such as famine, draught, poverty, plagues, wars and deaths. Beginning with the sixteenth century there has been great economical and social changes, such as the penetration of the church into places that were not wholly Christianized until then, which led to the witch craze and the death of nearly one hundred thousand people, mostly women.<sup>6</sup> Isabelle’s story takes place during the Protestant Reformation initiated with the teachings of Martin Luther in the sixteenth century. John Calvin, an associate of Luther, moved to Geneva to spread his teachings, also known as the Truth, which emphasized the significance of good deeds as well as faith and the direct worship of God without the need for a priest. Eventually, in 1560 and 1561, even the Catholic churches in the mountainous areas of France such as Cévennes were taken over by the Truth and the French Protestants, also known as the Huguenots. The year 1572 marks the Massacre of St Bartholomew, the murdering of thousands of Huguenots at a royal wedding, which was followed by persecutions throughout France and emigration of the Huguenots. In the novel when the Catholic soldiers kill the Duc and Jean Tournier, Isabelle’s father-in-law, for he is the **syndic** of the Duc de l’Aigle, and burn down the Tournier house and farm, Isabelle’s sister-in-law Susanne and her husband Bertrand flee with the Duchesse because Susanne is pregnant and near her time. The rest of the Tourniers and Isabelle migrate from Cévennes, France to Moutier, Switzerland. The Edict of Nantes, protecting the rights of Protestants, introduced only a period of temporary peace, in that it was revoked by Louis XIV in 1685, after which it was much worse for the Cevenol Protestants. The Camisard rebellion, the rebellion of the Huguenots in the Cevennes against the French government in the early eighteenth

---

such as burning at the stake, thus showing support from below. See R.M. Toivo, “The Witch-Craze as Holocaust: The Rise of Persecuting Societies”, **Witchcraft Historiography**, eds. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies, Houndmills, Macmillan, 2010, pp. 90-107.

Moreover, Henry V, Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Mary, and James I are among the monarchs who feared their enemies consulted the Devil and/or the witches and used witchcraft to murder them. One example to the witch hunts that stemmed from political anxieties and fears is the Scottish Witch Trial (1590), the trial of over two hundred people who were claimed to have gathered on 31 October 1589, that is, all Hallow E’en, at the old haunted church of North Berwick to consult the Devil on how to kill King James. See Kramer, Sprenger, **op. cit.**, p. 14. Russell, Aleksander, **op. cit.**, pp. 90-103.

<sup>6</sup> Ruiz, **op. cit.**

century was repressed. As a result, the Huguenots were once again forced to worship secretly. Ruiz explains witch craze as what took place in Europe during the time of the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution, between 1480s and 1660s. In this period of witch craze between eighty thousand and one hundred thousand people were executed.

Even before Isabelle was scapegoated and persecuted as a herbalist-healer-midwife-witch, she crosses the religious boundary and is persecuted by the villagers because of her red hair which associates her with the Virgin Mary, regarded as heretical after the Protestant Revolution. One day the sunlight reflecting from the blue-painted niche behind the statue of the Virgin Mary touches Isabelle's hair and makes it turn red. She is nicknamed **La Rousse**--a Cevenol nickname for the girls with red hair, after the Virgin Mary because she also had red hair. Isabelle's red hair and nickname become a curse when a Calvinist priest, Monsieur Marcel, replaces their Catholic priest. Monsieur Marcel starts preaching that they have contaminated the Virgin Mary with the candles, the paintings, the statues and the trinkets and she is preventing them from reaching the Truth. The children, mostly boys, start to follow Isabelle from the church to her house, whispering among themselves, pulling her hair and saying she is dirty. Isabelle has to wear a headcloth to hide her chestnut, "shameful hair"<sup>7</sup> which makes her a scapegoat, a spectacle of power, an embodiment of everything Catholicism represents. After the Catholic priest leaves and the villagers take over the church, the villagers led by Etienne Tournier, the son of the **syndic** and Isabelle's main oppressor, force Isabelle to tear down the statue of the Virgin Mary. In the meantime, not even her own twin brothers help Isabelle and she cannot see her father in the crowd. Just as the family and friends of the women accused of being witches, so they are afraid of being stigmatised and persecuted for being a witch, an agent of the Devil, too. The villagers, who have never before seen or heard breaking glass, are so ignorant and superstitious that they think it is the deed of the Devil when a boy is cut by a shard of glass after they break the church glass with a painting depicting a scene from the Original Sin.

---

<sup>7</sup> Tracy Chevalier, **The Virgin Blue**, London, Harper, 2006, p. 17.

Isabelle is not only socially persecuted by the villagers but also sexually abused and exploited by Etienne. As he grows older, Etienne starts forcing himself on Isabelle, who never fights back. He squeezes her breasts, kisses her and eventually forces her to have sexual intercourse with him; he marries her when she becomes pregnant. Isabelle has to marry her oppressor and live with his family after she gets pregnant from him. After the death of Isabelle's sister Marie and mother, the twin brothers, Petit Henri and Gérard, have to leave in order to join the war. Isabelle's father Henri du Moulin does not approve the marriage. He despises the Tourniers because they are wealthy and give money to the church but nothing to the beggars. Moreover, they marry their cousins and Jean Tournier is the **syndic**. Henri du Moulin says Isabelle will have her dowry but not the farm. He will not let a Tournier live in his house or take his farm; so he will leave it to his nephews. As for Etienne's family, his mother Hannah believes that Isabelle's baby is from someone else while Etienne believes Isabelle got pregnant on purpose. Isabelle thinks Etienne wants to marry her only because his mother hates her the most; this marriage is Etienne's only act of rebellion against his family. It should also be noted that Etienne calls Isabelle by her name, and not **La Rousse**, for the first time when he addresses his parents and announces that Isabelle is pregnant and he wants to marry her--most probably to annoy his mother rather than to please Isabelle. The second and last time he calls Isabelle by her name is after the Tourniers drown and bury Marie under the fireplace.

Language is yet another tool of oppression at the hands of the patriarchy. Man-made language represents women as deficient and positions them as the negative and lacking end of the binary oppositions. Dale Spender states that:

The English language has been literally man made and . . . it is still primarily under male control . . . This monopoly over language is one of the means by which males have ensured their own primacy, and consequently have ensured the invisibility or "other" nature of females, and this primacy is perpetuated while women continue to use, unchanged, the language which we have invented.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Dale Spender, **Man Made Language**, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 12.

Accordingly, Cheris Kramarae argues that “English lexicon is a structure organized to glorify maleness and ignore, trivialize or derogate femaleness.”<sup>9</sup> As long as women use this man-made language, they are bound to be trapped in a male discourse of submission. In the novel, upon the order of Jean Tournier, the patriarch of the house, all the Tourniers start chanting the psalms for protection when the Catholic soldiers are trying to break into their house. Then, Isabelle and Marie are shown chanting the psalms by themselves when there is a threat. So the women are expecting the word of the Father, the ultimate patriarch, to protect them. Kramarae says that “those who have the power to name the world are in a position to influence reality.”<sup>10</sup> The man-made language serves the needs of the patriarchy when it names and defines the female as inferior and subservient to the male. That Isabelle is called **La Rousse** in a derogatory manner, as mentioned above, reflects to the power of language too. Naming suggests authority and ownership. The power of naming is stated in Genesis where Adam, the sovereign and keeper of the Garden of Eden, names all the creatures and the first woman, Eve. Isabelle’s insistence on naming Marie points to her wish to have more authority over her daughter than Etienne and the Tourniers but eventually leads to Marie’s persecution due to her mother’s influence, due to the belief that witchcraft was inherited as well as her red hair and “heretical” name, after the Virgin Mary, and to her being drowned. Isabelle gives birth to three children: Petit Jean, born in blood, is a fearless child; Jacob, born blue, is a quiet child; and Marie, born in a flood of clear liquid with her eyes open, is a hopeful child. Isabelle prays to the Virgin Mary for her third baby to be a girl and promises to name her after the Virgin like her dead sister Marie no matter what everyone else says. Petit Jean inherits not only Etienne’s father’s name but also Etienne’s anger, oppression and violence. Jacob and Marie, however, take after Isabelle’s side of the family and are associated with the Virgin Mary, in that Marie was named after her and the colour blue which represented hope was attributed to her.

