

'FOR EVERY WOMAN IS AT HEART A WITCH': THE NEW ITERATIONS OF
THE LITERARY WITCH FROM TERRY PRATCHETT
AND SARAH J. MAAS

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

The iconography is immediately recognizable: black pointed hat, a broomstick, a cauldron, the dusty grimoire, herbs and potions in jars along the wall, mirrors and candles, an old woman who lures children into her home in the woods. Red and white striped tights, green skin. The animal familiar. All of these features come to mind when thinking of the witch, because the witch is a product of popular culture, influenced by religion, urban legends and fairy tales, literature, art, politics, and even science.

Representations of the witch throughout history are stacked one on top of the other, turning the figure of the witch into a motif that represents something vital in the cultural consciousness. Owen Davies holds that the history of witchcraft can “tell us about how societies formed, developed and changed over the centuries,” and how the witch was affected by the culture in which she lived (vi). Indeed, much of this evidence can be found in literature, particularly in late Victorian literature, eventually bleeding over into twentieth and twenty-first century fantasy novels. The “something vital” the literary witch represents in these iterations is the need for a symbol of female power. The Victorian witch of the 1880s and 1890s rose as a response to the weaponization of early modern witch myths by gender equality critics. Feminists reclaimed the witch as an act of rebellion, facilitating the evolution of the witch yet again into a symbol of female power.

Although visually the witch is recognizable, the scope of her evolution begs a definition. Rodney Needham provided a definition for the term “witch” used by anthropologists in 1977: “someone who causes harm to others by mystical means” (26). Robin Briggs begins *Witches and Neighbors* (1996) by defining a witch as “an incarnation of the ‘other,’ a human being who has betrayed his or her natural allegiances

to become an agent of evil,” but, as Ronald Hutton points out, Briggs’s definition falters later in the book, when she referenced people “who seek healing from both white and black witches” (qtd. in Hutton “Meaning” 100). Already, it’s clear that these definitions fail to encompass what the witch actually embodies. Some scholars, like Diane Purkiss, avoid defining the witch at all, instead taking the word “to mean whatever it did in the sources with which she dealt” (Hutton “Meaning” 101). Hutton includes the witch as “a symbol of independent female authority and resistance to male domination” as one definition in the Anglo-American sense (Hutton, *The Witch* Author’s Note). Although witchcraft representations are not unique to Eurocentric cultures, this thesis is primarily concerned with the European witchcraft tradition and the literature produced from it, so the following definitions will reflect that.

When speaking historically of pre-Victorian notions of the witch throughout history, this thesis shall follow Purkiss’s lead: that is, the term will be conflated with what it meant within those sources. However, the Victorian witch and the literary witch of the twenty-first century should be defined not simply by her power, but also in personality. In this thesis, a “witch” is defined as a woman who uses power—whether produced from within or through the use of magical tools—to affect change, or a woman who exists outside of the patriarchal structure as a figure of independent female autonomy, or any combination of the two. “Power” in this sense can be literal supernatural abilities or a metaphorical feminine power. In this manner, witchcraft, or magic, acts as a tool, or a means to an end. “Magic” is simply the tool—again, internal innate power or external assistance—the witch uses to manipulate her reality.

It is unclear precisely when the witch first appeared in the cultural consciousness. References to witchcraft can be found in writings as old as ancient Mesopotamia, approximately 2000 BCE. Written in cuneiform, these clay tablets contain instructions for what is most recognizable as “spells,” for lack of a better term. In the event of a dog bite, the instructions direct the reader to “Take some clay and rub the outside of the wound with it. Fashion a dog from clay and place it on the north wall directly in the sun. Recite [the following] incantation three times over it until the dog surrenders its moisture and the man’s bite dries up” (Maxwell-Stuart 2). Many of the misdeeds described in these texts could have been the work of a witch (“kaššaptu” in its female form) or someone with a command of harmful or evil magic. Directions for the expulsion of the kaššaptu include creating figurines to signify the witch and a ritual called “Maqlu,” which translates literally to “burning” (Maxwell-Stuart 3). Enchantments were often reflective of astral origins, such as “Sperm of Jupiter,” so their antidotes wielded by magicians were also dependent on the stars and planets for guidance, usually involving an invoking of the stars in prayer (Maxwell-Stuart 3). The stars and planets were typical components to Mesopotamian witchcraft, representing messages and symbols from the gods. Astral iconography remains a significant part of witch representation.

Other early depictions of the witch are found in the biblical references to witches and witchcraft in the Old Testament. Perhaps the most significant figure is the Witch of Endor in 1 Samuel, as a sorceress who summons the spirit of Samuel on behalf of Saul. Witchcraft is explicitly prohibited in the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament. The Bible’s Old Testament also contains the oft-cited Exodus 22:18: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,” a verse that appears in a notably large portion of witch representations in

media across the centuries (*King James Version*). Another disavowing is in Leviticus 20:27: “A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them.” In Deuteronomy, divination and necromancy are also forbidden in connection to witchcraft (Deut. 18:10-11). Finally, in 1 Samuel: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft” (1 Sam. 15:23). This linking in 1 Samuel of rebellion to witchcraft had a lasting effect on future representations of witches that eventually come to the forefront in the Middle Ages: that is, that witchcraft must by definition exist outside the realm of the Christian faith, and any rebellion against the faith would be heresy and therefore punishable.

The witch also shows up in Classical literature and art. In Greek culture, the vocabulary for magic practitioners is extensive. Greek gives the term “*goēteia*,” using the verb *goan*—to lament—to refer to the summoning of the dead or a necromancer (Maxwell-Stuart 18). Additionally, “*pharmakeia*” refers to the use of herbal based practices, for substances such as medicines, love potions, poisons, et cetera (18). At a point during the fifth century BCE, the terms were conflated, a fact made evident by Plato, who abjured any and all such practices as criminal (18).

The Greek and Roman traditions began a dual depiction of the witch, simultaneously casting her as beautiful and hideous, sensual and fearsome, good and evil. The Greek witch is a goddess like Circe and Hecate, or the gorgon Medusa, and even mortal sorceress Medea. In Greek myth and literature, the witch is typically young and beautiful (Spaeth 46). Homer describes Circe as having beautiful hair and a “sweet voice” (46). Circe wears “a long white robe, finely woven and beautiful” and wears “a fair girdle of gold” around her waist (46). The beautiful Greek witch is cast either as the mystifying

being a hero runs to for help, or the villain he is running from. Immortal examples include Medusa, the monstrous gorgon that must be slayed, and Pasiphaë, the sorceress who birthed the Minotaur. Mortals like Medea, who along with Circe is one of the most famous *pharmakides* in Greek literature, helped Jason escape with the Golden Fleece. Medea is depicted as being able to kill with her potions, and her patron is goddess of magic, Hecate (47). Hecate is the primary goddess of magic and spells in Greek myth. She is often depicted with three faces poised in different directions, to signify her role as guardian of the crossroads. In myth, she assisted Demeter in the search for her kidnapped daughter, Persephone. The magic employed by these witches and sorceresses had simple methods. Greek witches have the power to “change humans into animals, prophesy, cure childlessness, cast the evil eye, bewitch a lover, and poison an enemy” (Spaeth 51). Medea and Theocritus’s Simaetha called upon the gods for assistance, deities who had celestial names and ruled over astral realms (Helios, Artemis, etc) mirroring the Mesopotamian practice of calling upon the stars. In short, Greek witches are portrayed as either good with the potential for evil if crossed, good and evil together, or as ultimately neutral.

Roman witches differed. In Roman myth and literature, witches used their power to more selfish ends, and were generally morally corrupt. Roman tradition also lent itself to a more realistic and less divine depiction. In Roman culture, witches are old, ugly, and frightening creatures, with physical appearances and personalities to match their evil deeds. Horace’s Canidia is one of these examples, described as a hideous hag with snakes for hair and “uncut nails...discolored teeth...[and] pallid complexion” that made her and her sister terrible to look upon (Spaeth 47). Instead of the flowing robe of crisp white

donned by the Greek Circe, Canidia wears a shapeless black robe (47). Roman witches “cast their spells for money, seeking to bring a lover to a client, or to remove uncomfortable passion from a client whose love is now unattainable” (47). Canidia acts out of lust alone, and Erichtho acts out of a desire for power (47). Roman witches were written as the model of “bad” female behavior, designed to be the epitome of everything a woman should not be. Roman witches had the same powers as Greek witches, but could also be necromancers, commune with spirits, and control the gods. Greek witches were characters in mythology, Roman witches were represented as real historical figures (Spaeth 51).

In the Middle Ages, once Christianity had widely taken hold of the Western world, the witch began an evolution into the practitioner of a Satanic religion and, by extension, sexual deviancy. As Hutton argues, the creation of this stereotype of witches being devil-worshippers was the underpinning of the early modern witch trials (*Witch* 147). Much of Europe became Christianized in the fifth and sixth centuries, so during the Middle Ages the Church made an effort to stamp out residual pagan traditions and celebrations, which brought magical practices under heightened scrutiny. Pagan critics of Christianity—perhaps most notably Celsus, who wrote an attack on Christianity in the second century—questioned how “the miracles credited by [Christians] to their Messiah and his apostles could look like those promised by, and attributed to, ceremonial magicians” (Hutton *Witch* 148). In the fourth century, Augustine of Hippo provided an answer that endured through the Middle Ages: “the acts of magicians were accomplished with the aid of demons, whereas the miracles of Christian saints were made possible by the intervention of the one true God” (Hutton 148). This response contributes to a stark

othering—and vilification—of those that fail to meet the standards of the Christian faith; one is either Christian, and therefore good, or one consorts with demons, and is therefore Satanic and evil. This dichotomy repeats itself over and over again in the representation of witchcraft in the medieval period.

One of the first texts to make a direct connection between witchcraft and heresy was *De Universo* (784) by Rabanus Maurus. In this encyclopedic volume, Maurus states that witchcraft is the product of evil, and its purpose was to destroy the institution of the church and persuade pious worshippers to stray from the Christian faith (Lorenzi 35). The founding of the Inquisition in the twelfth century reiterated this belief. As Sophie Page notes, the terminology used to accuse heresy was influenced and informed by rhetoric used against magic: “heresy, like magic, was viewed as the work of the Devil and an expression of pride (heretics did not accept the opinion of the Church), ignorance (heretics were unable to understand their errors), and fraud (heretics pretended to be pious but were guilty of terrible sins) (56). It was Pope Alexander IV who ordered inquisitors to pay attention to sorcery and divination only when heresy was involved. But because of these investigations, fear of magic began to spread. Pope John XXII dealt with multiple cases of sorcery, including a case in which the accused allegedly plotted his murder. John XXII took an aggressive stance on combating magic, and in 1326 he issued a decree conflating benign magical practices like making images, rings, phials, with heresy and asserted that these practitioners worshiped demons, bound their souls to them, and fulfilled their most lustful desires (Page 56). This is not to say that talismans, amulets, and other protective accoutrement were inherently heretical (Page 56). In fact, a surviving fifteenth-century medical treatise “(Wellcome MS 404, fo. 33v)” describes an

amulet designed to protect against the plague has “pleas for Christ to save the bearer inscribed in its inner circle” (Page 58). Instances like this show how quickly the black and white become smudged, how the rules become jumbled, and how the hysteria begins.

It is important to note that up until this point, practitioners of magic—pagan, allegedly demonic, or otherwise—were not solely women. Witch trials took place in medieval Europe, the frequency of which fluctuated throughout the centuries, but even those accused and tried for witchcraft were not always women. That being said, of those tried for witchcraft, “a high proportion of the people tried in medieval courts for using erotic magic—rituals to secure desirable partners for sex, love, or marriage or to destroy partnerships that were obstacles to passion or ambition—were women” (Page 61).

Female sexuality threatened a stable, patriarchal Christian community, and a woman potentially using witchcraft to “seduce someone outside marriage, make a man impotent, or reduce him to erotic dependence on a mistress” was a weapon against the sanctity of Christian marriage (61). Before the fourteenth century, clerics found it difficult to reconcile how women, who were deemed physically, mentally, and spiritually weaker by men, could harness and control powerful demonic forces (Page 60). However, “this paradox was resolved by an increasing theological emphasis on the satanic pact, a formal written contract which involved the complete and explicit submission of the witch to demons” (60). For the price of their souls, witches could summon demons at will.

A section of Christian canon law, The *Canon Episcopi*, from the ninth century, comments directly on the satanic witchcraft stereotype; more specifically, the now commonplace image of witches riding through the night on the back of a goat, a symbol of Satan: “certain depraved women who have turned to Satan and been led astray by

illusion and diabolical temptations, claim and believe they ride at night on certain beasts to follow Diana, the pagan goddess, with a countless multitude of women...obeying her commands as their mistress and of being summoned to serve on certain nights” (Lorenzi 35). These women, as the *Episcopi* claims, have “strayed from the true path and are prisoners of the devil;” however, the canon is explicit in stating it does not believe these accounts to be truth (35). The Church’s stance here is that these rides at night and fraternization with Diana and even with demons are delusions, and it is the *belief* in these illusions that is considered heresy. It is worth noting the potential significance of the word “prisoner” in this section of the *Episcopi*. The word prisoner implies a lack of choice in the witch’s own predicament. As a prisoner, the witch would require outside assistance to be saved.

Representations of the witch in medieval art and literature, secular or otherwise, are evocative of the same religious fear and demonization. Another example of witches riding goats appears in a fourteenth century corbel located in the cathedral of Saint Etienne in Auxerre, France. This stone figure depicts a naked woman riding on the back of a goat, her body facing outward, fully exposed to the viewer (Lorenzi 32). In addition to her nakedness, her hair is loose around her face, and her expression is neutral, eyes downturned. In the fifteenth century and later, the goat was replaced with a broomstick, bringing to mind the familiar iconography of the witch (Lorenzi 42).

A fifteenth century painting known as *Leibezaube*—or, *Love Magic*—provides a visual for the female practitioner, made manifest by the theology of witchcraft (Page 60). A naked woman stands in the foreground of the painting, sprinkling the contents of a glass jar into a small chest. In addition to emptying the jar, strips of paper float around

her, and the flowers are strewn about the floor, evoking the sense of spell-casting at work. As Page points out, there is no obvious demonic presence in the painting, no hideous beast in the corner or standing behind the witch guiding her hand. This is because “the late medieval witch did not need one to be present for her operations because she had already pledged her soul to the devil and been granted powers” (60). Her power over men, or more specifically, *outside* of men is “indicated by the man entering at the back of the room with the submissive air of being a client or servant; certainly she does not appear to be afraid of his scrutiny” (60). By this point, the witch had become synonymous with demonic forces, so her presence alone was enough to evoke them.

As mentioned above, casting the witch as a devil-worshiper or as a woman copulating with demonic entities was the underpinning for perhaps the most infamous period in witchcraft history: the early modern witch trials. A cursory internet search of the “witch trials” brings up search results for primarily the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. The first images are of women burning at the stake and filled courtrooms with men flailing their arms flamboyantly with expressions of anger. The hysteria is played up, the drama is center stage. The familiar, repeated story of this time is that young sexually liberated women, healers, and even older women on the edges of society were rounded up by witch-hunters and burned at the stake or drowned in the name of the Church. The truth is more complicated. There is little evidence to suggest that the majority of the accused were unmarried or sexually liberated, or that the trials were all facilitated by the Church (Purkiss 8). Furthermore, though a majority of the accused witches were women, not all were. Rita Voltmer even argues against the term “witch craze” because it implies that participants were “labelling, excluding, denouncing, charging, sentencing, and executing

witches, driven by panic and paranoia, by some temporary phase of inexplicable insanity”; in actuality, the accusations that these witches were pawns of the devil and therefore enemies of God, and should be tried in violent and sometimes fatal trials, were the result of fear, but also of “dogmatism, fanaticism, bigotry, and ignoble self-interest” (99).