---

<sup>9</sup> Cheris Kramarae, **Women and Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis**, Rowley, Newbury House, 1981, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 165.

(Re)naming is taken one step further when Etienne in a way brands Isabelle with his initials. Etienne sometimes forces and sometimes tricks her to having sex with him like he does when she wants to learn how to read and write and asks Etienne to teach her how to write her name because the Tourniers are the only family in the village that owns a Bible, any book for that matter, and can write. Although Etienne knows only how to write his initials, he tricks Isabelle into having sex with him in return for teaching her writing his initials instead and makes her believe that it has become her name now that she has written it. When he is forcing Isabelle to have sex with him, he presses her head down on the paper. Since the ink is still wet, she gets branded on her forehead with Etienne's initials written backwards. In early modern societies, Ruiz notes, slaves also began to be branded on the forehead with the name of their owner, indicating ownership. He also emphasizes the sexual connotation of being branded with a mark.<sup>11</sup> The Devil is also believed to have named and branded the witches during the witches' Sabbath. That the initials are imprinted backwards on Isabelle's forehead is yet again reminiscent of the backwards chanting and dancing of the witches, disrupting the order and bringing chaos. Etienne's initials imprinted backwards might also be interpreted as Isabelle's way of disrupting the male discourse and order since she will not be subservient to Etienne as discussed. However, being under the constant surveillance of the Tourniers and the community, and being subject to constant verbal and physical violence as mentioned above, Isabelle is eventually terrorised into silence and submission:

She began to speak less, silent now by the fire at night, no longer telling the children stories or singing or laughing. She felt she was shrinking, that if she kept quiet she might become less visible, and be able to escape the suspicion entrapping her, the nameless threat hanging in the air.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Ruiz, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

Michel Foucault discusses how the disciplinary methods “lowered the threshold of describable individuality” and turned it into “a means of control and method of domination”<sup>13</sup> and how the mechanism of “panopticonism” used by Western disciplinary societies causes each member of the society to internalise the power of the state and its institutions, which was thus exercised through self-regulatory behaviours and practices. Isabelle, likewise, being closely monitored by her husband, her mother-in-law and even her own son, is intimidated into growing more and more self-conscious and submissive. Jacques Derrida argues that like the Western patriarchal discourse regards unity, identity and presence as superior to absence: “Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence.”<sup>14</sup> Feminist theorists have suggested ways to disrupt the phallogocentric discourse which associates men with presence and being and women with absence and death. Irigaray argues that there are two options for women to exist in phallogocentric discourse--either to mimic the male discourse until it is emptied of meaning or to be silenced only to exist in the gaps and interstices, both of which Isabelle tries. She mimics the male discourse when Etienne tricks her that his initials (discourse) become her initials, her name and discourse, as long as she is the one who writes them. Then again, since they are printed backwards on her forehead as mentioned above, it implies that she is mimicking the male discourse only to disrupt it. Moreover, she also chants the Psalms with Jean Tournier, mimicking the discourse of the church and the patriarch both, ironically, as a means of protection from the male oppression, against the Catholic soldiers and villagers. As for the other option, existing in silences and in interstices within the male discourse, like the women present at birth singing and sharing stories, Isabelle sings and tells stories to her children by the fire or haunts Ella’s dreams to tell her story. In other words, Isabelle exists in the gaps of phallogocentric discourse--songs, stories, and dreams. That Isabelle no longer tells stories or sings songs to her children means on a metaphorical level the absence, the death, of the female discourse and heritage. She would not be able to pass on her daughter Marie “the old knowledge” her mother taught her even if

---

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, **Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison**, trans. Alan Sheridan, London, Penguin, 1997, p. 191.

Marie was not sacrificed at a very young age by the Tourniers. Cixous offers writing as a solution, saying “that writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.”<sup>15</sup> It is Ella who follows Cixous’s argument on writing and who pens the herstory of Isabelle, in an attempt to unravel and disrupt the male discourse and provide alternative endings for Isabelle’s story at the end of the novel.

The body of the witch may also be regarded as a transgression of the physical boundary in itself. Irigaray draws an analogy between woman’s psychology and body, “in its absolute fluidity, its plasticity to all metamorphoses, its ubiquity in all its compossibilities, its invisibility”.<sup>16</sup> Isabelle gets scars from the cold and the coarse undercloth she wears to keep warm in the cold and harsh winters of Moutier; her leaking body reflects her psychology after being constantly monitored, being exposed to verbal and physical violence and her social and domestic functions being curtailed. Also, as Purkiss asserts, “the suffering female body”, here Isabelle’s body in particular, “can be used as a trope of timelessness which erases the specificity with which these experiences are mediated by social and discursive practices.”<sup>17</sup> Isabelle has lice and itches in the creases on the inside of her elbows and behind her knee. However, she fears to scratch these places and tries very hard to hide the blood and stains on her skin from Etienne not knowing of what he would accuse her because as Irigaray states “*Fluid* must remain that secret, sacred, *remainder* of the one. Blood but also milk, sperm, lymph, spittle, saliva, tears . . .”<sup>18</sup> As a matter of fact, when Etienne does notice the blood, he gives her another very hard beating.

Among the women persecuted for being witches, like Isabelle and her mother in the novel, were herbalist healers and midwives; the women who helped with birth and healed the sick were thought capable of murdering or inflicting illnesses on others as well. Three generations of women, Isabelle’s mother, Isabelle and her daughter Marie are accused of committing some of the crimes Bodin lists as the

---

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Maryland, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” p. 879.

<sup>16</sup> Irigaray, “Volume without contours,” *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

crimes committed by the witches in **De La Demonomanie des Sorciers (The Demonomania of Witches)**: pledging to Satan babies yet in the womb; sacrificing babies to the Devil before they have been baptised; causing infertility in the fields and thus famine; and having sexual intercourse with the Devil.<sup>19</sup> Sylvia Federici notes that:

women began to be prosecuted in large numbers, and more were executed for infanticide in 16th and 17th-century Europe than for any other crime, except for witchcraft, a charge that also centered on the killing of children and other violations of reproductive norms.

...

Both in France and England, starting from the end of the 16th century, few women were allowed to practice obstetrics, an activity that, until that time, has been inviolable mystery.<sup>20</sup>

Llewellyn Barstow also points to the fact that “The second heaviest concentration of European witch trials was in the French-speaking lands, especially on their margins”, like the two villages in **The Virgin Blue**. After the Catholic Reformation, the church was particularly hard on women: “Heavy penalties for illegitimate births and irregular marriages, and the death penalty for abortion and infanticide, placed new limits on women’s control over their bodies and their lives.”<sup>21</sup> That the herbalist-healer-midwife, who “asserted what control was possible over fertility, conception, successful pregnancy, and safe childbirth . . . cured male impotence and female infertility, performed abortions, provided contraceptives”,<sup>22</sup> had so much knowledge about and control over women’s body as well as life and death posed a threat for the patriarchal society, especially for the church because the priests, too, played the role of the healer and did not welcome the competition. Federici asserts that the marginalisation of the midwife meant women’s losing their control over procreation and playing a more passive role whereas the male doctors

---

<sup>18</sup> Irigaray, “Volume without contours,” *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> See Bodin, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-484.

<sup>20</sup> Federici, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89, 183.