The features of witchcraft were largely the same for much of the early modern period as in the Middle Ages: the pact with the Devil, flying at night to a sabbath, intercourse with demonic forces or the devil himself, and malevolent magical activities in the form of spells and incantations. Representations of the witch in medieval art and literature were less frequent, because it focused more on depictions of Lucifer, the embodiment of the evil personified in early witches of the Middle Ages. The definitive treatise on witchcraft of the early modern period was the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), published by catholic clergyman Heinrich Kramer. Known in English as “The Hammer of Witches,” the *Malleus* was a violent work, placing sorcery on the same level as heresy and demanding execution as a fit punishment for it. Authorities condemned the book for its illegality and immorality, but the effect it had on culture as it pertains to witchcraft lasted centuries. Despite being dismissed as a mostly fabricated and sensationalized text, it served as a great portion of the source material for nineteenth-century pseudo-historical witchcraft studies. The ramifications of the *Malleus* were more significant than the actual contents of the text.

The Renaissance, however, gives way to a more sexualized image of the witch, this version more tempting than terrible, more alluring than demonic. By the fifteenth century, imagery of witches and witchcraft leaned more toward a solitary practice, having

“greater autonomy, in respect of the devil” (Lorenzi 61). The obvious iconographic connections to Satanic imagery dwindled in representation. For example, the goat, a symbol of Satan, was replaced by the broomstick. Once the devilish symbol is removed, the witch is all that remains: a solitary version free of the demonic clutches. The shift to a solitary practice by a beautiful woman was arguably the result of the decline in plague and famine, after which there was a rise in intellectual activity, including the rediscovery of Classical writers, and the reinstating of women as artistic inspiration (Lorenzi 64).

Purkiss argues that the myth of the trials is difficult to let go of because it clearly identifies the oppressor and the oppressed, especially in its identification of Christianity as the oppressor. The myth, she argues “is a narrative of the Fall, of paradise lost. It is a story about how perfect our lives would be...if it were not for patriarchy and its violence” (8). The acceptance of this myth and the romanticization of it endures to the present day. The witch does not exist as simply a Christian cautionary tale, or a male fear, or even a misogynistic label. The witch exists as a fantasy, a mantle to take up. The witch trials myth is a religious one, “and the religion it defines is radical feminism” (Purkiss 8). What label can an early modern woman hold that is not dependent on her service for, or relationship to, others? Wife, mother, midwife, daughter, sister, servant: all contingent on a connection with those around her. Aside from a contrived relationship to the devil, the witch exists as a free being, separate from her relationship to others. The appeal of this separation and the acceptance of the dramatization is found later in Victorian literature and culture.

Victorian attitudes toward witchcraft were two-fold, and in direct relation to each other—on one side was the use of the witch as supposed evidence against gender

equality, the other side the reclaimed feminist version. Due in part to the rising feminist, or “New Woman” movement of the nineteenth-century, and in part to the Victorian interest in the occult, the witch became a popular figure in nineteenth-century literature and culture. This was signaled by the reprints of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books on witchcraft persecutions and confessions that became popular in the nineteenth century (Moran 123).

Victorian representations of the witch were found in periodicals, essays, novels, plays, as a motif of fiction. The witch is also found in Victorian academic texts, such as Wilhelm Gottfried Soldan’s *The History of the Witch Trials Described Using the Sources* (1843), a volume that relied almost exclusively on early modern witch-hunting manuals like the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which was not based in fact and was disavowed even by its contemporaries (Faxneld 199). Per Faxneld notes that prior to the 1960s, archival research was rarely used, so much of the Victorian historical witch was based in its mythic creation (199). Regardless, witch trial scholarship was wildly popular in the nineteenth century.

Armed with a renewed interest in the medieval and early modern witch and with an assumption that myth of the witch trials was fact, nineteenth-century critics of gender equality leveled “witch” as an insult against women. I would argue that this was not a practice the Victorians invented; even Classical authors used the term as an attack. Outside of literature and politics, science also co-opted the witch. Psychiatrists found witches useful in their own studies and writing on such, perhaps indirectly, “caused a conflation of witches, feminists, and hysterics” and in this context, “witches came to be closely linked to the diagnosis of hysteria” (Faxneld 208). Misrepresentation of the witch,

the hysteria surrounding witch hunts, and the misremembering of the stories are all to some degree the result of fear mongering in a patriarchal religious society. The witch archetype is a perfect vessel for the “Other,” onto which any number of fears and fantasies can be projected, due in part to the medieval glossing of the word “witch” with “Latin terms for a range or workers of apparently beneficial magic,” an action that appears to have been “a polemical tool to smear all forms of magic-worker by association with the term used for the destructive and hated kind” (Hutton, *Witch* Author’s Note). If the witch is evocative of a sexually liberated woman, she is a threat to the hegemonic patriarchal society and the institutional structures that exist within that society. If the witch is depicted as a devil worshipping heretic, she is a threat to the Church *and* the patriarchal institutions. Fear and distrust has been the reaction to these women in myth and history because what does one do with a woman this liberated? What does one do with a woman who is not controllable?

During the 1880s and 1890s, the witch was reclaimed by feminists, political essayists, and writers as a symbol of female liberation and autonomy. George Egerton’s short stories (*Keynotes and Discords* 1893) cast the witch as a sexually liberated female. Jules Michelet’s witch in *La Sorciere* (1862) is used as a vehicle for criticism of the church. Popular feminist political writers used witchcraft imagery in their writing as well.

The reclaimed Victorian witch presented as a feminist symbol is another point in a long timeline of witch representations borrowing from and expounding upon previous iterations. The above history of representations is not an exhaustive account of the history of witchcraft, but an overview of the way the witch has evolved in popular culture, emerging in the twenty-first century as an archetype representing power and liberation.

The image of a witch as an independent woman free of societal constraints—or at least actively battling them—outlasted the nineteenth century and has continuously surfaced in literature since.

The effects the fin-de-siècle Victorian witch had on later twenty-first century iterations of the literary witch can be summed up simply by the term “reclamation.” The popularity of the early modern witch trials, the subsequent weaponization of those accounts, and the subsequent response by feminists during the last decades of the nineteenth century, leads directly to contemporary media starring witches. Deborah Harkness’s *All Souls Trilogy*—beginning with *A Discovery of Witches* (2011)—centers on a main character named Diana Bishop, a direct descendant of Bridget Bishop, the first woman executed for witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692 (Harkness 10). Because of her lineage, Diana “must be powerful” and is “far from” an ordinary witch (Harkness 93). This novel treats Salem as fact, and Diana’s connection to Salem is something to distinguish her as especially powerful; Diana Bishop is set apart because of her lineage, giving her extraordinary power directly connected to her identity as witch. Amy W.S. Lee remarks on the trend in recent decades of using Salem as a backdrop, or perhaps a semi-historical backstory for characters, and how this trend “demonstrates not only a different reading of historical events” but the new reading “fulfills a psychological and emotional need contemporary society exhibits” (173). Perhaps the “need,” then is a desire to reclaim vilified figures and to fully form the witch into a symbol separate from misogynist, outdated, or altogether untrue roles they have played in the past.

Another reclamation happens in response to the use of the Victorian literary witch to vilify the church, such as Michelet’s interpretation. Matilda Joslyn Gage, a famed

suffrage activist, also drew connections in the same way. Gage had been “agitated by the role she felt all major churches played in the subjection of women,” and in a speech, claimed Christianity “is based upon the fact of woman servitude,” beginning with Eve (Faxneld 215). Her response was creating a “feminist witch cult,” as Faxneld labels it (215). Questioning the doctrine of the church as an institution naturally extends to questioning the Bible and its teachings, as Gage does. So, begin at the beginning: with the creation myth. According to Mesopotamian and Judaic mythology, Lilith was Adam’s first wife, before Eve. She is all but erased from Christian mythology, but the Victorians expressed an interest in her with works such as George Macdonald’s *Lilith* (1895) and in a painting of the same name by John Collier from 1889. Collier’s interpretation helped establish, in the Victorian minds, Lilith as a seductress. She stands naked against a dark background, hair flowing unbound, with a snake curled around her body. Erika Bornay “claims the image of Lilith as a symbol of female rebellion, the origin of the female myth against man was born with Lilith, of Babylonian Assyrian origins. Lilith is the mother of succubi, who are demons, devourers of men who attack women and newborns” (qtd. in Pérez 195). This image of the witch Lilith is evocative of the medieval imagery of the witch, an evil one who consorts with demons. Like the witch trials, Lilith is reclaimed as a witch both in late-Victorian literature and beyond. Lilith as a witch shows up later in C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950), in which Jadis, the White Witch, is characterized as being a descendent of Lilith herself (147). In fact, in *A Discovery of Witches*, Lilith is given the title of “the first witch” (475).

The notion of the witch outlived the nineteenth century, and women with power are represented in later literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The rise of

the fantasy genre in the first half of the twentieth century and the inception of young adult fantasy as a distinct genre in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries combined to create a burgeoning niche for these kinds of novels: a new Bildungsroman, following a young female protagonist born or bestowed with immense power and discovering who she is. Young adult literature as a genre rose to popularity parallel to the rise of the teenager around the 1950s and 60s, although literature intended for young minds has existed for far longer (Cart). More specifically, young adult fantasy rose to exorbitant mainstream popularity following the publication of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1997) by J.K. Rowling. Since then, the floodgates have opened for the genre, with other giant commercial successes like *Twilight* (2005), *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005), and many others.

The trend within young adult fantasy in recent years of the young female protagonist who develops great power, is the focus of this work. Terry Pratchett's Tiffany Aching novels (2003-2015), and the explosively popular *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015-) series by Sarah J. Maas, both fit into this category, and present two portraits of the literary witch in stark contrast to one another. Witches, as discussed above, appear throughout literature and media, both in the past and in the present day. There are hundreds of depictions in movies, television, historical fiction, adult science-fiction, et cetera; however, the young adult fantasy genre presents a unique set of circumstances that situate this most recent iteration of the reclaimed feminist witch as an overt point on a long line of the witch's evolution. In these novels typically, we follow a young girl whose life is fraught with obstacles—either she is poor, she is orphaned, she lives under an authoritarian regime of some kind, she dreams of a different life—and through some

event, whether it be divine intervention or a lucky accident, she is forced from her life and onto an adventure. At some point, either in the inciting incident or in the climax, the main character is bestowed with, or discovers, great power. The formula is familiar and repeated often in the young adult genre. Both Tiffany Aching and A Court of Thorns and Roses series exemplify this formula, in completely different ways, to completely different ends.

The titular character of Tiffany Aching series is a young witch just beginning her craft, acting as everything from a midwife to a handy man to savior of the world. The representation of Tiffany as a witch here is literal. Her power comes from her witchcraft, which she puts into action throughout the books, to affect *change* in her life and in the lives of those in her community. Pratchett uses the familiar iconography of the witch from historical interpretations to present a version of the witch that appears to be an updated version of already explored territory.

Feyre Archeron of the A Court of Thorns and Roses series meets the same established criteria of a witch in all but name. Feyre, despite having magic, is not dubbed a witch by herself or anyone around her. Familiar iconography of the witch is present in her world and in minor characters like the Weaver, but not in relation to her identity, as it is with Tiffany. This interpretation of the witch figure is less literal, focusing instead on the journey of a powerful young woman learning to combat her less than favorable circumstances using the world-shaking magic that is thrust upon her. The witch's contemporary face differs from the witch of history, but regardless, her representation is inextricable from the past versions of literature.

The first section of this work focuses on the effects of Victorian literature on the literary witch of the present, how the Victorians were influenced by the early modern revival, and how those influences appeared in popular culture of the time. The rise of the suffrage and “New Woman” movements, the fascination with the occult, and the weaponization of the early modern witch are particularly emphasized. The purpose of this chapter is to clearly mark the late Victorian period as the historical moment the witch fully evolved into an archetype symbolizing female power, and how its effects rippled through the century following.

The second section of this work is a study of two of the Tiffany Aching novels, and how Tiffany fits into a larger tradition of the literary witch. An analysis of those works reveals the obvious and underlying ways Tiffany fits into the role, and also how Pratchett uses the figure of the witch as a symbol of female autonomy uniquely by coupling it with a coming-of-age story. Pratchett uses established fairy tale tropes to present a feminist commentary on the plight of women in Tiffany’s society. Pratchett is satirizing early modern witch mythology, primarily by centralizing these pre-established notions with the conflict. To that end, the discussion also examines the ways Tiffany both embraces and challenges the typical notions of witch stereotypes, and how each approach lends itself to her development as a strong woman.

The third and final section is an examination of Feyre Archeron and how she fits into the title of literary witch. The purpose of this chapter is to show the future of the literary witch, and how she’s evolved beyond the traditional depictions of the witch and taken on a larger identity precisely because she represents female power. To do so will require a reflection on the historical idea of the witch, and how Feyre’s character

embodies the conflation of witches and feminists from the late nineteenth century, resulting in a young adult female protagonist that represents commonly understood qualities of the witch without being tied to that explicit name. Traditional witch iconography is intertwined with a character never expressly described as such, and Feyre uses her newfound power as something intrinsically tied to her strength as a woman. Feyre's power illustrates the ways in which the witch has taken on a new life, modifying the tradition. This thesis is primarily interested in how the witch operates in literature, unarguably influenced by culture and history, and how she modifies the historical tradition and interpretation of a woman in power over time.

II. LATE VICTORIAN ITERATIONS

“To one wizard, ten thousand witches,” begins Jules Michelet’s 1862 history of witchcraft, *La Sorcière* (1). Michelet begins his introduction with this quotation attributed to a nameless person “during the time of Louis XIII,” essentially assigning the moniker of “witch” as an almost uniquely female experience and gendering the term. In fact, Michelet says as much in the same paragraph of his introduction: “It is a gift peculiar to a woman and her temperament” (1). Identifying witches as almost exclusively women is not a distinctly Victorian tactic, nor is Michelet the first to dub them so, but *La Sorcière*’s contribution to the larger tradition of witches in art and literature ushered in the Victorian depictions and stands as one of the most popular examples of the “reclaimed” late Victorian witch, a version that is still lingering in contemporary literature.

Interest in witches and witchcraft is pervasive in nineteenth-century literature, culture, and social politics. During the first half of the century, the witch was still very much associated with diabolical forces because of the renewed interest in early modern examples. This created a dichotomy between the stereotypical evil witch used by gender opponents and the new reclaimed version embraced by proponents of gender equality, a motif simultaneously used by opponents and proponents of female emancipation. Gender equality critics used the term “witch” with negative connotations, which ultimately prompted advocates of female emancipation to reclaim the figure. Regardless of the side depicting the figure, they both cemented the association of witches and feminism, a connection that, as Moran and Faxneld both point out, bolstered the popularity of the witch being used for feminist readings. Indeed, during the 1880s and 1890s, the witch motif solidified explicitly into a symbol of female empowerment and rebellion. The

nineteenth century saw a burgeoning fascination with the occult—spiritualism, seances, and magic as entertainment for the upper and middle classes being the most popular modes—and alongside a growing secular society rose a revived interest in the early modern witch trials.

Republished witch trial accounts were popular during the Victorian period, with some examples being, in addition to *La Sorcière*: Wilhelm Gottfried Soldan's *The History of the Witch Trials Described Using the Sources* (1843), William Harrison Ainsworth's *The Lancashire Witches* (1848), the reemergence of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and later, Oliver Madox Heuffer's *The Book of Witches* (1908). Some of these accounts, especially the *Malleus*, were used by Jules Michelet and Matilda Joslyn Gage when they penned their own histories of witchcraft. The popularity of occultism and alternative religions such as "Theosophy (1875), The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1887), and Anthroposophy (1912)" boosted the interest of all things supernatural, serving as the culmination of centuries of overlap between science and the occult (Franklin 30). The first half of the nineteenth century experienced the arrival of "mesmeric mania" and the establishment of Spiritualism in the United States, eventually bleeding over into the United Kingdom during a time when the Church of England "was losing congregation to Nonconformist denominations and experiencing internal revolutions both high and low" (30). Richard Noakes argues that by the 1860s, Spiritualism had become a "conspicuous" part of daily Victorian life, complete with public seances and societies dedicated to its practice (qtd in Franklin 31). Spiritualism contributed heavily to a shift from the patriarchally controlled public sphere into a more

private, domestic sphere; therefore, it is no surprise that women became central to the practice of Spiritualism.

Women were popular practitioners of occult practices, a relationship pointed out by critics like Diana Basham, Tatiana Kontou, and Alex Owen. Kontou couples the two by arguing that women form “a strong affinity with the occult because just as the occult suggests a world beyond that of our immediate senses, so do women represent potential beyond those manifested in their usual roles,” and both women and the occult challenge the scope of what is natural or supernatural, naturally defying containment (276). Alex Owen argues that Spiritualism promoted a sort of feminine power because it challenged accepted forms of womanhood, by placing power with the female medium, while also still maintaining the confines of acceptable roles for women. (Owen 9). An established link has been drawn between women and the occult, and women’s interest in the occult can be defined in similar terms as their interest in the witch: a reclamation of a symbol to serve their own goals. Mesmerism, a movement preceding Spiritualism, was more centered around men, and often the male physicians performed treatments on female patients. Spiritualism shifted that accepted norm to better serve women, in domestic and private spheres no less.

Occultism brushed with medical science in the nineteenth century, and psychiatry as a field of study was also being established at the same time. Psychiatrists found interest in witches, using them as a study tool and as a way to critique the church, which was an antagonistic relationship because psychiatrists were replacing priests and nuns as healers of the soul and body “swallow[ing] up their market shares in the caretaking

business” (Faxneld 208). It was in this examination that witches became linked with hysterics, which eventually became conflated with feminists.

Psychiatrists reexamined the witchcraft accounts that had become popular and retroactively diagnosed those women as hysterics and were allowed to do so because in their study the laws of hysteria were supposedly “universal.” Paul Regnard published a treatise in 1887 entitled *Epidemic Maladies of the Spirit: Witchcraft, Magnetism, Morphinism, Megalomania* (translated from French) in which he claimed that “the witch of the past is identical to the hysteric” of the nineteenth century (Faxneld 210). Public experiments on female hysterics were not uncommon, many performed by Regnard’s mentor Jean-Martin Charcot. A practice referred to as “dermographism,” where physicians would trace letters or symbols into a hysterical patient's skin, often was preoccupied with demonic subjects (such as “SATAN”) (Faxneld 210). This also creates a connection with witchcraft and hysteria, because at this point witches as Satanists was a common conflation, and if hysterics are also linked, the three become almost interchangeable. These experiments forged a closer relationship to the occult, mirroring magic performances and seances of the day—some demonstrations included giving hysterics cards to perform, as a means of proving “extrasensory perception” (Faxneld 210). Elaine Showalter’s *The Female Malady* (1985) builds on the conflation of historical witches to hysteria patients, and adds that the two are also connected with the women’s rights movement, arguing that hysteria was weaponized against feminist movements (121). At this point, once society had (consciously or not) blended the definitions and representations of witches, hysterics, and feminists, a reclamation of the witch figure was

the next step. The witch had been claimed as a rebel before, but not to the extent the fin de siècle feminists would achieve.

The emergence of the New Woman movement was a huge factor in this characterization of the late Victorian witch. The term “New Woman” was coined by feminist writer Sarah Grand in 1894, in a piece titled “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” (Nelson 140). In this essay, she defines the “New Woman” as being a little above the generalized “him,” and because “he never even thought of looking up to where she has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years,” she sat thinking until “at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy” (Grand 142). Grand then illustrates an event of a “sudden and violent upheaval of the suffering sex in all parts of the world” in which women were “awaking from their long apathy, and, as they awoke, like healthy hungry children unable to articulate, they began to whimper for they knew not what” and spends the remainder of her essay setting out solutions to fix a broken society (142). She points out the systematic mistreatment of women in a society ruled by men: “Man deprived us of all proper education, and then jeered at us because we had no knowledge” and throughout “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” and other articles, Grand situates herself in the belief that women are morally and intellectually superior to men (143).

Within the two months following the publication of Grand’s initial “New Woman” essay, the term was ubiquitous, and was being referenced over and over again, with capital letters as is seen here (Nelson ix). Satires and responses were published in periodicals and a stage play ran for almost two hundred performances, all within the same

year. In light of its popularity, a stereotype emerged of the New Woman that gripped public imagination: “She was educated at Girton College, Cambridge, rode a bicycle, insisted on rational dress, and smoked in public: in short, she rejected the traditional role for women and demanded emancipation” (Nelson ix). A caricature of women riding bicycles comparing them to witches on broomsticks was also prominent; because bicycles were usually ridden in pants, it became a New Woman symbol of emancipation (Faxneld 214). In Victorian culture and ideology, men and women were meant to keep separate spaces, or “spheres”: women kept to the house, the Woman’s Sphere, and men were free to wander anywhere else. The New Woman is representative of an insistence on freedom from the constricting home sphere, and the strict gender roles that many feminist writers, including Sarah Grand, criticized; although, the home sphere was not necessarily completely relinquished, but incorporated into the ideals of the New Woman. It was more common for the New Woman to engage with her contestation using artistic, personal, and intellectual means within the home sphere, such as writing and theater, dressing, riding bicycles, or supporting the suffrage movements.

Other popular New Woman writers of the period include Mona Caird, George Egerton, Ella Hepworth Dixon, and Ella D’Arcy. Their writings boasted a wide readership because of the popularity, and thus, circulation of periodicals, with some of the most famous being *Women’s Penny Paper*, *The Girl’s Own Paper*, *Punch*, and *English Woman’s Journal*. Although many of the smaller feminist periodicals enjoyed fewer readers and were relatively short-lived, they were still a culturally significant phenomenon, providing a mouthpiece for women’s interests and issues that were previously ignored (Levine 293-294). Feminist periodicals targeted women as a primary

audience by not only giving a platform to gendered social issues, but because they did not “neglect literary and even domestic subjects, and their contents often overlapped in part with the established journals, as much for the sake of readability as to enhance circulation” (Levine 295). Such efforts, whether the material was traditionally and acceptably feminine or not, served the purpose of allowing women to fit into the established society and out of their restrictive “sphere,” instead of dismantling the existing structure entirely.

Extending to fiction, the New Woman appeared in writing by other authors as well, such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), which serves as simply a reference to the New Woman debate, and Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), which both foreshadow Grand’s writing, where the protagonist embodies the New Woman attributes. Expectedly, the ideologies of the New Woman becoming associated with that of witches meant an extensive number of witches in fiction as well, as the two became innately intertwined. Earlier works from the mid-Victorian period saw more literal representations of witches being written. William Harrison Ainsworth’s *The Lancashire Witches* is a fictionalized account of the actual Pendle Hill witch trials, while Wilhelm Meinhold’s *The Amber Witch* (1838) is a completely fictionalized narrative surrounding a witch trial that is based on early accounts of real ones. In it, the accused witch is not a witch at all, but her status as one casts her as a victim of a sexist society. *The Lancashire Witches* and *The Amber Witch* essentially rewrote early modern history. The mid-Victorian witch is a reimagining of the early modern trends that leans heavily into a mythologized version, perpetuated by pseudo-historical texts in order to sensationalize the facts of the early modern witch trials. Victorian occultism, coupled

with the suffrage and New Woman movements of the late nineteenth century, were the primary catalysts for the witch's renewed popularity in literature and culture via the late Victorians' new iteration. The witch shows up across genres of Victorian writing, from short stories and novels to alleged religious texts and fictionalized histories. References to witches and witchcraft are also prevalent in the writings of famous women's suffrage activist and abolitionist Matilda Joselyn Gage. In response to the popularity of the mid-Victorian witch representation, New Woman writers and fin de siècle feminist writers co-opted the witch into a symbol that benefited their movement. The pattern of the early modern interpretation is brought up again in Terry Pratchett's *Tiffany Aching* in the ways he subverts myths popularized by the mid-Victorians, such as the Burning Times and the myth of the persecuted healer, and how he satirizes mass hysteria. Many other contemporary witch representations of the twenty-first century have popularized Salem as an origin story for witches, including *Charmed*, *Hocus Pocus*, and *A Discovery of Witches*.

The early modern witch served as a sort of model for the Victorian iteration, having been influenced by the renewed interest in the witch trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Following the early modern trend of a dual perspective of witches in cultural representations—on one hand a hideous crone and devil worshiper, on the other an enigmatic sexual object—the mid-Victorian witch, like those depicted in *The Amber Witch* and *The Lancashire Witches*, became a reflection of contemporary society much like the early modern version, a being “onto which society successfully projected its fears and guilts” (qtd in Moran 125). Maureen Moran argues that “at a time of massive social upheaval and inexplicable physical and psychological illnesses, diabolical

possession became a helpful explanation to discredit heresy and social rebellion and to account for a harsh and uncontrollable material world” (125). The Victorian age underwent a period of social upheaval that directly influenced the representation of the witch, such as the suffrage and women’s rights movements, and upturn in the size of secular society, signaling a shift in the way that witches would be represented in late-Victorian literature. The mysterious female body “became patriarchy’s Other to be feared, abjected, and expunged if it threatened the boundaries set up to contain it” (Moran 125). The frequency with which female writers of the late nineteenth century seem to embrace the title of witch, however, legitimizes the claim that “modern scholars have suggested that witchcraft also expresses a woman’s unique sense of self and her own anxieties about her role as mother and maintainer of the household” (Moran 125). The same concerns are reflected in the hallmarks of the New Woman movement and also are present in the later witchcraft representations of Tiffany Aching and Feyre Archeron: their identities as witches are tied up within their desire to care for others and to decide their own rules over the trajectory of their lives. The bulk of Victorian fiction depicting reclaimed feminist witches does not explicitly seek to dismantle the society that stands, but rather provide an avenue to women to negotiate their role within the status-quo on their own terms. “The witch may not be just a suffering, broken body” as Moran puts it, but representative of female power, a tool with which to weaponize and subvert male expectations and craft a “new, (albeit mythic) self” (125).

In the witch motif of late Victorian fiction, the witch is primarily a sympathetic character. She is the solution to a problem, as painted above. She’s characterized in Egerton’s short stories “The Cross Line” and “An Empty Frame” (1893) as an enigma,

impossible to be understood fully. In Michelet's *La Sorcière*, and Charles Leland's *Aradia* (1899), the witch is a beautiful and powerful fantasy. Nineteenth-century culture "appropriates the image of the witch to create the glamorous sorceress who conflates popular male fears and fantasies of the "New Woman:" beautiful, sexually forthright and desirable, but unnaturally beyond domination by virtue of her independence, guile, and strength of mind and emotion" (Moran 124). The power to resist domination while retaining the ability to be beautiful, mysterious, and self-sufficient defines the late Victorian witch motif, and ultimately makes her ripe for use by late Victorian feminist writers and the writers of the subsequent decades—such as later witchcraft representations of the twenty-first century, including the witches of Pratchett and the witch figures of Maas.

Michelet's *La Sorciere* is one of the most popular and enduring representations of the Victorian witch; as the opening of this chapter suggests, it was very influential, presenting a kind of feminist version of witches. Although published prior to the New Woman movement and the emergence of the late Victorian witch, this book holds many of the same sentiments. A relationship with the mother of one of Michelet's students inspired him to turn toward women's issues, claiming he wanted to "rehabilitate her and defend her against oppression from male authorities past and present—like feudal lords, employers, loutish husbands, and, most important, the Catholic Church" (Faxneld 200). This belief is evident in *La Sorcière*, but it is also clear his views are overtly paternalistic, and therefore not as liberating of women as it may appear on the surface, a fact that will be discussed later in this chapter. In any case, Michelet was a prolific and successful writer and historian, and his work remains in print to this day. *La Sorcière*, although

written and advertised as a scholarly history on witchcraft, and authored by a working historian, can scarcely be described as such. The text used very few primary sources from the period of history Michelet covered but does contain a section heavily criticizing the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*. It is divided into two parts: the first is a collection of fables and a fictionalized account of the creation of the witch-cult as a form of social protest, and the second part is stories allegedly containing evidence from the early modern European witch trials.

Satanism and devil-worshiping are typically understood as negative attributes within the concept of witchcraft, particularly during the early modern period, but *La Sorcière* instead presents the two as favorable elements. The witches in *La Sorcière* are explicitly written as Satanists, but they are celebrated for it. Satan is characterized as a benevolent being, which directly challenges the Church's view of Satan. By allowing his witches to be Satanists without judgment, Michelet affords a certain power back to women, a prominent idea in succeeding witch representations. In the epilogue, Michelet writes that the work of Satan rests on "three everlasting rocks: Reason, Right, and Nature," and with woman as "the unhappy Witch, [Satan] made his first homely flights into science" (398). Faxneld maintains that this effectively makes woman Satan's chosen one, another example of the inversions between Satan and Christianity in the text—witches as Satan's thralls become witches as emancipated by Satan (204). In the text, Michelet insists: "She is herself, and preserves herself. She belongs neither to the Demon nor to God"; he says the devil may possess her, but gains nothing because she remains her own (78). Sometimes the Devil places "a coal of fire on her breast"—imagery Michelet uses seemingly as a stand-in for any harmful act inflicted upon the witch—but

the witch stands firm, refusing and calling the demon a “butcher”: “No, butcher, I will stay as I am” (78). The witch of the text is also written to be a sympathetic character from the very beginning. At the start of the text is an image of “bewitching Circe; sublime Sibyl!” and her downfall: “she who from her throne in the East taught men the virtues of plants and the courses of the stars...she is also who it is whom, a thousand years later, people hunt down like a wild beast” (2-3). The witch—named in terms of the mythological example of Circe—has been “dishonoured, worried, stoned, or set upon the burning coals!” (3). Michelet references the witch persecutions of the early modern period to paint a sympathetic portrait of the witch before he empowers her, to some extent.

The social politics of Michelet’s monograph reflect his real-life leanings, and the creation of the witch-cult in the text comes as a response to feudalism and social injustices. The members of the pagan religion were peasants, and their expression of Satanism doubles as their rebellion against the power structures subjugating them. This witchcraft religion began in the lowest social classes, as Purkiss puts it: “as a religion of the people...because it was a manifestation of the democratic spirit” (35). Michelet even assigns blame to the Catholic Church for the creation of the witchcraft religion: “At what date, then, did the Witch first appear? I say unfalteringly, “In the age of despair”: of that deep despair which the gentry of the Church engendered. Unfalteringly do I say, “The Witch is a crime of their own achieving” (9). In Michelet’s view, oppressive practices and rituals of the Church acted as a catalyst for a personalized form of religious expression, especially that which centralized women in its practice.

The central aspect of the witch's religion, the Black Mass—a concept co-opted by Matilda Joslyn Gage, a woman we will return to—is another inversion of Christianity and its practices. The Black Mass is a version of the witch's sabbath, which has been recounted across various witch iterations. The intended purpose of the Black Mass was “Human brotherhood, defiance of the Christian heaven, a distorted worship of nature herself as God,” while centering women on the altar and in the highest place of authority (149). During these masses, the witch and woman become the living altar upon which the ceremony is performed, including a denial of Jesus, paying homage to their new master, and a mockery of the Christian host. The priestess/witch begins the service with: “I will come before thine altar; but save me, O Lord, from the faithless and violent man (from the priest and the baron),” which is another reference to the basis of the religion in its genesis: the disavowing of authority, both religious and secular (151). In this call to be saved from violent men, she acknowledges the inherent iniquity of a patriarchal society and invokes the larger idea of the witch as a woman using magic to seek power and/or to affect change in her life. The physicality of the witches in Michelet are evocative of the Greek style, and Medea and Circe are even mentioned by Michelet in the introductory section of his history. Described as extremely ethereal and almost haunting, the witch of the Black Mass is painted with significant attention paid to her power and otherworldliness. Her magical abilities and dominating power are central to the text and serve as a challenge to the institutions that would dampen it. Michelet is very clear on this: “In its earliest phase the Black Mass seemed to betoken this redemption of Eve, so long accursed of Christianity. The woman fills every office in the Sabbath. She is priestess, altar, pledge of holy communion, by turns. Nay, at bottom, is she not herself as

God?” (148). By equating women—witches, for in this text they are inseparable—to God, Michelet attempts to erase all influence of the Catholic Church and give all power back to the women of the Black Mass.