<sup>21</sup> Llewellyn Barstow, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

took over the title “giver of life”. Engels, additionally, “argues that the source of the oppression of women came from the exclusion of women from social production and the conversion of household tasks into a private service.”<sup>23</sup> Accordingly the Tourniers do not allow Isabelle to practise midwifery after she marries Etienne. Actually, Isabelle does assume the role of the witch one time to make use of the fear of the Tourniers. She threatens them to put a curse on their crops if they do not let her name her baby Marie after her dead sister, and after the Virgin Mary. Isabelle’s mother is a herbalist-healer-midwife and Isabelle is her little helper. One day they stay a bit longer after a birth, listening to the songs and stories visiting the woman in labour as it is the tradition. When they are returning home at twilight, a rabid wolf attacks and bites Isabelle’s mother, who dies a few weeks after. The villagers believe that the wolf was sent by the devil to take Isabelle’s mother who was working for him; they blame Isabelle’s mother for the recent string of deaths of mother and/or babies during birth, including the death of her own daughter Marie and her baby, who is born dead because her head is too big and she is strangled by the umbilical cord. Accordingly, in **Malleus Maleficarum** it is claimed that “some witches can kill the baby in the mother’s womb simply by laying their hands on the mother.”<sup>24</sup> Being a herbalist-healer-midwife, Isabelle’s mother uses a lot of herbs to help both the mother and the baby during birth and Isabelle, who accompanies and helps her mother, is also good with the herbs. She looks after her mother after she is bitten by a rabid wolf. She cleans her wound with water boiled with shepherd’s purse and lays cobwebs over it before she binds it with soft wool. She adds rosemary and sage in her mother’s omelette and mouths a silent prayer over it too. Isabelle does not let the new Catholic priest pass the threshold to pray for her mother. She holds a broom across the doorway blocking the entrance and lets the Catholic priest in only after Monsieur Marcel, who is a Calvinist priest and a cobbler, arrives. Apart from the witches riding to the nocturnal gatherings on their broomsticks, the broom was the protector of the fire and the hearth. Isabelle too is trying to protect their house from the invasion of the Catholic priest, confirming with the impositions and expectations of her community, for she is already being bashed for her red hair and her mother is

---

<sup>23</sup> Engels, **op. cit.**, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Kramer, Sprenger, **op. cit.**, p. 189.

accused of being a witch. Yet another reference to the broom, this time as a herbalist medicine, is when Isabelle dreams that the shepherd gives her the yellow flowers of the brooms and tells her to put them in hot water and drink it. The broom is again loaded with positive connotations such as being a herbal medicine. Moreover, like her mother, Isabelle can assess pregnancy and pregnant women. When Susanne has to ride to escape from the Catholic soldiers although her time is near, she advises her to ride the ass sideways to support the baby with her legs. She also helps Pascale, whom they befriend in Moutier, have an abortion, which was considered to be the greatest sexual sin alongside contraception.<sup>25</sup> Pascale and her father Gaspard's used to run an inn in Lyons. As an aftermath of the Massacre of St Bartholomew, the Catholic soldiers invade their inn. Pascale's father tells her to keep the soldiers busy serving them wine while he is packing so that they can escape. The Catholic soldiers rape Pascale. She is now three months pregnant and her father still knows nothing about the rape or the baby. Isabelle gathers some juniper and rue from the depths of the woods to make a paste for Pascale to eat. The two women meet among the rocks at the top of the gorge, kneel on the ground and pray to Saint Margaret until Pascale bleeds and the ground is red with blood. As a matter of fact, Isabelle frequents the woods to gather herbs and roots as well as to help Pascale lose her baby, to pull out Marie's read hair and the hidden baby goat she has helped being delivered and then the blue cloth. The villagers in Moutier start talking about her. A woodcutter sees her in the woods with a baby goat and then some other villager finds out the patch of blood left from Pascale's abortion. Hannah has told Etienne that Isabelle talked to a shepherd when they left Mont Lozère. They also know about the goat and think she either sacrificed it to the Devil in the woods, probably because of the patch of blood, or traded it with the peddler. On the one hand, the goat is "associated with love, knowledge, fertility, prophecy, expiation, regeneration, and rebirth",<sup>26</sup> all of which are reminiscent of the herbalist-healer-midwife-witch and her knowledge and medicinal use of nature. On the other hand, the goat is associated with the Devil, because the "early Christian Church tried to equate the horned Pagan God with the biblical devil or Satan figure"; for this reason, "In the sixteenth and seventeenth

---

<sup>25</sup> Llewellyn Barstow, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>26</sup> Illes, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

centuries . . . in France, Italy and the Basque region, the Devil is depicted with the horns of a goat.”<sup>27</sup> In some confession of the witches, the Devil was depicted as a he-goat. Similarly, the etchings of Goya represent the Devil as a he-goat associated with extreme sexuality and bestiality. That is why Etienne accuses Isabelle of “witchery”<sup>28</sup> and beats her until she loses consciousness with one of the wooden sticks Petit Jean has cut. Etienne is the inflictor of the punishment, the torture, Hannah is the accuser and Petit Jean is both the accuser and the provider of the method and means of punishment; the Tourniers almost re-enact the witch trials and persecutions. Hannah has not been speaking since their house was set on fire by the Catholic soldiers. Isabelle, mistakenly assuming that Hannah has gone dumb and cannot tell anyone anything, speaks freely in front of her about the shed in the forest where they hide the goat. Gilbert and Gubar mention that “female bonding is extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy: women almost inevitably turn against women because the voice of the . . . [patriarch] sets them against each other.”<sup>29</sup> Llewellyn Barstow provides an explanation regarding why women accused other women of being witches: “if a woman displeased or threatened the men of her community, she would also be seen as dangerous by the women who depended on or identified with those men.”<sup>30</sup> After the death of his father, Etienne is the patriarch of the house. Etienne’s brutal treatment of Isabelle and Marie also determines the way Hannah and Petit Jean treat her and Marie.

It was believed that the witches met the Devil in the woods in their nocturnal gatherings, in the witches’ Sabbath and sacrificed babies, had orgies and had sex with their familiars and the Devil. The “edge of the depths of woods, water and the unconscious—the places where things can turn into their opposites”<sup>31</sup> were the abode of the mythical and fairy tale witches such as the Furies, that is the Weird Sisters,

---

<sup>27</sup> Grimassi, *op. cit.*, p.44. Grimassi also notes that the image of Baphomet, the Goat of the Witches’ Sabbath, was particularly designed to test the dedication of self-proclaimed modern day witches. Any true seeker of the mystery teachings would not be afraid to proceed simply on account of being afraid of the image of the monstrous head of the goat on an androgynous body, representing the balance between masculine and feminine polarities, enlightenment. *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>28</sup> Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>29</sup> Gilbert, Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 38. See Margaret A. Murray, “Witches and the Number Thirteen,” *Folklore* 31.3 (1920): p. 207.

<sup>30</sup> Llewellyn Barstow, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> N. Hall, *The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections on the Archetypal Feminine*, New York, Harper & Row, 1980, p. 256.

and the witch in Hansel and Gretel. The forest then is the place where binary oppositions are turned upside down. Illes underlines that since man-made hierarchies do not apply in the forest, it is an equaliser. She notes that forests have always been associated with witchcraft, in that “when Christianity banished spell-casting and magical traditions, some practitioners sought privacy and independence in the woods. These people eventually came to be called witches”.<sup>32</sup> They would study the power of vegetation, how to communicate with the animals and travel to the world of spirits. Like it is for Isabella, “For these practitioners, the forest was home, shrine and medicine cabinet all in one.”<sup>33</sup> Illes reminds us of the legend of Kybele as the first witch: Kybele, born an unwanted female child and left in a forest as a baby, was nurtured and raised by the leopards. She invented witchcraft in the forest making use of trees, roots, animals and spirits. She left the forest temporarily only to pass on her wisdom other women.

Isabelle’s daughter Marie is accused of being a heretic and a witch, worshipping the Devil. She has blond hair but if it were red, Isabelle says she would dye it with the juice of the black walnuts, so that Marie would not be persecuted like Isabelle is. Then Marie starts to have red strands in her hair. In the spring Isabelle regularly takes her to the woods to inspect her hair and pull out the red strands. Marie keeps her growing ball of red hair and hides in a nearby tree in the woods. Soon they notice that the birds took her hair to make a nest out of it, which yet again associates the female with nature. Marie’s hair, which is considered sinful in the patriarchal society, proves useful and protective in nature. Petit Jean finds the bird nest made out of Marie’s red hair when he was cutting sticks in the woods. In addition to her red hair, Marie is caught wearing a blue undercloth, which Pascale has sewn for her using the cloth Isabelle got from the Catholic peddler. Isabelle notices a hidden baby goat trying to push out, secretly helps the delivery and hides it in the woods. Then she trades the baby goat for the blue cloth. In order to show her gratitude to Isabelle and to thank her, Pascale decides to sew a dress for Marie using the blue cloth. The peddler tells Isabelle that the weaver makes this special blue cloth to show his gratitude for having his missing daughter back. He models it after the robe of the

---

<sup>32</sup> Illes, *op. cit.*, pp. 658-659.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 657.

Virgin Mary in a painting by one of Isabelle's ancestors. He claims that his daughter will always be safe and under the protection of the Virgin Mary. Pascale wants to provide such a protection for Marie when she sews a dress for her and makes her wear it under her clothes, which ironically has the opposite effect, causing her imminent death. Having caught Marie wearing a "Catholic cloth",<sup>34</sup> Hannah, Etienne and Petit Jean first fill the pockets of her black dress with stones, then drown her in the river and finally bury her under the hearth Etienne has built for their new house. In the meantime they mislead Isabelle by telling her to look for Marie in the woods, They claim that she wanted to show her new blue dress to the Devil; therefore, she tore her black dress and left it behind. Marie's being almost certainly drowned and then buried under the fireplace by the Tourniers as a sacrifice, as discussed below, recalls the ways the witches were persecuted.

Mies draws a parallel between the exploitation of women by men and the exploitation of nature by men:

Bacon's scientific method, which is still the foundation of modern science, unified knowledge with material power. Many of the technological inventions were in fact related to warfare and conquest, like gunpowder, navigation, the magnet . . . Violence, therefore, was the key word and key method by which the New Man established his domination over women and nature.

. . . it was necessary that the old autonomy of women over their sexuality and reproductive capacities be destroyed, and that women be forcibly made to breed . . . Similarly, nature had to be transformed into a vast reservoir of material sources to be exploited and turned into profit by this class.<sup>35</sup>

Francis Bacon's method and ideology of examining nature, which is inspired by the witch trials and executions of the Inquisition, reminds us of Etienne's verbally abusing, bashing and beating Isabelle to make her confess her deeds and forcing Isabelle to have sex with him. Etienne's sexually forcing himself on Isabelle is reminiscent of the scientists' struggle to penetrate into the depths of nature. Purkiss

---

<sup>34</sup> Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>35</sup> Mies, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

says that the midwife represented “the female sexual autonomy which the church cannot tolerate.”<sup>36</sup> Walker explains the reason behind such hostility to midwives as “the notion that midwives could help women control their own fate, learn secrets of sex and birth control, or procure abortions.”<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Merchant argues that:

The principal villain in Bacon’s secular Recovery Narrative was nature, cast in female gender. Although Eve’s inquisitiveness may have caused “man’s” Fall from “his” God-given domain, for Bacon the relentless interrogation of nature (as fallen Eve) could regain it. Bacon used the inquisition and the courtroom as models for cross examination of nature.<sup>38</sup>

Eve’s inquisitiveness and eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge and sharing this knowledge is actually reminiscent of the herbalist-healer-midwife-witch, who were known as the wise-women in the medieval age, studying the vegetation; gathering herbs, roots and flowers from the depths of the forest; and sharing their knowledge about herb lore, the female body, reproduction, contraceptives and abortion with other women, most often their daughters or granddaughters. Ehrenreich and English assert that:

. . . the witch was an empiricist: she relied on her senses rather than on faith or doctrine, she believed in trial and error, cause and effect. Her attitude was not religiously passive but actively inquiring. She trusted her ability to find ways to deal with disease, pregnancy and childbirth—whether through medication or charms. In short, her magic was the science of her time.<sup>39</sup>

Many historians trace the origins of witchcraft in Europe to the very early religions of mankind, the vegetation religions, agrarian and fertility cults, and their incantations, rituals and ceremonies to ensure fertility and prevent famine, draught,

---

<sup>36</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, New York, Harper & Row, 1985, pp. 654-655.

<sup>38</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*, New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 75.

flood and so on. Accordingly, Ruiz argues that religion and magic have always been intertwined and that magic is the way in which pre-historical human beings try to control and dominate nature and the world. The rituals of the Church itself were indeed perceived by the worshippers as magic too. Magic, alchemy and science were overlapping in the late fifteenth century, during the time of witch craze. Ruiz notes that science too has elements of magic and that an alchemist or a magician is not that different from a scientist. Bacon for instance doubled in magic and science. However, in the 1650s and 1660s with the emergence and rise of the Scientific Revolution science, magic and religion had clear-cut boundaries. Science prevailed over magic due to the process of secularization in Europe. Keith Thomas argues in his book **Religion and the Decline of Magic** that the adoption of a new kind of religion leads to the decline of magic.<sup>40</sup> **The Virgin Blue**, too, delineates how magic and religion was at first intertwined through the Tourniers' traditions and practices. When the Catholic soldiers burn the Tournier farm down and are trying to break into the house, Jean Tournier, Isabelle's father-in-law, starts singing a psalm and asks the others to join him. The Huguenots recited the psalms, especially the Psalm 31, as a means of protection when bad things happened. After the soldiers kill Jean, Isabelle takes her children and runs out of the house and feels a blue light, that is, the Virgin Mary, surround and protect her. When they are running away from their village and a group of men cut their way in the forest, Marie, Jacob and Isabelle again start chanting the psalms. The Tourniers keep mentioning the magic protecting their houses in Cévennes. The Tourniers have been living in that house for a hundred years and they claim that no babies died in that house yet. However, the same cannot be claimed for the girls, as it turns out at the end of the novel that the Tourniers have been burying their children under the hearth. Susanne explains that the magic that protects the house is in the hearth and that it is older than praying but not older than God; however, she claims talking any more than that about the magic would ruin the power of the magic.<sup>41</sup> Hannah Tournier, Isabelle's mother-in-law, kneels down in front of the hearth, lights candles and prays to the magic. Etienne builds a chimney

---

<sup>39</sup> Ehrenreich, English, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> Keith Thomas, **Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England**, London, Penguin, 1991.

and a hearth in their new house in Moutier and buries Marie under the hearth. Jean-Paul, the librarian, explains the Tourniers's tradition:

'In some cultures people bury things in the foundations of houses when they're built. Bodies of animals, sometimes shoes. Sometimes, not often, humans. The idea was that their souls would remain with the house and scare away evil spirits.

. . .  
Religion has never completely destroyed superstition. Christianity was like a layer over the older beliefs – it covered them but they didn't disappear.'<sup>42</sup>

Returning to Ehrenreich and English's calling the witch an empiricist, once again the herbalist-healer-midwife-witch defies the silent and passive receptacle role imposed on her through the binary opposites; she is an active, questioning, experimenting and transforming seeker of knowledge and power to control life and death. Searching for such knowledge and power in the depths of the forest, the herbalist-healer-midwife-witch crosses the civilisation-nature boundary. Moi notes that since Cixous and Irigaray show "that femininity is defined as lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos and darkness—in short, as non-Being" and since "Kristeva's emphasis on marginality allows us to view this repression of the feminine as marginal in terms of *positionality* rather than of essences", women who, according to patriarchy, occupy "a marginal position within the symbolic order", might as well be regarded as "the *limit* or borderline of that order."<sup>43</sup> Isabelle's contribution to the community can be confined to neither domestic nor social spheres although marginalisation of the herbalist-healer-midwife particularly aims to isolate women from the social sphere by not allowing them to have any social functions or productivity and thus confining them to the domestic sphere. Isabelle, however, plays a social role as a herbalist-healer-midwife as well as a domestic role caring for animals, crops, cooking, baking, preserving food, caring for and educating children,

---

<sup>41</sup> Chevalier, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>43</sup> Moi, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-67.

nursing sick family members, advising on pregnancy, helping with abortion and birth, which recalls the medieval women's work and contribution to Europe's economic life.<sup>44</sup>

Merchant asserts that "Although Marx and Engels ultimately opted for the domination of nature through technology and science, their insight into the interaction between human production and nonhuman nature is fundamental to the history of ecological thinking."<sup>45</sup> In his **Capital**, Marx uses the term "Appropriation of Nature" (**Aneignung der Natur**) to mean "making nature our own, humanizing nature" and "to have dominance, control and mastership over nature". The latter use of the phrase recalls men's attempts at gaining dominance over women. Mies disagrees with the early Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg who claims that for the development of productive forces, that is, human's total control and dominance over nature, warfare and violence can be justified.<sup>46</sup> This is the reason why the church and the state accused herbalist healers and midwives of being witches and executed them; the patriarchal institutions, the male elite rulers wanted to have complete control over the female body and reproduction.