This moment of power for Michelet’s witches falters to some degree, with them often described as being healers and midwives, and closer to nature than men by design. In his introduction to the witch, Michelet writes of her: “This very life of hers, dreadful though it be, tightens and braces her woman’s energy, her womanly electricity. Hence, you may see her endowed with two gifts. One is the *inspiration of lucid frenzy*, which in its several degrees, becomes poesy, second-sight, depth of insight” and he goes so far as to gender this power: “of such a gift the man, the wizard, knows nothing. On his side no beginning would have been made” (11). This serves to provide her with a special kind of power, unique to female witches. This same idea of a gendered cleverness intrinsic to a woman is reminiscent of Grand’s New Woman belief that women were inherently intellectually superior to men. A similar idea is used by Pratchett’s Tiffany Aching, a witch whose powers are directly tied to her cleverness. Michelet goes on: “From this gift flows that other, the sublime power of *unaided conception*, that parthenogenesis which our physiologists have come to recognise, as touching fruitfulness of the body in the females of several species; and which is not less a truth with regard to the conceptions of the spirit” (11). This power to create “unaided” bestows a great power onto the witch, but it also still only delegates her to production, in the same way childbirth and motherhood do. Purkiss refers to Michelet’s characterization as supporting the stereotype of “women as nature, men as culture” (35).

So, the witch seems to give women power over their own bodies, but it also feeds into Michelet's paternalistic view of women's emancipation. In his conclusion, Michelet writes that the Witch is gone, and: "Busied in these latter days with the affairs of men, Woman has in return given up her rightful part, that of the physician, the comforter, the healing Fairy. Herein lies her proper priesthood—a priesthood that does belong to her, whatever the Church may say" (399). Contrast this against the subsequent ideas of the New Woman, as a response to Michelet's contemporary view of the woman's sphere, which the New Woman pushes back against and firmly rejects, effectively embracing the witch identity more directly than Michelet. Classifying women as healers and "comforters" contributes to stereotypical roles for women, and for witches. Michelet writes about a redemption of Eve and a shirking of Christianity's bonds in favor of female emancipation, but the audience is left with a reinforcement of typical female roles as maternal fairies of the "woman's sphere" (Faxneld 207).

Ultimately, *La Sorcière* is not actually presenting a fully realized feminist text. Michelet's text is more of a commentary on religion and social issues, based on opinions he held in his own life. By presenting the text as a history of witchcraft, Michelet plays into a collective imagination of the witch as a figure, recognizable by her dress and her power. As was discussed in the introduction of this paper, the iconography of the witch is well-established, and Michelet's version contributes directly to the myth of the witch as a whole. Though flawed, *La Sorcière* is invaluable for the influence it had on witch representations that continue to this day, including the establishing of witches as symbols of social rebellion and laying the groundwork for writers like Gage to take their traditionally negative aspects and paint them as empowering attributes. I would argue that

Michelet's lack of representation of truly liberated women is in part what pushed later writers such as Gage to expand on the ideas put forth in his work to begin with. Having been wildly popular and influential upon its 1862 publication, *La Sorcière* did serve as the beginning of a long list of later witch representations of the final decades of the Victorian period.

A similar so-called historical text was published in 1899 by journalist and amateur folklorist Charles Godfrey Leland. *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches* is a composite text: half religious text, half oral history. As we've seen, *La Sorcière* treats witchcraft as a historical practice, but Leland builds on that belief and writes of witchcraft as a living, breathing religion. Leland moved to Italy at the age of 62 in 1886 in order to study local folklore, and while there he met the Italian witch by the name of Maddalena (Faxneld 221). According to *Aradia*, Italian witchcraft is a family practice passed down generation to generation and Maddalena was part of this tradition. Leland was able to conduct the research necessary to compile the text, which was mostly derived from oral tradition. It contains just as much of Leland's thoughts and beliefs as it does actual folklore, however, and it is not uncommon for critics to accuse *Aradia* of being a hoax. Robert Mathiesen touches on the uncertain truth of Maddalena's existence, writing that Leland obtained several hundred pages of material from her, and he mentioned her frequently across letters and journals (31). Out of all of the supposed physical evidence, none of it remains except for one letter in Maddalena's own hand printed in one of Leland's scrapbooks dated June 1895, in which Maddalena talks of her impending marriage and immigration to the United States (32). A photo of the Italian witch is available in Leland's biography as well. This is to say that *Aradia's* research cannot be entirely a hoax, unless of course

Maddalena was the culprit, having been paid by Leland for her contributions (Faxneld 222). Regardless of its accuracy or legitimacy, *Aradia* expounded upon the work Michelet began to cement the idea of the witch as a rebel against oppression and a symbol of female power. Its influence is still evident in pagan faiths of the twenty-first century and served as a source material for Charles Gardner and the founding of the modern-day religion of Wicca (and continues to serve as a reference for it). Wicca has no defined religious scripture but “*Aradia* is the oldest to have wide currency as a source for a more or less democratic folk religion” therefore, the Dianic hymns and rituals served as an inspiration for the inception of Wicca and is today thought of as a “foremother,” Chas S. Clifton notes (3). Some of the contents of *Aradia* are reflected in the characterization and events of Feyre Archeron’s story, a full account of which follows in the third chapter of this paper.

Leland’s passed down Italian folklore contains relics from established witch iconography and Christianity. The central figure and goddess of the text is Diana, *Aradia*’s mother. Diana is goddess of the hunt and protector of childbirth and is closely associated with the moon. Often depicted as a triple deity—much like the triple goddess of Wicca—she is a popular figure in witchcraft literature. *Aradia*, goddess of witches, is the product of the union between Diana and Lucifer, Diana’s “brother and son, herself and her other half” (14). Diana is classified as the dark, and Lucifer the light, having been first divided into darkness and light herself. Leland gives a version of the creation myth involving Diana as the creator of the world, the “stars and the rain” (13). Diana “spun the lives of all men; all things were spun from the wheel of Diana. Lucifer turned the wheel” (14). This is an obvious inversion of the Christian creation myth, with other references

included in the text, such as an invocation of Cain at the witches' sabbath, and identification of Aradia as a derivative of the wicked queen of the New Testament, Herodias, responsible for John the Baptist's death (Faxneld 223). Faxneld also points out that *Aradia's* Lucifer is also definitely the same Lucifer of Christianity, which is evident in the passage: "Thou who are daughter unto him who was most evil of all spirits, who of old once reigned in hell when driven away from heaven" (223). Diana came to earth and created magic and sorcery and became "Queen of the Witches; she was the cat who ruled the star-mice, the heaven and the rain" (Leland 15). Aradia is given the power to change water to wine, a power analogous to Jesus (12). Like Michelet, Leland places woman—and witch—in the most powerful position, upsetting even God and, by association, men.

Within the text, women are positioned as being absolutely necessary to meaningful societal change and as being capable of successfully wielding their power over men. Upon the birth of Aradia, goddess of witches, Diana tells her that she shall be the first witch, and "thou shalt teach the art of poisoning, of poisoning those are great lords of all; Yea, thou shalt make them die in their palaces; And thou shalt bind the oppressor's soul (with power)" (5). This speech characterizes Aradia, and by extension witches, as the savior of the oppressed, in this case being the poor and women. Like Michelet's peasant witches, Aradia is also designed specifically as a harbinger of a social rebellion against oppression. According to Leland, witches were the oppressed, "revenging themselves in every way, and holding orgies to Diana which the church represented as being the worship of Satan"; he then doubles down on how this information was given to him directly from Maddalena, who herself was perhaps a victim of the oppression (59). Diana is named multiple times in the text as a "protectress" of

those who served her, which are equated with the oppressed. The text suggests the rise of the witchcraft religion was a result of “The endless preaching to the people that it was a duty to suffer and endure oppression and tyranny, and that the rights of the Authority of all kinds were so great that they on the whole even excused their worst abuses. For by upholding Authority in the nobility the church maintained its own”; the result of this being the “rebels” and “outcasts” and all those discontented joining in their pagan religion (60). To be sure, women are named at the center of this movement: “Whenever in history there is a period of radical intellectual rebellion against long-established conservatism, hierarchy, and the like, there is always an effort to regard Woman as the fully equal, which means the superior sex” (63). Leland takes the opportunity to not only equate the sexes, but place women *above* men in every way, possibly because of their ability to affect change, a motif that shows up across witchcraft literature.

There is evidence of parallels to other late Victorian literature, fiction or otherwise, in *Aradia*. New Woman and female emancipation authors were pushing ideas similar to those in *Aradia*, and once the witch became a popular figure for feminist re-visioning that connection became even clearer. Commensurate with the texts of Leland and Michelet, the women’s rights activists of the period were also battling oppression. A passage from *Aradia* can be read as a direct response to the issues of the day. The witch “laying aside all question as to magic or its non-existence—was once a real factor or great power in rebellious social life, and to this very day—as most novels bear witness—it is recognized that there is something uncanny, mysterious, and incomprehensible in woman, which neither she herself nor man can explain” (64).

The reference to “novels” points out a relationship between reclaimed witches and fiction that was budding at the time. Regardless of whether or not the magic is real or literal, Leland draws a line connecting the personality or characterization of witches that extends beyond the literal to a greater idea of how witches are represented in writing. Because “every woman is at heart a witch” and he wonders, “are not the charms of love of every kind, and the enjoyment of beauty in all its forms in nature, mysteries, miracles, or magical?” (64). In short, magic is everywhere for these women, and does not have to be the literal hocus pocus of myth, but can simply be the method, the “magic” they use to claim their power: a power that is repeatedly given to women—witches—as rightfully theirs. This idea was cemented in witch writings during the end of the nineteenth century, and the notion of every woman as a witch and that magic is pervasive effectively broadens the definition of who can be a witch; the term could now belong to all women fighting for their agency.

The witch as fundamentally misunderstood is apparent in the work of George Egerton. Her 1893 collection of short stories, *Keynotes*, contain two pieces —“A Cross Line” and “An Empty Frame” —that expertly illustrate the mentality of the late Victorian witch partially set up by Michelet and the New Woman, and how feminists came to think of her as a kind of metaphor for reclaimed female power. George Egerton, the pen name of writer Mary Chavelita Dunne, was most known for her writing with themes of female freedom and often the female character’s psychology played a major part in her stories. In “A Cross Line,” the first story in *Keynotes*, an unnamed woman meets a man fishing, and they strike up a conversation—and possibly a romance. However, it’s revealed that the protagonist is already married to a patronizing and infantilizing husband who does not

understand her. During her conversations with the fisherman, the audience comes to learn that the fisherman at least doesn't *mis*understand her. Once she finds out she's pregnant—a fact that is never explicitly divulged but gathered nonetheless—she cuts off the burgeoning friendship with the fisherman and the story ends.

The story specifically establishes the protagonist as being defined by her psyche—reminiscent of the way witch figures are defined by their strength of mind—and investigates her grappling with the ways men subjugate women. The female main character of the story is introduced by the contents of her mind: “Her mind is nothing if not picturesque; her busy brain, with all its capabilities...is always producing pictures and finding associations between the most unlikely objects” (Egerton 1). Right away, the audience knows her mind before they know her outward beauty or temperament. This characterization is integral to the rest of her story. When the woman meets the fisherman, her would-be lover, she divulges a rather “mannish” interest in fishing and the two strike up a conversation. At one point the narrator notes: “What odd eyes the woman has! Kind of magnetic,” which gives the reader the sense that she is a mysterious figure, unknowable but alluring nonetheless, a stereotype that fits in thousands of years of witch characterization (5). This sense is given again during their meeting, when something about his voice “jars on her” because she has a sensitivity to inflection, “with an intuition that is almost second sight” (7). This again lends a kind of mysterious power—psychic magic, in this case—to the woman. She goes back to her husband, a man who doesn't understand her. During these moments conversing with his wife, the husband says: “You are a queer little devil!” and a moment later she retorts: “It's just men like you send women like me to the devil” (15-16). The woman is very aware that men—in this case

her husband—are the perpetrators casting women like her as the villains. Although a relationship with the Devil is not present in her characterization as a witch, “Egerton’s writing must have functioned as a significant affirmation of the general notion that witches, traditionally understood as Satanists, as symbols of female power and independence” simply because she pushes back on the notion that the two are linked (Faxneld 231). Indeed, in her reply to him, she insists that it is men like him that damn her in the end. His accusation only strengthens her desire for freedom, for living as a “witch.” In an echo of Grand’s New Woman writings about men that “deprived” women of knowledge and then “jeered” at them for it, Egerton condemns the man’s infantilization of the woman in the story; the same sort of patronizing attitude of men that keep women uneducated.

It is then that the woman retreats into the magic of her mind, associating her desired liberation with imagery of earlier types of witch representations. For more than two pages after, she sits fantasizing about what her freedom would look like. She looks out to the water, thinking of Cleopatra sailing down to meet Anthony “and a great longing fills her to soul to sail off somewhere too,— away from the daily need of dinner-getting and the recurring Monday with its washing, life with its tame duties and virtuous monotony” (19). She dreams she is on stage in front of a packed theater “gauze-clad in a cobweb garment of wondrous tissue; her arms are clasped by jeweled snakes, and one with quivering diamond fangs coils round her hips; her hair floats loosely, and her feet are sandal-clad, and the delicate breath of vines and the salt freshness of an incoming sea seem to fill her nostrils” (19). This image of her references the Greek witch, such as Medea or Circe, dressed like a goddess. Tired of the unstimulating life of a housewife,

she begins to see it as a trap. She can see herself with the power of “swaying all these human souls to wonder” “with parted lips and panting, rounded breasts, and a dancing devil in each glowing eye, sway[ing] voluptuously to the wild music that [is]...seductive, intoxicating” (20). This is a much more overtly sexual image, giving power back to the witch of the Renaissance, a demon-loving sexual deviant who luxuriates in this kind of behavior. For this protagonist, it is a fantasy that she longs for and sees as a result of freedom. In the midst of this reverie she is “spellbound,” a word choice that is not accidental (20). Her fantasies are her witchcraft, a way for her to live as her desired self.

Egerton ruminates on how women are further pushed to embrace the mantle of being a witch by the disinterest men have in understanding the minds of women. After this daydream, she sits pensive with the fisherman/lover, and it occurs to her that “The denseness of man, his chivalrous, conservative devotion to the female idea he has created, blinds him, perhaps happily to the problems of her complex nature” (21). “Idea” of women is the key phrase here, because it demonstrates in the woman’s thoughts the willful ignorance of men; that she is not fully realized in the minds of the men around her. However, the witch in *her* mind is very real, and very attainable. Men have “overlooked the eternal wildness, the untamed primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best woman... an untamable quality that may be concealed but is never eradicated by culture, the keynote of woman’s witchcraft and woman’s strength” (22). She validates the anger that women feel, and gives yet another reason to embrace the witch, the freedom of allowing oneself to experience the unfiltered emotion when not stifled by the Woman’s Sphere or man’s expectation. *Keynotes* is also the name of the collection, and when used here it becomes evident that the central point of Egerton’s

stories is to point out the core of a woman's desire. While she is thinking of all this, how women's roles and men's ideas of them are based on an unwillingness to know them, the fisherman interrupts her with: "Dreaming or speering into futurity? You have the look of a seer. I believe you are half a witch!" (23). Her response is "Is not every woman that? Let us hope I'm for my friends a white one" (23). She almost gleefully accepts the moniker in this passage, and muses that she hopes everyone at least believes she is kind—a white witch being a good witch. In *Aradia*, Leland also points to the universality of women as witches, making the same claim as the main character of "A Cross Line": that all women are witches.

The protagonist ultimately makes the assertion that this burden within her as she aches for freedom from the world of men is commonplace, and that the desire to be free of the codes defined by masculinity is a shared notion between women. As the story starts to come to a close, she begins to come to terms with the fact that she is misunderstood, and while the fisherman is not as guilty of it as her husband, it isn't enough: "I have given freely whatever they craved from me in the way of understanding or love; I have touched sore places they showed me, and healed them,— but they never got at me. I have been for myself, and helped myself, and borne the burden of my own mistakes" (24). She feels she is unknowable and does not fit neatly in the role she's placed in. She says: "Can't you understand where the spell lies? It is the freedom, the freshness, the vague danger, the unknown that has a witchery for me, ay, for every woman!" (27). She identifies the spell as the magic-working—the witchcraft—that leads her to personal agency. This moment is the first time she has explicitly vocalized her desire for a life of freedom and adventure, that witchery is the way to achieve it, and she reckons that this is

universal experience for women: “At heart we care nothing for laws, nothing for systems; all your elaborately reasoned codes for controlling morals or man do not weigh a jot with us against an impulse, an instinct. We learn those things from you, you tamed, amenable animals; they are not natural to us” (28). The truth for her lies in the undeniable difference in how men exist in the world and how women are forced to exist, because of what is acceptable behavior for her sex. However, “Natural femininity as constructed by Egerton, is far from only the tender, maternal variety valued so highly at the turn of the century. It also encompasses strong traits of wildness, coupled with other non-rational and anti-cultural features like strong intuition and instincts” (Faxneld 231). Egerton presents a version of femininity that prides itself on existing outside the norm, true to the New Woman belief system.

Although the protagonist ultimately concedes, abandoning these fantasies and going home to her husband, she still challenges the power structures of men in ways that allow her to remain identifiable as a witch figure. When she finds out she is pregnant (a development the reader deduces from her actions and words to her maid Lizzie) she decides to stay with her husband instead of pursuing freedom—synonymous with witchery in the text—and tells Lizzie to hang something white on the lilac bush, the signal to the fisherman that “his moment has ended” with her (30). At the last second, she insists she will do it herself. Hanging something white on the lilac bush is evocative of a spell or ritual, akin to herbalism and folk magic like burning sage to ward off negative energy, and the woman choosing to complete the last act of witchcraft for herself is an important moment in her choosing her path. The story ends on this note, with the woman giving up her freedom for a middle-class maternal existence, but this choice does not rob

her entirely of her identity. As Moran argues: “To be a witch is to become part of a timeless network of strong and powerful women and to reject man’s model of femininity ‘fashioned... on imaginary lines’” (136). That being said, her choice to stay and become a mother does not make her any less of a witch. The identity lies in the ability to question her given lot, and a desire to break out of it. Her strength comes directly from a resistance that she possesses to the very end. Indeed, in “A Cross Line” Egerton brings up the witch metaphor so often that it becomes a central motif in the story, completely impossible to ignore the intention behind making being a witch so integrally linked with a woman’s power.

Another story by Egerton from the same collection, “An Empty Frame” follows a woman similar to the aforementioned character, showing the ubiquity of women’s yearning for freedom and stagnation in the patriarchy. Also unnamed, this woman, having come in for the night and changed clothes, sits in a chair in front of an empty frame sitting on the mantel. Egerton gives a clipped description of her: “Her face is more characteristic than beautiful. Nine men would pass it, the tenth sell his immortal soul for it...The eyes tell you little; they are keen and inquiring, and probe others’ thoughts rather than reveal their own” (116-117). This description of her is similar to the one from “A Cross Line” in that it gets at her effect on others, giving her a possibly magical effect on those around her. The woman in “An Empty Frame” has, perhaps inadvertently, affected a former lover of hers. She remembers the letter from him:

You love me; I know it, you other half of me. You want me to complete your life, as I you, you good, sweet woman; you slight, weak thing, with your strong will and your grand, great heart; you witch, with a soul of clean white fire... you dear

one, come to me; I want you, now, always. Be with me, work with me, share with me, live with me, my equal as a creature; above me, as my queen of women! I love you, I worship you; but you my views...Come! I will crouch at your feet and swear myself to you. (118-119)

The woman declined the offer and married someone who “seemed to need her most out of those who admired her” (119). After her husband arrives home, the reader sees a conversation between them, in which the woman says firmly: “You couldn’t understand me if you tried to, and better not try!” (123). In the letter, it’s clear the witch is a metaphor for the liberated woman, a woman who can be man’s equal in every way. In fact, the letter’s author explicitly says he desires her to be “above me, as my queen of women!” placing her even higher than him because of how she’s bewitched his heart. Just before dictating the letter in the story, the woman refers to it as the “words that decided her fate” and the fate comes in the form of the man she ended up marrying, who does not understand her (118). The man in the letter could have understood her as a witch, but she laments the loss of that possibility. As is true in “A Cross Line,” the witch motif in “An Empty Frame” illustrates a type of free and creative woman, completely liberated from societal expectations, an ideal image of the New Woman.

It should be noted that the characters in Egerton’s stories mentioned here are not literally witches. Instead, their likening to witches is metaphorical, based on their emotional desires and need for freedom. The characters in “A Cross Line” and “An Empty Frame” are both likened to witches, by themselves and men in their lives, effectively making the witch figure definable as an image of female power, “a metaphor for the type of creative woman who is men’s equal in all respects” (Faxneld 229). While

only a witch symbolically, these women still are capable of using their power as such to affect change in their lives, to reference the established definition of “witch” in this paper. As is seen in “A Cross Line,” though, our “witch” does not use this power, and instead actively chooses to remain in her marriage and let her fisherman go.

Naturally, fiction was inspired by real life and vice versa. As previously noted, Matilda Joslyn Gage was influenced partly by the witch-cult of *La Sorcière*, and in her work the witch shows up as a metaphor for a liberated woman. Gage goes so far as to create an anti-Christian feminist witch cult of her own in her work. Gage was brought up in New York in an abolitionist household, a home that was a stop on the Underground Railroad. Her father was a passionate activist and educated Gage in multiple languages, philosophy, and science. She grew up to be an activist herself, becoming a staunch suffragist, abolitionist, and women’s rights advocate. Unlike some of her contemporaries, Gage believed suffrage was not enough to attain women’s equality and that women should aim higher. She was a member of the National Women’s Suffrage Movement but was pushed out due to her more radical views, and eventually founded the Women’s National Liberal Union. Her most important work is *Woman, Church, and State* (1893), which encompasses many of her anti-Christian sentiments. She was aware of the radical nature of this book, writing to her son after its publication, saying: “I expect savage attacks” (Corey 51). It is dedicated in part to those “who dare seek truth for the sake of truth,” underscoring how important she felt this text would be.

At the core of this text is Gage’s belief that the church is the primary force behind women’s subjugation, and that Christianity itself would collapse without the subordination of women (Fenton 30). Gage adopted the witch-cult theory and leaned

heavily into it to illustrate the plight of women in the early modern period. The disproven theory simply describes the accused early modern witches as surviving members of a pagan religion that survived the introduction of Christianity to Europe. In an 1878 public speech, years before the publication of *Woman, Church, and State*, Gage attacked Christianity, claiming it “is based upon the fact of woman servitude;” Gage specifically names Eve—as Michelet does—a woman punished for her desire for knowledge by being permanently subjugated by her husband (Faxneld 215). In the book, she alleges that none of the wrongdoings perpetrated by the church against women were as horrific as the witch trials, where innocent women were dragged off to be executed (Gage puts this number at around nine million women, but present-day calculations are much more modest) (Faxneld 218). Faxneld figures “She was probably the first person to extensively analyze the persecutions of witches as a misogynist genocide” (218). Her idea is that society would better understand the church’s oppression against women if the term “women” replaced “witches.” Gage takes cues from Michelet’s history, and uses the *Malleus Maleficarum* as a primary text, in the same way as Michelet. The witch-cult featured in *Church and State* is modeled after the witches of the Black Mass in *La Sorcière*, which are in turn modeled after the mythologized version the witch-cult theory puts forth and uses it as a template for anti-Christian rhetoric, saying: “This period was especially that of woman’s rebellion against the existing order of religion and government in both church and state” (258-259). At these Black Masses, the rites “in defiance of that God to whom the serfs under church teaching ascribed all their wrongs, she was also called “The Devil’s Bride” (258). Gage quotes Michelet in this passage, recalling the title of the priestess heading the Black Mass, but she “emphasizes the

feminist tendencies in his text when she claims the priest and the lord tyrannized not only the serfs as a social class but also the female sex at large” (Faxneld 219).

Woman, Church, and State is Gage’s attempt to connect the dots of women’s history, drawing a connection between the witch trials, the church’s harmful doctrine, and women’s rights (Corey 53). However, because she largely uses *La Sorcière* and the *Malleus* as her primary evidence for her claims, her text cannot be viewed as historical evidence. It should instead be viewed as a political text, and part esoteric belief, as Faxneld classifies it. Gage of course had a personal stake in this publication, in her attempt to distance witches from hysterics, a popular belief at the time; since she associates witches with female scholars with suffragettes, this defense is necessary. If taken at face value and not as historical fact, Gage’s work still represents a hugely significant marker in the fin de siècle feminist reclamation of the witch. She took Michelet’s fledgling ideas about the witch as feminist and developed them into a solid connection. Her writing has been credited with influencing the portrayal of witches in her son-in-law L. Frank Baum’s book *The Wonderful Wizard Of Oz* (Fenton 23). The idea of the witch represented within fantasy such as this will be an important subject from this point forward. Gage brought the witch into the contemporary, conflating her issues with that of all women, effectively laying the groundwork for her future iterations as a feminist symbol.

Whether literal or metaphorical, the witch’s journey remains the same. The daydreaming witch of “A Cross Line” obviously differs from the priestess of the witch-cult of *Aradia*, but both women find common ground in their search for power and autonomy. Even in their descriptions they share similarity, usually always being related

as wearing little or no clothes, and always loose fitting, flowing vestments, following the Greek style commonly used by Victorian writers. This contrasts heavily with the corseted fashions and heavy skirts of the nineteenth century, so in a way, even their clothing represents a kind of freedom, in a society where just wearing pants to ride a bike would have been enough to level the allegation of “witch.” Although used by antifeminists as an insult (or in the case of hysteria, an indictment on their mental state), suffragettes and female advocates took the term back and fully empowered the witch as an attainable female fantasy. In their writing they give life to the idea that to be a liberated woman, a free, and sexually forthright woman is not a bad thing. This celebration of the witch outlived the nineteenth century and, following the rise of fantasy as a genre, became even more popular.

III. TWENTIETH-CENTURY FANTASY AND TIFFANY ACHING

Fantastical elements have always been a part of fiction and storytelling. Ancient mythology and folklore are bursting with stories of magic, monsters, and gods. Aesop's fables have been adapted and retold countless times and are full of talking animals. Some of Shakespeare's most popular plays cast a magical being as the story's catalyst: the sorcerer Prospero from *The Tempest* (1610), Titania, Queen of the Faeries, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595), and the prophetic Weird Sisters trio from *Macbeth* (1606). Fairy tales, such as those by the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault, introduced vital elements that would become popular in later fantasy works.

Kathryn Hume defines fantasy as "a departure from consensus reality" (Hume 21). The inherent complexity of fantasy is evident in this somewhat vague definition because the shift from a "consensus reality" can take the form of innumerable variations of interpretation; for example, the magical world can be adjacent or coexistent with reality, or it can be a totally separate place. The setting can be based on medievalist aesthetics and society, which is common, or the world can be only marginally based in reality, historical or contemporary.

Earlier examples of these diversions from reality can be seen in fairy tales, which acted as building blocks to today's modern fantasy. By building on familiar characteristics of folklore and mythology, fairy tales provided familiar hallmarks and iconography that fantasy worlds continue. Popular elements of fairy tales include "monsters and dragons, evil step-parents and fairy godmothers, princes and princesses" as well as anthropomorphic animals, curses, and quests (Abbruscato 1). Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm's tales, published in 1812, were collected folk tales published together,

with some of the most notable being “Hansel and Gretel,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Snow White,” and “Rumpelstiltskin” (Barron 32). Hansel and Gretel’s story is particularly significant in this collection because of its character of the witch. Based on German folklore, a witch lures Hansel and Gretel into her cottage in order to cannibalize the children. The Evil Queen of “Snow White” also employs magic in the use of her magic mirror, and her enchanted poison to put Snow White into a sleep like death. Hans Christian Andersen’s literary fairy tales of the mid-nineteenth century deal with similar elements.

The works that follow in the nineteenth century built on the characteristics established by fairy tales and added the creation of a fantasy world. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), and later L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), adapt well-established fantasy elements set up by folklore and fairy tales and expound upon them by using the inclusion of a separate fantastical world. Indeed, “At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the word ‘fantasy’ changed its meaning radically in the course of a single generation” (Prickett 1). Prickett argues, “From its earliest usage in the English Language, the word has been associated with two other, related ones, ‘imagination’ and ‘fancy’ (1). Chaucer, Prickett explains, used both terms to mean ‘mental image’ or an ‘image of something that does not exist’ and the tone of such definitions carries a somewhat negative connotations, implying delusion or hallucination: “Fantasy might be horrible, it might be delightful, but it was definitely unreal, and therefore of little more than clinical interest to sane and practical citizens...it signified a kind of imagination one might expect to find in madmen—or children” (1). However, by 1825, these definitions shifted drastically:

From being terms of derision, or descriptions of daydreaming, words like ‘fantasy’ and ‘imagination’ suddenly began to take on new status as hurrah words. People began to feel that the very unreality of fantasy gave its creations a kind of separate existence, an autonomy, even a ‘real life’ of its own. They even began to feel differently about madmen and children, who now became objects of interest. (Prickett 2)

This change in attitude can be attributed to the massive shift experienced by society during the Victorian period. Romanticism came into vogue at the start of the nineteenth century, and fantasy literature benefitted from its rise, “with its interest in folk traditions, its rejection of the previous, rational-age view of the world, and its idealization of the child”; all of these being factors that contributed to the defining of fantasy characteristics, and an establishing of a real market for these stories (Nikolajeva 139). Similarly, the rise of a secular society and an interest in occultism and the supernatural experienced by Victorians also contributed to the rise of fantasy elements in literature, and “During this period, fantasy became more sophisticated, affected by the development of science and technology, such as quantum physics, new theories regarding the origins of the universe, and experiments with atomic energy” (Nikolajeva 140). Social movements such as the female emancipation and suffrage campaign lent itself to a use of supernatural elements such as the witch, as exemplified in the previous chapter. “This revised view of the world, a new attitude toward the laws of nature, opened the human mind to much of what fantasy offers: supernatural proceedings, time-shifts, and other worlds,” and much of this was given credence during the nineteenth century (Nikolajeva 140). All of these factors combined to create a landscape ripe for the rise of fantasy as a genre, and indeed, in 1858,

George MacDonald published *Phantases*, a work held to be the first fantasy novel written for adults. Edith Nesbit is another notable fantasy author from the period. An activist as well as a writer, her works include *The Book of Dragons* (1899), *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), and *The Enchanted Castle* (1907). Her work is primarily concerned with juxtaposing the ordinary and the real with the magical. In addition, Carroll and Baum are perhaps two of the most famous fantasy authors of the period and as referenced previously, helped establish the idea of the magical world in the genre.