Whereas post-Cartesian dichotomies associate nature always with evil and disorder, nature plays a completely opposite role for the herbalist healers and midwives who gather herbs and roots from the depths of the woods. Neumann's description of the Great Mother recalls the herbalist-healer-midwife-witch's control over life and death and her power to heal and to kill--her knowledge of birth control, contraceptives and abortion: "the protectress, the good mother who feeds man with fruits and tubers and grains, but also poisons him and lets him hunger and thirst in times of drought, when she withdraws from living things."<sup>47</sup> Also pointing to the dual nature of the Great Goddess, Rich calls "the eternal giver of life and embodiment of the natural order, including death."<sup>48</sup> Isabelle refers to midwifery, to what she has learned from her mother about midwifery as "the old knowledge".<sup>49</sup> In

---

<sup>44</sup> See Llewellyn Barstow, **op. cit.**, p. 101.

<sup>45</sup> Carolyn Merchant, **Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England**, 2nd ed., USA, University of North Carolina Press, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> See Mies, **op.cit.**, p. 73 n10.

<sup>47</sup> Neumann, **op. cit.**, p. 52.

<sup>48</sup> Rich, **op. cit.**, p. 72.

<sup>49</sup> Chevalier, **op.cit.**, p. 65.

the Neolithic age, the Mother Earth was symbolised by objects connoting fertility and rebirth such as water cups, butterflies and snakes. There was a duality inherent in the female deities which can be detected in their representations. For instance, the snake, on the one hand, symbolises death as its poison can kill; on the other hand, poison is also used in medicine as a cure. Moreover, the snake also symbolises rebirth for it sheds its skin.

Moreover, while women are associated thus with nature and chaos, men are associated with science and progress. Accordingly in the novel when Isabelle has her first menstrual period, her mother calls it **les fleurs**, “special flowers from God”.<sup>50</sup> When Isabelle’s sister Marie dies giving birth to a still-born baby, they bury her in a sunny spot where she liked to sit and plant a cypress tree over her heart. When her mother dies, they plant a second cypress tree for her. Neumann notes that “the symbols of the transformative character almost always retain a connection with the elementary character of the Feminine and with the symbols of the womb and belly region.”<sup>51</sup> **The Virgin Blue** abounds with such recurrent images. There is a repeating river scene depicting Isabelle and Ella each, lying backwards on the river. In two of these scenes, both women are pregnant, their bellies push above the water and they cup the mound with their hands.<sup>52</sup> Here the river is also reminiscent of the amniotic fluid. Sir A.E. Wallis Budge argues that the Great Goddess can be traced in all water sources such as:

the sea of heaven on which sail the barks of the gods of light, the circular, life-generating ocean above and below the earth. To her belong all waters, streams, fountains, ponds and springs, as well as the rain.<sup>53</sup>

It was believed that the Ocean encircled the earth like the Ouroboros, the snake biting its own tail. Isabelle and Ella’s bellies, pushing above the water,

---

<sup>50</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Neumann, **op. cit.**, p. 47.

<sup>52</sup> See Chevalier, **op. cit.**, pp. 22, 301.

<sup>53</sup> Sir E.A. Wallis Budge, **The Gods of the Egyptians, or Studies in Egyptian Mythology**, 2 Vols., Methuen & Co., London, 1904, p. 301.

surrounded with waters and containing life, recalls this ancient description of the earth, which once again associates womb, vessel and a new world with one another. Moreover, Isabelle resembles nature to the female when she says the Cevenol mountains look like a women's belly whereas the mountains of the Jura, where they had to migrate, looks like a woman's shoulders. The Cevenol mountains, looking like a woman's belly, suggest the productive role Isabelle used to play as a herbalist healer and midwife. She hates "the rough, steep [Jura] mountains, the strange crops, [and] the hard winters"<sup>54</sup> of the Moutier. However, the gorge at the East of Moutier, which looks like a giant vagina, inspires awe in her. If she is alone, she crosses herself when she passes the gorge. Ella, likewise, describes the limestone gorge as:

a dramatic wall of yellow-grey rock extending from mountains on either side, crumbled in the centre to allow the Birse to pass through. It was impressive with the sun shining on it; it reminded me of a cathedral.<sup>55</sup>

As mentioned above, she helps Pascale with the abortion and the two women kneel down and pray together at the gorge too. Furthermore, Neumann states that "the gate as entrance and the womb is a primordial symbol of the Great Mother."<sup>56</sup> That Isabelle chooses to perform the abortion at the gorge, which is an entrance and resembles a womb, once again depicts her crossing the life-death boundary.

To further illustrate her unity with nature, Isabelle is either associated with or guided by animals. She has some special relationship with the wolves, which is not completely explained in the novel. The wolf she first encounters in the novel, for instance, does not harm Isabelle. The wolf she encounters after her mother's death whenever she needs guidance or encouragement is almost certainly her mother as she thanks it, calling it "*Maman*."<sup>57</sup> Upon biting Isabelle's mother, it looks at Isabelle shortly and runs away into the dark. Then Isabelle runs into another wolf when she is walking to the Tourniers' farm, so that she and Etienne can announce to Etienne's

---

<sup>54</sup> Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>56</sup> Neumann, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>57</sup> Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

family that Isabelle is pregnant and they want to get married. Although she is afraid of the wolf, Isabelle picks up a branch and scares it away by waving the branch and shouting at it. Fending off the wolf gives Isabelle courage to talk to the Tourniers about her pregnancy. The second time the wolf-mother appears is when the Catholic soldiers burn the Tournier farm. The third time the wolf-mother appears is when Isabelle is searching for Marie in the woods. It drives her like a sheep and leads her back to the house where Etienne is hiding Marie's body to be buried under the hearth as a sacrifice. Mazzoni states that she-wolf was "often represented as a physical pedestal—for its new spiritual order. As a visual connection to divine power and ancient greatness".<sup>58</sup> However, **Malleus Maleficarum** associates witches with the wolves because the latter devour their own cubs just like witches were believed to devour babies.<sup>59</sup> Then, Isabelle's mother returning from the dead as a wolf also recalls the cannibalism accusations against midwives.

Isabelle is associated with a female hence reddish-brown kestrel. The colour of its feathers which recalls the colour of Isabelle's hair is not the only similarity they have. The name of the kestrel is derived from its call, from the Latin word **crepicella** meaning "to rattle, creak or crackle".<sup>60</sup> Isabelle too in a way communicates with Ella in her recurrent blue nightmares. A bond is created between these two women, which enables them to communicate, after Ella moves to France and decides to get pregnant. The kestrel is a bird of prey, symbolising power and vitality in nature. Likewise, Isabelle, who is actually a herbalist-healer-midwife, is accused of being a witch and killing mothers during the birth and sacrificing new born babies to the Devil. Her healing and killing powers and knowledge of nature, herbs and roots, inspire fear. The kestrel is also a migrating bird, adaptive and resourceful and can survive in any kind of environment.<sup>61</sup> Isabelle too survives the oppression and torture of the Tourniers; she gets very sick and has psoriasis and lice but survives the harsh winters of the mountain village they have to migrate to after the Catholic soldiers burn down the Tournier house, farm and live stock. Just as the kestrel has keen

---

<sup>58</sup> Cristina Mazzoni, **She-wolf: The Story of a Roman Icon**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Kramer, Sprenger, **op. cit.**, p. 111.

<sup>60</sup> Ronald H Wauer, **Kestrel: Falcon of Many Names**, Colorado, Johnson Books, 2005, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> See **Ibid.**

eyesight, so Isabelle can see a thread of blue cloth coming out of the furnace of the fireplace and understands they buried Marie under the fireplace.