Two of the most popular fantasy writers of all time, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, wrote stories that contained many of the shared features of preceding fantastical works: talking animals, the presence of magic, a magical world, and the battle between good versus evil. Tolkien's foundational essay, "On Fairy Stories," explains at length the idea of a "literary belief," the case "when the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator.' He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, he relates what is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside" (Tolkien 36-37). Other elements integral to "fairy stories," (a term Tolkien uses to mean "fantasy") are recovery, escape, and consolation (46). Recovery, as Tolkien explains it, is a response to the Primary—real—world, in order to make the familiar strange again. Escape is self-explanatory, because if one inhabits the Secondary World during the act of reading, the fantasy is by definition escapist, an effect Tolkien believes to be beneficial. Because we live in a broken world, inhabiting Faerie (the Secondary World) is not a "flight of the deserter" but "escape of the prisoner" (60). Consolation is a simple notion: the promise of the happy ending.

Of course, Tolkien's notions have been built upon much in the same way as fantasy always has been, but his work helped to establish elements that are now seen as necessary for works in the fantasy genre. In the wake of the success of early fantasy by Carroll, Baum (who wrote fourteen books about the magical land of Oz), and MacDonald, Tolkien and Lewis helped usher in the golden age of fantasy. Other significant pioneers of this time are Ursula K. Le Guin, Roald Dahl, and Terry Brooks. In the last three decades, fantasy has experienced a huge surge in popularity. The Harry Potter series (1997-2007) is the bestselling book series of all time, fantasy or otherwise, with a staggering half a billion copies sold (both Tolkien and Lewis have spots on the bestselling books list as well) (Fiorillo). The start of the twenty-first century also saw a renewed interest in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1954) and *The Hobbit* (1937) when Peter Jackson's film adaptations premiered, and became some of the most profitable movies of all time (the *Harry Potter* films also make this list). The third installment, *The Return of the King* (2003) tied for the most Academy Award nominations ever (Barron 31). The 2000s also saw the explosion in popularity of young adult fantasy properties, like *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Twilight* (2005), *Divergent* (2001), *The Mortal Instruments* (2007), and *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005), to name a few.

This popularity is a direct effect of the Victorian period because the era cemented many of the defining characteristics of fantasy into a distinguishable genre and directly influenced the pioneers of the genre. Modern fantasy contains the established elements to some degree, while also adding something unique. Even further, there are many contemporary examples of fantasy that use classic fairy tales as fodder for a modern retelling. Worldbuilding is crucial to any work of fantasy, and the popular contemporary

works of fantasy continue the tradition of building upon the existing criteria, while, like the Victorians, presenting a social commentary as a backdrop for the work. As argued in Chapter One of this paper, Victorian feminists reclaimed the witch from gender critics and morphed the figure into a symbol of feminine power. The witch falls under the elements of fantasy because she is a magical element or fantastical creature. Fantasy media involving witches has also experienced renewed popularity in recent years, a phenomenon evocative of the Victorian interest in witch trial accounts and the republishing of material about witches, be it historical, pseudo-scientific, or folkloric interpretation. Popular contemporary depictions of witches include *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003), *Wicked* (2003), *Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017), *Charmed* (1998-2006), and of course, *Harry Potter* (1997). Other instances show witches in the style of the fairy-tale: a wicked old hag, or an evil being with the power to steal youth and beauty from others. Examples of this version are *Hocus Pocus* (1993), *Tangled* (2010), and *Stardust* (2007).

Because of the unlimited possibilities at an author's disposal when working with the "impossible," fantasy shows what could not be possible in reality. This idea is reminiscent of Tolkien's "recovery" perspective of fantasy: the "regaining of a clear view... to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity" (Tolkien 57). Having this revitalized view of everyday occurrences or social issues can offer a fresh perspective of real life reflected within the world of fantasy. Brian Attebery writes, for example, about how Shakespeare lifted stories from Ovid, but is primarily interested in how this "allow[ed] him to comment on current events, challenge his contemporaries, [and] create what amounts to a new model

of the mind” (Attebery 3). The same idea can be applied to fantasy, and how elements of the genre lend themselves to investigating facets of real life. In particular, fantasy is an ideal form for an exploration of female power, especially in times fraught with oppressive gender discourse. It is well suited because “Fantasy provides new contexts, and thus inevitably new meanings, for myth...By telling stories about, around, and upon mythic stories, we put ourselves onto the same stage with the gods and heroes and monsters and thus are forced to confront our godlike, heroic, and monstrous selves” (Attebery 3-4). Because the witch was a popular figure in the nineteenth century, it lived on with the establishment of a more popular fantasy genre. The witch is a vessel that one—writer or reader—can pour dreams, fantasies, fears, and anxieties into, making the witch an appropriate fit for an examination of fantasy’s potential. Indeed, “The popularity of *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *A Game of Thrones* indicates that the genre is a pervasive phenomenon, demanding critical evaluation of its emotional appeal and its political implications” (Baker 437).

Terry Pratchett brings audiences just this kind of witch in the form of young Tiffany Aching. Tiffany is the protagonist in a subseries of Pratchett’s wildly successful bestselling *Discworld*, of which there are forty books in total. Over the course of five books, the Tiffany Aching series sees 9-year-old Tiffany reach maturity, charting her journey to become a full-fledged witch, and all the responsibilities and adventures that come with it. Young adult literature, “for rather obvious reasons, frequently focuses on coming-of-age narratives, and fantasy is no exception to this: Many of the most popular works of our time center on the teenage years of a protagonist as they find their place in

the (magical) world” (Kohler 103). Tiffany’s coming-of-age coincides directly with her maturation as a witch, a fact that makes the two inextricable from her character.

The series depicts Tiffany’s journey into becoming a mature, full-fledged witch, as she contends with various threatening magical forces which helps to further develop her abilities. In the first novel, *The Wee Free Men* (2003), we meet Tiffany before her path to being a witch begins. Her grandmother, Granny Aching, has died and she feels lost. In the wake of Granny’s death, the Faerie Queen enters her home, the Chalk, and kidnaps Tiffany’s younger brother and the Baron’s son, leaving Tiffany to rescue them and defend her home. Tiffany is also the only person in her homeland who is able to perceive the arrival of the Faerie Queen, as well as the land of Faerie as a whole, demonstrating that she is sensitive to the realm of magic long before her witch training. The Wee Free Men (pictsies otherwise known as the Nac Mac Feegle), are the first to identify Tiffany as a witch—significant, as the Feegle are magical creatures that knowingly acknowledge Tiffany’s abilities. *A Hat Full of Sky* (2004) follows Tiffany as she leaves the Chalk to begin formal training as a witch, with the primary conflict of the story being Tiffany’s possession by a “hiver,” a being that can control a person’s mind and body. She expels the spirit and returns home to take her place as her community’s witch. In the third installment, *Wintersmith* (2006), Tiffany accidentally causes the Wintersmith—the personification of Winter—to fall in love with her, and she defeats him with a kiss. In *I Shall Wear Midnight* (2010), the magic used to defeat the Wintersmith awakens the Cunning Man, a long-dead spirit of a witchfinder. His presence sows distrust and violence toward witches, and Tiffany is tasked with defeating him. The final book, *The Shepherd’s Crown* (2015), shows Tiffany as a very powerful witch, inheriting what

Granny Weatherwax leaves behind after her passing. Tiffany gathers the witches around her to prepare for an attack by the elves, and they stand victorious when Tiffany calls on the power of the Chalk. Her story ends with her building her own steading, using pieces that once made up her grandmother's.

Tiffany has many adventures, and experiences quite a few pivotal moments in her development, but I believe the most important events in her story take place in the first novel, *The Wee Free Men*, and the fourth, *I Shall Wear Midnight*. In these books, Tiffany uses her innate abilities, such as strength and a sharp wit, to become a witch, and her journey culminates when she faces the embodiment of hatred against witches, and by extension, women. It's precisely through Pratchett's characterization of witches and the subversion of long-established stereotypes that he presents his witches as symbols of female power and autonomy.

From the beginning, Tiffany shows an innate ability for witchcraft, more organic to her than what even the most experienced witches around her would expect. When we first meet Tiffany, she is a nine-year-old girl, living in the small, rural community of the Chalk. She comes from a family of farmers and is quite good at making cheese. An older witch unknown to Tiffany, Miss Tick, is examining the ripple in the world: "There's probably another world making contact. That's never good. I ought to go there. But...according to my left elbow, there's a witch there already" (*Wee Free Men* 2). Tiffany's status as a witch is evident even before any training, and Miss Tick respects her as a witch, leaving the Chalk to her. However, Miss Tick insists: "You can't grow a good witch on chalk... You need good hard rock to grow a witch, believe me" (2). From the beginning, witches are in part characterized by their close relationship to the land and

nature, a trait common in witch representations from history. Regardless of Miss Tick's belief, Tiffany shows signs of being a witch, even on Chalk. Tiffany has "decided only last week that she wanted to be a witch when she grows up" and sets out to accomplish it (3). Miss Tick watches her trick and hit Jenny Green-Teeth over the head with a frying pan, using her brother as bait, a feat she compliments as "quick thinking" (15). At this point, Miss Tick is well aware of Tiffany's natural affinity for witchcraft, so when the young girl comes calling to the traveling band of teachers hoping to find a witch, Miss Tick is there waiting for her.

The stereotypical depiction of a witch that Tiffany is exposed to would have her believe them all to be evil, old crones, which is at odds with the true nature of witches in Pratchett's stories: a community of women whose witchcraft largely revolves around helping others. During this conversation with Miss Tick, it becomes clear why Tiffany wants to be a witch and what makes her well suited to the role. When Miss Tick asks why Tiffany wants to be a witch, the first thing to enter her head is the book of children's fairy tales: "*It had started with the Goode Childe's Booke of Faerie Tales. Actually it had started with a lot of things, but the stories most of all...all the stories had somewhere, the witch. The wicked old witch*"; Tiffany wonders where the evidence is for that accusation:

The stories never said *why* she was wicked. It was enough to be an old woman, enough to be all alone, enough to look strange because you had no teeth. It was enough to be *called* a witch...The stories didn't want you to think, they just wanted you to believe what you were told... And you were told that the old witch lived all by herself in a strange cottage that was made of gingerbread or ran around on giant hen's feet, and talked to animals, and could do magic. (30-31)

This is enough for her to challenge the ideas in the stories—because Tiffany could never find any evidence, and so she rebuked it wholeheartedly. The young girl only “Ever knew one woman who lived all alone in a strange cottage,” referencing her beloved Granny Aching, who shared many of the qualities with the witch from the stories, but who had “nothing wicked about her” (31). Tiffany’s parents are all but invisible in the story. Her parental figure and role model is unequivocally Granny Aching. The way that Granny could have been perceived by others, because she fits the description of the wicked witch, affects Tiffany a great deal, and is part of her reasoning for becoming a witch. Granny imparted on her that “*Them as can do has to do for them as can’t. And someone has to speak up for them as has no voices*” (200). So, Tiffany was trained by her most beloved loved one to be responsible for those in her community and on her land. The loss of her grandmother is an upheaval for Tiffany: “She was seven, and the world had ended” (152). Pratchett does not shy away from Tiffany’s loss and her feelings, but Granny’s influence remains a strong presence throughout the saga, which is evident in Tiffany’s sense of responsibility and maturity. Tiffany says with complete pride, “I think my grandmother was slightly a witch” (33).

Pratchett frequently uses the established stereotypes of witches in fairy tales and other literature to prove that Tiffany Aching thinks for herself, because she consistently challenges them—a trait that is central to the characterization of all his witches. Eileen Donaldson argues that fairy tales are used because they contain a “a rich source of “ready made” meaning on which authors of children’s literature may draw in order to explore these fears because most young readers should be conversant with at least some fairy tale tropes” (“Earning the Right” 145). During the same conversation with Miss Tick—a

discussion that effectively marks Tiffany's introduction to the world of witchcraft and her training as such—Tiffany brings up the incident with Mrs. Snapperly. The previous summer, the Baron's son had gone missing in the woods in which Mrs. Snapperly lived. Because Mrs. Snapperly fit the description of the evil nature of witches—she was old, she lived alone in a cottage in the woods, she had a cat, and had a bit of a cackle—she was driven out of her home. After the Baron's son went missing, some of the townspeople gathered together and “they looked in the oven and they dug up her garden and they threw stones at her old cat until it died and they turned her out of her cottage and piled up all her old books in the middle of the room and set fire to them and burned the place to the ground and everyone said she was old witch” (40). So, “Tiffany connects these overly didactic fairy tales with the case of Mrs. Snapperly... and realizes the danger of uncritically taking stories at their word, having seen the real-world consequences of unthinking action” (Kohler 115). This theme is a central point of *I Shall Wear Midnight*, but is introduced at the beginning of Tiffany's training, illustrating how important it is to her. When looking through the book of tales again after being introduced to Miss Tick, Tiffany further interrogates the validity of the stories, because it tells her what to think: “Stories like this stopped people thinking properly, she was sure. She'd read that one and thought, Excuse me? *No one* has an oven big enough to get a whole person in, and what made the children think they could just walk around eating people's houses in any case?...The stories *weren't real*. But Mrs Snapperly had died because of stories” (59). Even as a child, she “question[s] the messages that these fairy tales convey, and finds empowerment in breaking free from their stifling structures” (Kohler 115). Questioning the stories and subjugating stereotypes in front of her is at the center of her decision to

pursue witchcraft. Aside from fairy tale stereotypes, some of the negative views of witches come from Victorian iterations, the era that solidified the myth of the persecuted healer and brought pseudo-historical accounts of witch persecutions to popularity. Pratchett interacts more directly with this history in *I Shall Wear Midnight*, but Tiffany is exposed to its effects her entire life.

Tiffany consistently uses her identity as a witch to disrupt how negative witch stereotypes are weaponized against others. Throwing children in the oven, having an animal familiar, having old spell books (Mrs. Snapperly's had "pictures of stars in them"), and having a cackling laugh, are all stereotypical characteristics of fairy tale and folklore witches, and Mrs. Snapperly just so happened to have some of those traits: "That made her a witch, and the people of the Chalk didn't trust witches, so she was pulled out into the snow" and left for dead (*Midnight* 67). Tiffany's inherent sense of curiosity rebels against this attack, so she goes to "investigate and, upon finding no evidence that Mrs. Snapperly committed any crime, decides, perhaps counterintuitively, that she herself wants to become a witch" (Kohler 106). At that moment, "with a pocketful of charred stars, not knowing what it was she was doing, but determined to do it, she had become a witch" (*Wee Free* 210). Tiffany feels responsible for putting a stop to this unfair treatment based on myth and misunderstanding, a trait that Pratchett's witches must have—magic is not enough, one must take "responsibility for anything that is put in front of her" (Kohler 105). For Tiffany, being a witch is representative of rebelling against the social order that would victimize innocent women because of similarities they may share with fairy tales and old myths. Miss Tick listens to this story, and her reactions show how familiar she herself is with this tale ("I bet Mrs. Snapperly had no teeth and talked to

herself, right?") (40). The older witch asks the younger: "Tell me why you still want to be a witch, bearing in mind what happened to Mrs. Snapperly" and Tiffany responds succinctly and with total confidence, "So that sort of thing doesn't happen again" (42). Tiffany believes in herself and feels a strong sense of purpose to protect women like Mrs. Snapperly and Granny Aching. The attributes that may be assigned to her in her future as a witch do not frighten her, they only fill her with more pride and a greater sense of purpose to defend her community. When Miss Tick tells her of the disturbance she felt, signaling another world trying to make contact—a world that ends up being the realm of the Faerie Queen—Tiffany immediately asks "Can I stop it?" a response Miss Tick is impressed with because Tiffany wants to help on her own: "You said, 'Can I stop it?' And not 'Can anyone stop it?' Or 'can we stop it?' That's good. You accept responsibility. That's a good start. And you keep a cool head" (38). Miss Tick gives Tiffany more responsibility—and more power—when she says the Baron would "be no use at all," because neither he nor any of his men have "magical powers" and asks if there are any other witches (38-39). There aren't; Tiffany is all there is. "Have you ever heard the saying 'The land finds its witch'? It's happened here, I'll bet" and so, Tiffany Aching becomes the witch of the Chalk (49).

The characterization and the traits that Pratchett's witches possess are significant because they do not primarily concern the use of magical ability. Although they do use magic to some degree, the witches of *Discworld* are mostly defined by their mental prowess, self-reliance, and courage. Of course, Miss Tick, Nanny Ogg, Granny Weatherwax, and Tiffany herself embrace the familiar iconography associated with the witch, adornments that signal their power—and pride in their work. Miss Tick says

emphatically: “Yes, yes, I am a witch. I have a talking animal, a tendency to correct other people’s pronunciation... and a fascination for poking my nose into other people’s affairs, and yes, a *pointy hat*” (27). Not only does this list connect her with familiar witch imagery, it also effectively shows her unabashed confidence in who she is. However, none of this is “magic.” In Tiffany’s world, “the truly great witches pride themselves on rarely actually using magic,” whereas “wizards seem more willing to use magic day-to-day—” a dichotomy that works to separate witches from other magic-users (Croft 130). Tiffany uses recognizable magic throughout her journey: she travels between worlds, she takes the pain from others, weaponizing that pain into a defense mechanism, speaks to Death, and banishes the Faerie Queen. However, she recognizes the difficulty of magic: “Everyone wants magic to exist, Tiffany thought to herself, and what can I say? No, it doesn’t? Or: yes, it does, but it’s not what you think? Everyone wants to believe that we can change the world by snapping our fingers” (*Midnight* 40). One of the Wee Free Men tells Tiffany she did well, after she attempts to find a way into the realm of the Faerie Queen, but Tiffany responds in the negative, claiming she didn’t do any magic because she doesn’t know how. Rob Anybody, a pictsie, tells her: “What’s magic, eh? Just wavin’ a stick an’ sayin’ a few wee magical words. An’ what’s so clever aboot that, eh? But lookin’ at things, really *lookin’* at ‘em, an then workin’ ‘em oout, now, that’s a *real* skill” (*Wee Free* 179). Tiffany’s skills of problem solving and critical thinking have long been evident at this point, and those features have also been exemplified as the making of a good witch. The witches of Discworld use their power in other, more tangible ways: by taking care of others and doing what needs to be done.

Kohler refers to this version of witchcraft as a kind of “everyday heroism” and writes: “Witches in Pratchett’s universe are respected (though not always liked) authority figures in usually rural communities, where they dispense remedies and advice, assist births and sit up with the dying, and generally ensure that the vulnerable in their community are taken care of” (105-106). Tiffany says “you couldn’t even be a witch if you couldn’t maneuver someone who was heavier than you. You would never be able to change an invalid’s sheets otherwise” (*Midnight* 26). These duties, midwifing children, healing the sick, and doing the chores, are repeatedly referred to as “woman’s work,” effectively linking witchcraft to womanhood (*Midnight* 105). Donaldson argues that “Like traditional witches, Pratchett’s witches are associated with life’s bloody moments of transition: birth, menarche, sex and death” (“Earning the Right” 150). Tiffany’s maturation is also a transitional period, and her training gives the older witches around her an opportunity to do “women’s work” and show her the ways. Indeed, Tiffany says with certainty in *I Shall Wear Midnight* that “witches were definitely women” and most of the ones she knew were unmarried or widowed, a fact resulting from witches being “*apart*... You were among people, but not the *same* as them. There was always a kind of distance or separation. You didn’t have to work at it—it happened anyway” (*I Shall Wear Midnight* 9). According to Pratchett, witches are of course women and they are of course set apart and othered by their communities.

If Pratchett’s witches typically refrain from using magic, what makes them witches? The Tiffany Aching series exemplifies witches using criteria not measured by magical ability. In addition to their ability to take care of their communities, witches are also mentally very capable women. Miss Tick lists the traits of a witch:

“Witches don’t use magic unless they really have to. It’s hard work and difficult to control. We do other things. A witch pays attention to everything that’s going on. A witch uses her head. A witch is sure of herself...A witch delights in small details. A witch sees through things and around things. A witch sees farther than most. A witch sees things from the other side. A witch knows where she is, who she is, and *when* she is. A witch would see Jenny Green-Teeth.” (*Wee Free* 28-29)

With this statement, Tiffany—and by extension, all witches—are made indivisible from their power. It is not about what spells she does or what potions she makes, but who she *is*: a collection of traits intrinsically linked to her personality. “A witch deals with things,” using mainly her mental strength (*Wee Free* 175). “Unlike wizards, a witch makes do with little,” and one of Tiffany’s most commonly used skills is her First Sight and Second Thoughts (*Wee Free* 1). First Sight is when one can see what is truly there, like Jenny Green-Teeth, the Headless Horseman, and later, the Cunning Man whereas Second Thoughts is when a witch thinks about what she is thinking (*Wee Free* 141). Often, Tiffany’s Second Thoughts are illustrated in the text by Tiffany thinking to herself and answering herself, working out her thoughts. This is critical thinking on a near magical scale and is extremely important to Tiffany’s maturation and also her confidence, making her arsenal of intelligence central to her identity as a witch.

Because of Granny Aching, Tiffany is, perhaps unwittingly, trained to see the magic in menial tasks—or good farming and years of experience. In flashback, we’re told a story about a time Granny challenged the Baron. When the Baron’s favored hunting dog is caught killing sheep, a messenger comes to request that Mrs. Aching use her influence to save the dog from being put down, regardless of the local law. Her response

is to tell the Baron to be at the barn the following morning, “and we’ll see if an old dog can learn new tricks. There will be a reckoning. Good night to ye” (94). The following morning arrives, and Granny places the hungry—and rather angry—dog into a barn with a sheep, the very animal it’s already guilty of killing. Tiffany is raised up to look into a window where she sees the sheep charge the dog. After much thumping, the dog emerges limping. Granny swears that he won’t hurt a sheep again. On the outside, this looks impossible, a true feat of the hag o’ the hills, as the Nac Mac Feegle would say, and Tiffany believes it to be magic. One day, she overhears her parents discussing it: “Twas an old shepherds’ trick, that’s all. An old ewe will fight like a lion for her lamb, we all know that” (97). However, Tiffany is unshaken by this: “That was how it worked. No magic at all. But that time it had been magic. And it didn’t stop being magic just because you found out how it was done” (97). Granny’s prowess as a witch does not diminish in light of this development, because the magic is still there. The magic is in the cleverness. Cleverness is part of the magic.

The witches in the Tiffany Aching series are deeply connected to nature and their land, like Granny to her sheep. The idea of the Chalk being Tiffany’s land, inherited from her grandmother, the previous “hag o’ the hills” recurs throughout the series. During the climax of the first book, Tiffany feels this truly for the first time. She says to herself: “*This land is in my bones*” (289). This is absolutely inherited from Granny Aching’s philosophy. When Granny questions the Baron, she asks: “Who speaks for the hills?” (94). While not explicitly identified as a witch, everyone assumes as much about her—again, because of Pratchett’s use of traditional and established witch stereotypes. The Nac Mac Feegle—who first see Tiffany when she wallops Jenny Green-Teeth—question the

young witch when she doesn't know of the Queen of the Faeries: "An' you the wean o' Granny Aching, who had these hills in her bones?" (91). The Feegle see it as an impossibility that Tiffany would not be just as connected to the land as her grandmother.

It is the land—and the people on it—that are affected when the world of the Faerie Queen collides with the Chalk in *The Wee Free Men*. The Baron's son has been missing for nearly a year, and when Tiffany's youngest sibling, Wentworth, also disappears, the young witch takes it upon herself to find her brother and save the Chalk. In the wake of the disappearances, monsters and nightmares begin to wreak havoc on the community, and "There's no one to stop them," except: "'There's me,' said Tiffany" (75). Tiffany immediately takes charge of the situation, as the Chalk witch. Enlisting the help of the Feegles, Tiffany infiltrates the Faerie Queen's realm using the magic that stems from her confidence in herself: "You can't leave a doorway into your world that *anyone* can walk through, otherwise people would wander in and out by accident. You'd have to know it was there. Perhaps that's the only way it would work. Fine. Then I'll believe that this is the entrance"; then Tiffany steps through the entrance to face the Queen (177).

Tiffany's identity as a good witch protagonist is a contrast against the story's familiar archetype of a powerful bad woman antagonist; this comes in the form of The Queen of the Faeries. Tiffany fighting against The Queen sees her actively rebuking negative stereotypes through her positive representation of witching and womanhood. The Queen of the Faeries is reminiscent of the Snow Queen from Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales (Jadis, the antagonist of fantasy paragon C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* books, also fits the description); a mysterious powerful being who steals children with the

promise of infinite sweets and brings them back to her icy realm where they don't age. In this sense, the Queen acts as a foil for Tiffany, the epitome of a heroic witch, who is a child, no less. The villain uses her power to spin dreams and illusions to succeed in her conquest, but Tiffany pushes against her every step of the way: "I'm more real than this place," Tiffany says—and she is (202). The rest is just an illusion that she has to dissolve. The young witch's heroics in this battle are less about selflessness and more about the fact that she believes this land and this responsibility is hers. Alice Nuttall argues this, saying: "She ultimately chooses to rescue her brother, not because of love or out of sisterly instinct but because he is "hers" (57). Tiffany has a pattern of centering herself in her community and her relationship, which Pratchett frames as a positive attribute for a girl and a witch. The Queen's creatures "were invading *her* place" and the Queen had taken *her* brother (197). The Queen responds to Tiffany by saying: "Yes, that's a very witchy thing, isn't it," said the voice of the Queen. "Selfishness? Mine, mine, mine? All a witch cares about is what's *hers*," but this selfishness stems directly from a self-assuredness that Tiffany has in herself—and in the great pride she takes in being the witch of the Chalk, and Granny Aching's heir (240). Pratchett inverts gender stereotypes because he allows his heroine to feel selfish: "For Tiffany, selfishness becomes a source of strength and an integral part of [her] role as [a] heroine, challenging both literary and social concepts of 'good womanhood'" (Nuttall 54). If she were not selfish and did not feel such accountability on behalf of her community, the Queen would have defeated her. The Queen calls Tiffany selfish, but the heroine later accepts this part of herself and understands its power: "All witches are selfish, the Queen had said. But Tiffany's Third Thoughts said: "Then turn selfishness into a weapon! Make all things yours!...Protect

them! Save them!... My dreams! My brother! My family! My land! My world! How dare you try to take these things, because *they are mine. I have a duty!*" (291). This duty is what tugs Tiffany toward victory in the end.

The climax sees Tiffany battling illusions and running through dreamscapes, and in one of those illusions she recognizes Granny: "There was a gust of Jolly Sailor tobacco, and sheep, and turpentine," and she sees an image of her smiling with pride (293). The Granny Aching part of Tiffany rises in rebellion when the Queen has the young witch in her clutches, and as Donaldson puts it: "Where Tiffany may initially have wanted to emulate her grandmother...because Granny is no longer a separate person, Tiffany can embody, can incarnate, Granny's strengths and power so that they are her own" ("Nae King!" 68). Tiffany defeats the witch by turning her into a pitiful little creature, essentially stripping her of power, ensuring the Queen "cannot fool me anymore. Or touch me. Or anything that is mine" (301). She does this by harnessing the power of the Chalk, sensing the "breath of the downs and the distant roar of ancient seas trapped in millions of tiny shells," a skill she has honed by believing the land is hers to wield (300).

For Tiffany, social concord is a cornerstone of her vision for her community. After rescuing her brother and the Baron's son—another clear subversion of the typical trope of the prince being the hero—Tiffany returns home, where she begins to settle in and fully accept her role as the community witch. She asks Roland, the Baron's son, if he will be a good Baron, making sure he "wouldn't let people turn an old lady out of her house" (325). This reference back to Mrs. Snapperly makes it clear that it is very important to Tiffany that such abuse never happens again, because it is her responsibility.

Roland must be a good baron: “Because *I’ll* be there, you see...All the time. I’ll be watching everything, because I come from a long line of Aching people and this is my land. But you can be the Baron for us and I hope you’re a good one. If you are not... there will be a reckoning” (326). She uses Granny’s words in threatening a reckoning, and this conversation shows her challenging authority and using her power as a witch to protect her community. These are lessons that follow her throughout her journey, along with learning to accept herself as a witch and hone that power, a foundation that comes to a head in *I Shall Wear Midnight*.

A primary function of Pratchett’s witches is to subvert preconceptions from fairy tales and myths and present witches as images of female power, a focus that becomes the main thematic element of the fourth novel, *I Shall Wear Midnight*. Throughout these novels, however, there are frequent examples of allusions to not only fairy tales, but previous iterations of witch figures, which Pratchett also wields as commentary on the unfair treatment of them. There are references to popular witch media published at the close of the Victorian period. In fact, he uses perhaps the most popular: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Miss Tick, talking about her good sturdy pointy hat, says: “They are incredibly hard to come by, especially ones strong enough to withstand falling farm houses” (*Wee Free* 36). The image of the Wicked Witch of the East sticking out from under a fallen farm house is one of the most iconic images of witches surely, but perhaps of all time. As has been argued previously, the Victorian period was responsible for a resurgence of interest in the early modern witch trials, and L. Frank Baum’s mother-in-law, Matilda Joselyn Gage, was a substantial contributor to this interest. As noted previously, much of the “historical” work done in this period was not based on fact, but

sensationalized accounts of the trials, such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*—mirrored in *Midnight* with the witchfinder’s spirit, the Cunning Man’s “*Bonfire of the Witches*” (325). The Cunning Man is based on an early modern depiction of a witchfinder, and “popular images of witches derive from the witches of early modern Europe. However, these images have been shaped to modern purposes” and are therefore not historically accurate, to be sure (Goodare 452). The image of the witch was reshaped in the nineteenth century to fit a certain narrative, using early modern depictions that morphed into a mythos of its own, a reshaping that has lasted until the twenty-first century, showing up across media and literature, and in *Tiffany Aching*.

Pratchett’s books contain references to this phenomenon, such as in *A Hat Full of Sky*, the second book in the *Tiffany Aching* subseries. This novel covers the period in which the young witch goes off for training, and while there, finds out about “Witch Trials” (143). This is an obvious reference to the early modern arrests, questioning, and executions of accused witches, but Pratchett overturns this meaning entirely, turning it into a positive event. His “Witch Trial” is a gathering of witches, where they can meet up and see their friends and share gossip and perhaps share a spell or two (143). Pratchett continues the joke and inversion of the term in *I Shall Wear Midnight* when Tiffany is accused of murder and she demands “something that probably no other witch has ever asked for before”: A hearing, “and that means evidence” (275). This reference to the early modern witch trials is also a reminder of Tiffany’s concerns about fairy tales when she was younger. Pratchett’s comedic perception of witch trials and the way he connects them to Tiffany’s earlier anxieties about fairy tale witches are indicative of a larger trend of challenging negative nineteenth-century stereotypes.

A final nod to late Victorian witches concerns the broomstick. Both *The Wee Free Men* and *I Shall Wear Midnight* reference the appropriate attire for riding a broomstick: “You like having to wear really, really thick pants? Believe me, if I’ve got to fly, I wear two pairs of woolen ones and a canvas pair on the outside which, I may tell you, are not very feminine no matter how much lace you sew on” (*Wee Free* 28). Though comedic in nature, I believe this to be a clear callback to the Victorian caricature equating women on bikes to witches on broomsticks. Here Miss Tick makes dresses and broomsticks mutually exclusive, much in the same way the caricatures present dresses on bikes to be inherently unfeminine. Pratchett, however, presents this allusion playfully because, naturally, Tiffany still is a witch, still gets to be feminine, and still rides her broomstick—just with more padding.