The Epilogue leaves Isabelle at the crossroads on her knees, bathed in blue light, and with “three choices: she can either go forward, she can go back, or she can remain where she is.”<sup>62</sup> The crossroads suggest choosing which path to follow, that is, decision-making. Ella says out of all three possibilities, the worst would be to turn back and live for the rest of her life in a house with her daughter’s body under the hearth. One other possibility is that she finds the shepherd, gives birth to her baby and goes back to being a Catholic. However, Ella believes that most probably Isabelle and her baby both die before she can give birth while she is trying to escape the Tourniers--her grave has no tombstone and she is forgotten. That actually explains why all the names of the Tourniers, except those of Isabelle and Marie, have survived until today. Ella says that:

‘In our family names have been passed down even up to the present. There are still Jacobs and Jeans, and Hannahs and Susannes It’s like a commemoration. All original names still survive, except for Marie and Isabelle. . . . I think that meant they did something wrong, they died or were shunned, or something. And the family dropped their names.’<sup>63</sup>

Since Ella is the shortened form of Isabella, Ella does carry on her ancestor Isabelle’s name in a way. Moreover, Ella’s nightmares in blue, investigations and writing the Tourniers’ history, with Isabelle as its focal point, compensates for the tombstone Isabelle probably never had. What happened to Isabelle, Marie and many more women who were either accused of being witches or sacrificed to ensure the safety and the protection of their murderers will always be remembered.

---

<sup>62</sup> Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

<sup>63</sup> Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

## CONCLUSION

So far, few have said, “Yes, these things really happened.” And no one has yet said, “They will never dare to happen again”.<sup>1</sup>

Just as “many people, especially women, ... had invented, reinvented and retold stories of witches which affirmed and denied their own problematic identities, allowing them to express and manage desires, fears and anxieties otherwise denied legitimate expression”,<sup>2</sup> so feminist theorists make use of the witch figure, especially the herbalist-healer-witch and the herbalist-healer-midwife-witch to deconstruct the phallogocentric male discourse based on metaphysical and male-set binary dichotomies, which define the female as “lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos, darkness – in short, as non-Being”<sup>3</sup> and refashion a female identity and discourse. As mentioned earlier, Moi claims that “if patriarchy sees women as occupying a marginal position within the symbolic order, then it can construe them as the *limit* or borderline of that order”, in which case women “will share in the disconcerting properties of *all* frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside.”<sup>4</sup> The body, the flight and the cauldron of the herbalist-healer-witch, providing and holding fast and therefore associated with both life and death at the same time, represents this ambiguity, fluidity and uncontainable rebellious energy of women and women’s language.

Although “In English pamphlets . . . the witch’s own version of ‘witchcraft’, is often medicinal”,<sup>5</sup> in time, the herbalist-healer-witches and the herbalist-healer-midwife-witches came to be associated only with **malefice**, devil worship and death and to be regarded as a threat to the patriarchal authority, the state and the church. The rising of a new capitalist class, modern medicine and the professionalisation of male doctors led to the demonisation and persecution of the herbalist-healers and

---

<sup>1</sup> Llewellyn Barstow, Epilogue, **op. cit.**, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Purkiss, **op. cit.**, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Moi, **op. cit.**, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 167.

midwives and to curtailment of their practices and social productivity just like the capitalist system devalues the labour of women today.

Zenia and Karen/Charis in Atwood's **The Robber Bride** and Isabelle in Chevalier's **The Virgin Blue** are the literary descendants of the herbalist-healers and midwives who were accused of being witches and brought to trial for witchcraft. In **The Robber Bride** Zenia as a liberating force and herbalist-healer-witch figure disrupts the patriarchal discourse and order; enlightens and encourages Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz to subvert the male order; saves them from their husbands/partners' sexual, physical and financial exploitation and oppression; brings them together so that they can heal their wounds and refashion themselves through identification with Zenia herself and female solidarity. Zenia not only plays the role of the herbalist-healer-witch to the three women, taking away, through transference, the pain and suffering their husbands/partners have inflicted on them and sacrifices herself for the healing process to be complete, but also plays the role of what Daly calls the witch-crone, the archetype of female powers, to create Hag-ography, that is, female solidarity among them. Having inherited her healing/killing power from her grandmother, Karen/Charis is the embodiment of the herbalist-healer-witch who uses subversive modes of communication such as the witch's flight, cauldron, previsions and clairvoyance to deconstruct the phallus-oriented male discourse and oppression and to create a feminine space, a female language and discourse. She uses her healing powers when she was a child to survive the sexual abuse and rape of her uncle and her killing power to give her uncle small heart attacks. Furthermore, she helps her friends, Tony and Roz, to survive the liberation process initiated by Zenia and eventually liberates Zenia herself too. **The Virgin Blue** intertwines the stories of the 16th-century French herbalist-healer-midwife Isabelle du Moulin, who is accused of and persecuted for being a witch like her mother, and her descendant Ella, a contemporary Californian woman who has recently moved to Lisle-sur-Tarn. Like her ancestors Isabelle and Isabelle's mother, Ella is a midwife, trying to qualify to practise in France. While she is investigating her French ancestors, her family history is at the same time haunting her in recurrent nightmares in blue. The silenced and

---

<sup>5</sup> Marion Gibson, **Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches**, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 26.

repressed Isabelle returns centuries after and demands her story to be heard by haunting Ella's dreams. Isabelle's story can be interpreted as the semiotic, which according to Kristeva, can disrupt the symbolic order, which can be traced in language in the form of ruptures, absences and gaps. Ella's nightmares in blue, investigations and writing the Tourniers' history, with Isabelle as its focal point, compensates for the tombstone Isabelle probably never had and helps Isabelle and Marie, persecuted for being witches, to be remembered.

A woman becomes a crone, according to Daly, "having discovered depths of courage, strength and wisdom in her self. The Burning Times is a Crone-logical term which refers not only to the period of the European witchcraze but to the perpetual witchcraze which is the entire period of patriarchal rule."<sup>6</sup> Purkiss does not necessarily agree with Daly's "treating the Burning Times as an enabling myth, a narrative of inner discovery" because:

It might seriously be doubted whether a myth that portrays women as nothing but the helpless victims of patriarchy, and the female body as nothing but a site of torture and death is enabling, especially if these portrayals are taken to define what woman under patriarchy is, for all time.<sup>7</sup>

Irigaray too believes it is impossible to escape from the self-sameness of the patriarchy: "history would repeat itself in the long run, would revert to sameness: to phallograticism. It would leave room neither for women's sexuality, nor for women's imaginary, nor for women's language to take (their) place."<sup>8</sup> Then again, like the destructive return of the repressed and the muted, Cixous mentions, waiting in silences and dreams, the herbalist-healer-witch, by her nature is bound to repeat the cycle of birth, death and rebirth **ad infinitum**, and to perpetually haunt the next generation of women, through subversive modes of communication such as clairvoyance, previsions, soothsaying or reading the Tarot cards, demanding for recognition and identification. The witches' cauldron also carries the very power of

---

<sup>6</sup> Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Boston, Beacon, 1978, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Purkiss, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," *op. cit.*, p. 33.

the herbalist-healer-witch over life and death and the power to transform anything put in it. Hence, the darker herbalist-healer-witch figure Zenia's haunting Karen/Charis, Tony and Roz until they can identify with her, inherit her wisdom and powers, transfer all the male-inflicted sickness and paralysis onto her to be healed and to reclaim their domestic and social roles and productivity, their say and control over their body and their reproduction. Hence, Isabelle's haunting the dreams of Ella until Ella unravels the story of Isabelle and finds Marie's tomb. Hence, the painful reconciliation of the old generation of women with the new generation, the reconciliation of Charis with her dark double Karen and then her daughter August(a) in **The Robber Bride** and the reconciliation of Ella with Isabella in **The Virgin Blue** through identification and female solidarity to inherit, refashion and to pass on the female discourse, wisdom and power of life and death.

In the contemporary English novels **The Robber Bride** and **The Virgin Blue**, the herbalist-healer-midwife-witch figures, Zenia, Karen/Charis and Isabelle respectively, are persecuted and oppressed for having control over life and death, that is having the power to heal and at the same time to inflict illnesses and/or kill and thereby crossing the metaphysical and male-set social, physical and religious boundaries. Just as the feminist theorists, so Zenia, Karen/Charis and Isabelle embrace the label witch--the fluid, ambiguous, uncontainable and undefinable identity of the witch which echoes the discourse of feminist literary theorists such as Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva on female identity and language because this very fluidity of women and witches makes it impossible for the patriarchal phallogocentric order to reduce and entrap them into the lacking end of binary dichotomies. Through this identification and solidarity and through subversive modes of communication such as the flight, cauldron and clairvoyance of the witch as well as cooking, dreams, Tarot reading, Zenia, Karen/Charis and Isabelle, the literary descendants of herbalist-healer-midwife-witches, eventually create and pass on to next generations a feminine space, language and discourse so as to disrupt the phallogocentric male discourse and order.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alcoff, Linda: "Cultural Feminism versus Post-structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," **Signs** 13.3 (Spring, 1988): pp. 405-436.
- Anderson, Benedict: **Imagined Communities**, London, Verso, 2003.
- Atwood, Margaret: **The Robber Bride**, New York, Nan A. Talese-Doubleday, 1993.
- Behringer, Wolfgang: "Weather, Hunger and Fear: Origins of the European Witch-Hunts in Climate, Society and Mentality," **German History** 31.1 (1995): pp. 1-27.
- Bland, Lucy: **Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality**, London, Tauris Parke, 2001.
- Bodin, Jean: **De La Demonomanie des Sorciers [The Demonomania of Witches]**, Paris, Chez Estienne Prevosteau, 1598.
- Briggs, Katharine: **British Folk-Tales and Legends, A Sampler**, London & New York, Routledge, 2002.
- Budapest, Zsuzsanna: **The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries**, Oakland, Wingbow, 1989.

- Budge, E.A. Wallis, Sir: **The Gods of the Egyptians, or Studies in Egyptian Mythology**, 2 Vols., Methuen & Co., London, 1904.
- Burk, Kevin: **Astrology: Understanding the Birth Chart**, St. Paul: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2001.
- Campbell, Joseph: **The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology**, London, Penguin Compass, 1991.
- Campbell, Joseph: **The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology**, London, Penguin Compass, 1991.
- Chevalier, Tracy: **The Virgin Blue**, London, Harper, 2006.
- Cixous, Hélène: "The Laugh of the Medusa," 1975, trans. Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, **Signs** 1.4 (Summer 1976): pp. 875-893.
- Cixous, Hélène & Catherine Clément: **The Newly Born Woman**, trans. Betsy Wing, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1986.
- Coke, Edward: **The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England: Concerning High Treason, and Other Pleas of the Crown and Criminal Causes**, 1644, London, E. and R. Brooke, 1797.

- Daly, Mary: **Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism**, London, Women's Press, 1979.
- Derrida, Jacques: **Of grammatology**, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Maryland, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Derrida, Jacques: **Spurs**, trans. Barbara Harlow, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Douglas, Mary: **Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo**, London, Routledge, 2004.
- Douglas, Susan J.: **Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media**, New York, Three Rivers Press, 1994.
- Dunn, Richard S.: **The Age of Religious Wars: 1559-1715**, 2nd ed., New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.
- Dworkin, Andrea: **Woman-Hating**, New York, Dutton, 1974.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara, Dierdre English: **Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers**, London, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1973.
- Eisler, Riane: "Messages from the Past: The World of the Goddess," **This Sacred Earth:**

- Religion, Nature, Environment**, 2nd ed., ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 449-461.
- Engels, Frederick: **The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State**, Chippendale, Resistance Books, 2004.
- Federici, Silvia: **Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation**, Canada, Autonomedia, 2004.
- Ferkiss, Victor: **Nature, Technology, and Society: Cultural Roots of the Current Environmental Crisis**, New York, New York University Press, 1983.
- Fisher, Jerilyn, Ellen S. Silber: "Fairy Tales, Feminist Theory, and the Lives of Women and Girls", **Analyzing the Different Voice: Feminist Psychological Theory and Literary Texts**, ed. Jerilyn Fisher, Ellen S. Silber, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998, pp. 67-96.
- Foucault, Michel: **Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison**, trans. Alan Sheridan, London, Penguin, 1997.
- Genz, Stéphanie, Benjamin A. Brabon: **Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories**, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

- Gibson, Marion: **Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches**, London, Routledge, 1999.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., Susan Gubar: **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, 2nd ed, New Haven, Yale Nota Bene, 2000.
- Girard, René: **The Scapegoat**, trans. Yvonne Freccero, Boston, Brill, 1989.
- Grimassi, Raven: **Witchcraft: A Mystery Tradition**, Woodbury, Llewellyn, 2008.
- Grosz, Elizabeth: **Volatile Bodies**, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Guazzo, Francesco María: **Compendium Maleficarum: A Handbook on Witchcraft from the 1600s**, ed, Montague Summers, San Diego, The Book Tree, 2004.
- Hall, N.: **The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections on the Archetypal Feminine**, New York, Harper & Row, 1980.
- Hill, Frances: **The Salem Witch Trails Reader, U.S.A.**, DaCapo Press, 2000.

- Holy Bible: King James Version**, London, HarperCollins, 1957.
- Hults, Linda C.: **The Witch as Muse: Art, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Europe**, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- Illes, Judika: **The Element Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Complete A-Z for the Entire Magical World**, London, HarperElement, 2005.
- Irigaray, Luce: **The Irigaray Reader**, ed. Margaret Whitford, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995.
- Irigaray, Luce: **The Sex Which Is Not One**, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Ithaca, Cornell University, 1985.
- Jütte, Robert: **Contraception: A History**, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008.
- Kepler, Johannes: **Kepler's Somnium: The Dream, or Posthumous Work on Lunar Astronomy**, 1630, trans., Edward Rosen, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1967.
- King James I: **Dæmonologie**, 1597, ed. G.B. Harrison, San Diego, The Book Tree, 2002.

- Kramarae, Cheri: **Women and Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis**, Rowley, Newbury House, 1981.
- Kramer, Heinrich, James Sprenger: **Malleus Maleficarum, Or, The Hammer of Witches**, 1486, trans. Montague Summers, n.p., Forgotten Books, 2008.
- Kristeva, Julia: **Revolution in Poetic Language**, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984.
- Kristeva, Julia: "Woman Can Never Be Defined," 1974, **New French Feminisms: An Anthology**, eds. Elaine Marks, Isabelle de Courtivron, Sussex, Harvester Press, 1981, pp. 137-141.
- Leyser, Henrietta: **Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450-1500**, London, Phoenix Giant, 1999.
- Llewellyn Barstow, Anne: **Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts, Our Legacy of Violence Against Women**, London, Pandora, 1995.
- Lockhart, Bonnie: "Who Were the Witches," **Dreams, Drums & Green Thumbs**, MP3, Bonnie Lockhart, 30 March 2002.
- Macfarlane, Alan: **Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A regional and comparative**

- study**, 2nd ed., Introduction by James Sharpe, London, Routledge, 1999.
- MacPherson, Margaret: **Nellie McClung: Voice for the Voiceless**, Canada, XYZ éditeur/XYZ Publishing, 2003.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw: “Gedanken zum Problem des Zauberwesens,” **Die Dynamik des Kulturwandels**, Vienna, 1951, pp. 185-196.
- Mazzoni, Cristina: **She-wolf: The Story of a Roman Icon**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Merchant, Carolyn: **Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England**, 2nd ed., USA, University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Merchant, Carolyn: **Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture**, New York, Routledge, 2004.
- Michelet, Jules: **The Sorceress: Satanism and Witchcraft**, 1939, trans. Alfred Richard Allinson, np., Forgotten Books, 2008.
- Mies, Maria: **Patriarchy & Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International**

- Division of Labour**, 1986, New York, Zed, 1998.
- Moi, Toril: **Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory**, London, Routledge, 1995.
- Morey, Ann-Janine: **Religion and Sexuality in American Literature**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Murray, Margaret A.: "The Witch Cult in Palæolithic Times," **Man** 22 (Jan. 1922): p. 3.
- Murray, Margaret A.: "Witches and the Number Thirteen," **Folklore** 31.3 (1920): pp. 204-209.
- Murray, Margaret A.: **The Witch Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1921.
- Neumann, Erich: **The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype**, 2nd ed., trans. by Ralph Manheim, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Parker, Janet & Julie Stanton, eds.: **Mythology: Myths, Legends, Fantasies**, New Jersey, Wellfleet Press, 2004.
- Pfister, Christian: "Climatic Extremes, Recurrent Crises and Witch Hunts: Strategies of European Societies in Coping with Exogenous

- Shocks in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” **The Medieval History Journal** 10.1-2 (2007): pp. 33-73.
- Poovey, Mary: “‘Feminism and Deconstruction,’” **Feminist Studies** 14.1 (Spring, 1988): pp. 51-65.
- Purkiss, Diane: **The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations**, London & New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2003.
- Rich, Adrienne: **Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution**, London, Virago, 1977.
- Rubin Suleiman, Susan: **Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde**, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Ruiz, Teofilo F.: **Terror of History: Mystics, Heretics, and Witches in the Western Tradition**, The Teaching Company, The Great Courses Series, University of California, Los Angeles, 2002.
- Rushdie, Salman: **Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002**, London, Vintage, 2003.

- Russell, Jeffrey B., Brooks Alexander: **Appendix, A New History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics & Pagans**, London, Thames & Hudson, 2007.
- Sallmann, Jean-Michel: **“Witch,” A History of Women in the West: III. Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes**, eds. Natalie Zemon Davis, Arlette Farge. Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994, pp. 444-457.
- Savage, Candace: **Witch: The Wild Ride from Wicked to Wicca**, Vancouver, Greystone Books, 2001.
- Sempruch, Justyna: **Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature**, Indiana, Purdue University Press, 2008.
- Shakespeare, William: **Macbeth (Arden Shakespeare: Third Series)**, ed. Kenneth Muir, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2004.
- Sharpe, C. K.: **A Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft in Scotland**, 1884, Whitefish, Kessinger Publishing, 2003.
- Showalter, Elaine: **A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing**, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999.

- Spender, Dale: **Man Made Language**, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.
- Starhawk (Miriam Simos): **Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics**, 1982, London, Mandala, 1990.
- Starhawk (Miriam Simos): **The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess** 1979, rev. ed., San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1988.
- Swann, Claudia: **Art, Science and Witchcraft in Modern Holland: Jacques de Gheyn II (1565-1629)**, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Thomas, Keith: **Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England**, London, Penguin, 1991.
- Thomsett, Michael C.: **The Inquisition: A History**, Jefferson, McFarland, 2010.
- Toivo, R.M.: "The Witch-Craze as Holocaust: The Rise of Persecuting Societies", **Witchcraft Historiography**, eds. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies, Houndmills, Macmillan, 2010, pp. 90-107.
- "Toxic," def. 2, **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**,

**Fourth Edition**, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004, 21 Apr. 2009, <Dictionary.com  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Toric>>.

Valiente, Doreen: **The Rebirth of Witchcraft**, London, Wash, 1989.

Walker, Barbara G.: **The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom and Power**, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1985.

Walker, Barbara G.: **Man Made God: A Collection of Essays**, Seattle: Stellar House Publishing, 2010.

Walker, Barbara G.: **The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets**, New York, Harper & Row, 1985.

Wauer, Ronald H.: **Kestrel: Falcon of Many Names**, Colorado, Johnson Books, 2005.

“Weasel,” *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*, Random House, Inc., 21 Apr. 2009, <Dictionary.com  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/weasel>>.

Wilson, Sharon Rose: **Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics**, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1993.

Zemon Davis, Natalie:

**Society and Culture in Early Modern  
France: Eight Essays**, Stanford,  
Stanford University Press, 1975.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Adı, Soyadı : Buket Akgün  
Doğum Tarihi : 30.07.1977  
Ev Adresi : Emniyetevleri, Çelebi Mehmet Sok., 11/2, 4. Levent, İST.  
İş Adresi : İstanbul Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve  
Edebiyatı A.B.D. 442  
Akademik Statü : Okutman  
Tel. (Ev) : 0212 325 47 09  
(İş) : 0532 704 24 90  
E-posta : [akgun@istanbul.edu.tr](mailto:akgun@istanbul.edu.tr)

## ÖĞRENİM

### Doktora

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı, İstanbul Üniversitesi 2004 - ...  
Tez Aşaması

### Yüksek lisans

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı, İstanbul Üniversitesi 2001 - 2004  
Tez: "Wonderland and Middle-earth: The Mythic Quest in the Dream/Fantasy World"

### Lisans

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi 1995 - 1999  
Tez: "Poets of the Beat Generation"

Amerikan Çalışmaları Sertifika Programı, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi 1996 - 1998

## Orta Öğretim & Lise

Tercüman Koleji, Güngören

1988-1995

## İlk Öğretim

12 Eylül İlkokulu, 4. Levent

1983-1988

## SUNUMLAR VE YAYINLAR

“Doris Lessing’in ‘To Room Nineteen’ (‘19 Numaralı Oda’ya’) Öyküsünde Öznel Bireyselliğin Ölümü.” Basıma hazır makale.

“Kuralları Değiştirmek ve Gücü Paylaşmak: *Vampir Avcısı Buffy*'de Avcı Mitinin Yeniden Tanımlanışı.” 1. Korku Anlatıları Konferansı: Yazınsal ve/veya Görsel Vampir Anlatıları. İstanbul Üniversitesi, İstanbul. 2 Kasım 2010.

“*The Penelopiad*: Dislodging the Myth of Penelope as the Archetype of Faithful and Patient Wife.” *Book of Abstracts of the 4th International IDEA Conference: Studies in English, April 15-17, 2009, Celal Bayar University*. Ed. Assoc. Prof. Nafize Sibel Güzel. Manisa: Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009.

“The Artistic and Religious Nature of Food in ‘Christ in the House of Martha and Mary’.” *Proceedings of Representations of Food in British Literature, International Symposium, November 15-16, 2007, İstanbul Kültür University*. Ed. Dr. Zekiye Antakyalıoğlu. İstanbul: İstanbul Kültür Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2008. 79-84.

“Sally Potter'ın *Orlando*'sundaki Baş Döndürücü Değişim Ağına Yakalanmış Eksantrik [*excentric*] Karakterler.” Öğrenci Şenliği. İstanbul Üniversitesi, İstanbul. 15 Mayıs 2008.

“Orlando: Yüzyıllar Boyu Sanatçının Arayışı.” *Akşit Göktürk’ü Anma Toplantısı: Yazında Sanat ve Sanatçı, Sanat ve Çeviri, 8-9 Mart 2007*. İstanbul: Dilta, 2007. 141-51.

“Yüzüklerin Efendisi: Kehanetler ve Yarı Gerçeklik.” *Akşit Göktürk’ü Anma Toplantısı: Yazında ve Çeviride Fantastik, 23-24 Şubat 2005*. İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2006. 117-24.

“The battle of ‘good’ and evil in Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘The Suicide Club’: The ‘gay bashing’ in the Victorian society.” *Proceedings of 23rd All-Turkey English Literature Conference, April 24-26, 2002: Evil in English Literature*. İstanbul: MAS, 2003. 180-87.

## ÇEVİRİLER

Cem Başeskioğlu’nun *Merhamet* adlı senaryosunun İngilizce’ye çevrilmesi (2007).

William Morris, *Umudun Yolcuları (The Pilgrims of Hope)*. İstanbul: Otonom Yayıncılık, 2007.

Flannery O’Connor. “Taşralı İyi İnsanlar” (“Good Country People”). *Amerikan Edebiyatı Öykü Antolojisi*. Ed. Naciye Akseki Öncül & Esra Melikoğlu. İstanbul: Dünya Yayıncılık, 2003. 434-57.