Other allusions to the early modern witch, through the lens of the Victorian revisions, are exhibited by the antagonist of the fourth *Tiffany* novel. The Cunning Man, the villain of the fourth installment, is the personification of hatred and the mistrust of witches. He is fueled by the fear of the community, of the angry mob. Much like early on in her witchcraft career, Tiffany still actively battles against negative stereotypes and the myths surrounding women like her. The book opens on Tiffany entering the scouring—a late summer fair where it is common practice to find the person you’ll marry—knowing full well “when you were a witch, you were all witches” (*Midnight* 2). Because she knows that the actions of one will affect all witches, she is diligent in presenting a good face to her community. She saves a young teenager who was beaten by her father for getting pregnant—beaten so hard she miscarried. She rescues that girl, Amber, and puts her in the care of her trusted friends, the Feegles. She births children and she cuts old

ladies' toenails because no one else thinks to do it. She cares for the ailing old Baron and fixes what needs fixing. She does this because it's her duty, because

Tiffany Aching was the witch, and she had made herself the witch because they needed one. Everybody needs a witch, but sometimes they just don't know it. And it was working. The storybook pictures of the drooling hag were being wiped away, every time Tiffany helped a young mother with her first baby, or smoothed an old man's path to his grave. Nevertheless, old stories, old rumors, and old picture books still seem to have their own hold on the memory of the world. (12)

During the first act of the book, there is a lot of insight into how some of the public negatively regards Tiffany, even though she does so much for them. As Tiffany is caring for the elderly Baron, siphoning off his pain with magic, Miss Spruce, a household nurse, calls to her: "I don't hold with magic, you know," even though Tiffany is doing a service to the man (77). Two teenage girls at the scouring tell Tiffany, "I asked my granny if I could be a witch when I was older, and she said I shouldn't want to, because witches have no passionate parts, miss" (15). By removing the young witch's capacity for desire and by extension, for finding love, this comment further alienates Tiffany from other "ordinary" women. It's clear that a common belief on the Disc is that witches are other by nature. Regardless, Tiffany's actions are appreciated by many on the Chalk. It eventually becomes clear that much of the recent strife surrounding witches, and the source of the energy that created the "rough music" (here meaning a roused mob) that came for Amber's father, Mr. Petty, comes from the influence of the Cunning Man.

The Cunning Man is the malevolent spirit of a witchfinder from one thousand years prior to the events of *I Shall Wear Midnight*. He is described as a witchfinder, a

book burner, and a torturer, and he is this way because other people told him that is what his god wanted (201). Eskarina Smith, a fellow witch, tells Tiffany the story; as the only witch to ever become a wizard, Eskarina was there herself. The witchfinder meets a witch, they fall in love, and for the first time he has to think for himself. He wonders at the possibility of a rescue attempt, but the witch sees him from where she is on the stake, and “what he is thinking doesn’t matter, because she knows who he is and what he has done...and she reaches with both hands smoothly through the wicker basket they’ve put around her...and grabs him, and holds him tight as the torch drops down onto the oily wood and the flames spring up. She never takes her eyes off him and never loosens her grip” (203). Pratchett again allows a witch to triumph and does so using the backdrop of the cliched witch-burning story. However, the hatred in the man’s heart allows the creation of the Cunning Man, and he returns every few centuries as a ghostly presence that not everyone can physically see, but whom many are affected by. Witches in Discworld have seen him before, but it is Tiffany Aching who summons him, with her show of power upon kissing the Wintersmith. Miss Smith tells Tiffany that the Cunning Man can always find witches: “You would have some quiet little village where everybody got on reasonably well and no one had noticed any witches at all. But when the Cunning Man arrived, suddenly there were witches everywhere, but unfortunately not for very long. He believed that witches were the reason for just about everything bad that happened” (204). This sentiment spreads in the Chalk, and soon the Cunning Man infiltrates people’s heads, turning them violent or full of hate. Rumors start to spread about witches ruining crops and stealing babies. One way he does this is by sending the “rough music.” Named for the beating of metal on metal and screaming, the rough music

is a violent mob. The first instance of this is after Mr. Petty beats his daughter. Tiffany tries to intercept them because she knows they will kill him. It is revealed that it was the rough music that came for Mrs. Snapperly; it's even the Cunning Man's doing that Mr. Petty beat his daughter (413). The rough music is Pratchett's way of using the same frenzied "hysteria" that is scattered throughout contemporary references to the witch trials—neighbor turning on neighbor, fear mongering and finger pointing. This story is repeated in the attack of Mrs. Snapperly: "People had marched to the rough music and roughly dragged out the cracked old woman whose only crime, as far as Tiffany could see, was that she had no teeth left and smelled of wee...this had been done by good people, nice people, people she knew and met every day, and they had done all these things that even now, they never talked about" (210). The people were kind for all she knew, but the power of the Cunning Man influences them to turn on people who fit the description of the hated witch, of the bad, wicked woman.

Pratchett uses the idea of the witch as a vessel to illustrate how many of the negative myths surrounding witches got started:

All the witches put together can remember the really bad times. When wearing a pointy hat got a stone thrown at you, if not something worse. And when you go back further than that... it's like a disease," Mrs. Proust said. "It sort of creeps up. It's in the wind, as if it goes from person to person. Poison goes where poison's welcome. And there's always an excuse, isn't there, to throw a stone at the old lady who looks funny. It's always easier to blame somebody. And once you've called someone a witch, then you'd be amazed how many things you can blame her for. (175)

The answer is: everything. Across history, witches have been cast as devil worshippers, monsters, and hysterics. Pratchett's witches subvert the traditional witch trial story using Tiffany and her unusual power to dismantle it. She actively tries to rewrite the fairy tale stories and is a good witch precisely because of that. Tiffany, being responsible for the Chalk as always, decides to fight back without the help of the other witches in order to prove herself. She says to Granny Weatherwax that she would "rather die trying to be a witch" than being the girl everyone helped out of kindness, and Weatherwax validates the traits Tiffany has been showing all along: "Miss Aching, you are showing an almost sinful self-assurance and overwhelming pride and certainty, and may I say that I wouldn't expect anything less of a witch" (361). Tiffany's self-assurance is a great portion of her power as a witch. The most frequent powers she uses are her First Sight and Second Thoughts—and sometimes Third and Fourth Thoughts, if the mood takes her. These powers give her an edge against the sway of the Cunning Man, because they allow her to see through the spell he puts on people. When the cook equates misery with witchcraft in a drunken rant, Tiffany's Second Thoughts tell her: "Remember this, cause if you hit back at her, you will become what he wants you to be! Don't give him space in your head again!" (268).

Tiffany's power over the stories allows her to not only alter her own story and that of violent men, but she also can change the story of the figure of the helpless princess. Instead of being the simple servant girl with mousy brown hair the fairy tales would cast her as, she "could be the witch... You didn't have to be stuck in the story. You could change it, not just for yourself, but for other people. You could change the story with a wave of your hand" (167). She can change the story, in this case the cyclical

nature of the Cunning Man traveling across time to hurt witches. She further changes this story, and therefore preconceptions, by enlisting the help of Roland's—the newly minted Baron—fiancée. Leticia is a highborn lady, a true fairy tale princess. However, when the two girls join forces, Tiffany is able to vanquish the Cunning Man. Leticia, despite being a lady, dreamt of being a witch: “But just my luck, I had long blond hair and a pale complexion and a very rich father. What good was that? Girls like that can't be witches!” (304). In a charming twist, Tiffany discovers Leticia is in fact a witch, proving the conventionally attractive blondes can be witches after all. The competition between these two types of girls, the lowborn brunette and the royal blonde, is another traditional element of fairy tales that Pratchett subverts, serving as a way to engage young readers to examine “anxieties they might feel” about growing up (Donaldson, “Earning the Right” 152). Leticia's wish to become a witch and her amateur spellwork also problematize “the pervasive glamour associated with the princess, suggesting that this traditional fairy tale protagonist is monstrous if one considers the gendered implications for girls who cannot meet its demands” (“Earning the Right” 152). With a bit of Leticia's help, Tiffany ends the Cunning Man, using fire—a reversal of the witch burnings.

Triumphant, Tiffany is validated by her community and fellow witches as a true witch. With the victory over the biggest enemy to witches, Tiffany returns to the Baron's funeral and the new Baron's marriage and is surrounded by witches from all throughout the land. Granny Weatherwax congratulates her: “It seems to us that you've done a woman's job today. The place where we looks for witches is at the center of things. Well, we looks around here and we see that you is so central that this steading spins on you... We leave this steading in the best of hands” (436). Because her power does not lie

in sword or sorcery, she serves as an example of an “alternative ‘to the prominent image of the physically-oriented female warrior,’ a trend that is more and more common for female heroines (Beeler 16). Tiffany is the undisputed hero, physical prowess or no. She has worked for the entirety of her training to center herself in her community as its witch, and by defeating the Cunning Man, the embodiment of the hatred of witches, Tiffany becomes a full-fledged witch.

Pratchett, similar to the late Victorians and New Woman movement, reclaims the tropes that are typically seen as victimizing or downright negative and spins them into a constructive representation of a young witch. Tiffany is unequivocally cast as an unapologetically confident and powerful young woman, and this is a direct effect of her witchiness. Tiffany challenges conceptions of herself and other witches, but she also entertains thoughts of challenging authority. Much like the witches of Michelet’s *La Sorciere*, Tiffany pushes back against the ruling of the Baron. She often urges him to remedy injustices. In fact, this appears to be an Aching family tradition. Her father insists: “as far as the *land* knew, it was owned by the Achings” (*Wee Free* 9).. Granny Aching of course challenges the Baron of her time. Tiffany herself wonders what would happen if everybody in the village got together and said to the new Baron: “‘Look, we will let you stay here, and you can even sleep in the big bedroom, and of course we will give you all your meals and flick a duster around from time to time, but apart from that this land is ours now, do you understand?’ Would it work?” (*Midnight* 251). The overlap of witches and political unrest is a direct result from the writings of the nineteenth century, which is also seen in the work of Matilda Joslyn Gage, among others. Pratchett’s subversions are often for comedic effect but point to the far-reaching effects of the late

Victorian period on witchcraft representation. Other twenty-first century authors pick up the late Victorian challenges in different ways but show the continuing process of re-visioning the witch.

IV. FEYRE ARCHERON AND THE NEW WITCH

Readers are still feeling the aftershocks of the young adult fantasy boom of the late 2000s and early 2010s. After the completion of the *Twilight*, *Hunger Games*, and *Harry Potter* franchises, the frequency of movie adaptations of wildly popular fantasy series has admittedly declined, but its readership has not. Bookstores and bestseller lists are still clogged with YA fantasy novels and the online community of fans—particularly those participating in the subset of social media platform TikTok, known as “BookTok”—are very active in their support of the genre. More specifically, female-led young adult fantasy novels are in vogue, a penchant in the genre that has been popular since the phenomenon of the 2000s and 2010s.

One of the most popular fantasy writers working right now is Sarah J. Maas; her first novel, *Throne of Glass*, was originally published in 2012, and she has released in all fifteen books across three series, with the latter two still ongoing. As of 2021, Maas’s books have sold more than 12 million copies and have been published in 37 languages (Andreeva). All three of Maas’s series—*Throne of Glass* (2012-2018), *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015-), and *Crescent City* (2020-), have female protagonists. Maas’s books, and the success of female-led heroic fantasy novels, follow a trend of strong women in media laid out by Sherrie A. Inness, which she coined as “tough girls.” Tough girls break away from the gender roles pushed upon female characters traditionally and move toward a stronger, more heroic, and more independent identity. Inness’s tough girl is more in line with the kick-boxing, gun-shooting type, and “the appearance of the tough girl is in many ways a response to market forces” (6). It is unfair to relegate this archetype to just a result of media interest, because the tough girl also “represents a culture in which real women

are re-evaluating what it means to be tough” (6). This kind of female character shows up across modern young adult fantasy of the twenty-first century, as we have seen with Tiffany Aching’s character.

In an echo of the New Woman movement and its relationship to the figure of the witch, contemporary women are still negotiating women’s rights, and women’s liberation movements are still very much active in the 2020s. The portrayal of strong female characters, or “tough girls,” if you like, “suggests that women are not as excluded from the heroic as Western history has traditionally taught us” and we are captivated by “the female hero (or anti-hero) because she presents a myth of invincibility. Like her male cohorts, the tough woman is portrayed as impossible or nearly impossible to defeat” (Inness 8). Indeed, this is a cathartic image “in a society where women are warned that they should not walk alone after dark and should never visited a deserted area by themselves” and “in a culture where women are considered the ‘natural’ victims of men” because these women consistently defeat their would-be attackers and enemies (8). In the same way the powerful and independent witch was alluring to the women of the past, a fantasy in which to pour one’s fears and dreams, so strong female characters are to the modern woman. Feyre Archeron, the protagonist of Sarah J. Maas’s *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series, is one such character. Her story is a popular example of subverting the tradition of the heroic tale, which at this point is standard practice in the genre: a young woman coming into her own power and saving the day—or the world, epically speaking.

Feyre is not a witch in the sense that Tiffany Aching is, or the sorceresses of *Aradia* and *La Sorcière* are, but her character still fits into the category by definition and practice, effectively making her recognizable as a witch figure. Because of the

reclamation of the witch figure fashioned by the writers of the late nineteenth century, “witch” is functionally congruous with a powerful woman. To revisit the definition put forth at the outset of this thesis, a witch cannot be defined solely by her supernatural abilities because the symbol has outgrown those parameters. A witch, in a post-New Woman definition, is classified by her attributes as well as power: that is, a witch is a woman who uses power—whether internal or externally in the form of magical tools—to affect change, or a woman who exists outside of the patriarchal structure as a figure of independent female autonomy, or any combination of the two. Because of the conflation of witch with bad woman, free woman, or sexually liberated woman, the writers of the 1880s and 90s accepted the moniker as a badge representing women’s liberation, as has been illustrated in previous chapters. The witch, although originally linked with negative connotations, became an image of “female power which lies outside male control” (Rountree 117). This idea is attractive to women, as Ethan Doyle White frames it, “who are unhappy with dominant cultural and religious values, rooted as they are in Christianity, patriarchy, and capitalism, and who feel powerless or marginalized in their society” (428). This kind of character shows up across young adult fantasy for the same reason it showed up in the 1890s Egerton stories: the allure of freedom outside gender oppression.

Maas’s protagonist fits seamlessly on the line drawn through witch representations from all of history because her characterization is a direct result of the iterations of the archetype that came before her. Feyre’s journey of seeking autonomy and freedom and her rise to power are consistent with the paths of Pratchett’s Tiffany Aching, the socialist witches from *La Sorcière*, and the reclaimed witch of Matilda Joslyn Gage’s

anti-clerical witch of *Woman, Church and State*. Feyre’s arc takes place primarily in *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015), *A Court of Mist and Fury* (2016), and *A Court of Wings and Ruin* (2017).¹

The first book in the series is a loose retelling of “Beauty and the Beast,” causing Maas to, somewhat inadvertently, tackle some of the same themes as Terry Pratchett in the subversion of stereotypical fairy tale tropes, such as the damsel-in-distress narrative and the witch as primarily an evil, old woman. Feyre’s love interest is the beast character from the tale, but Feyre saves the entire land in the end, not just her lover. In the second book, Maas utilizes the fairy tale trope of the “beast” to pull off a narrative shift that the reader does not realize is being set up, precisely because her lover Tamlin fits so cleanly into the stereotype of the handsome prince from the fairy tale. In the third novel, Feyre becomes a fully realized witch figure after learning to control her magic and coming into a position of authority while surrounding herself with a community of powerful women.

The series slowly establishes a world-wide struggle for power that Feyre knows nothing about at the start of her journey. Feyre resides in the Mortal Lands with her family and a small population of humans. The extent of Feyre’s knowledge about the world largely stops at her family and community, as well as the wall separating them from the land of Prythian where the Fae live—who, as far as Feyre has been taught, are a deadly threat to humans. Prythian is a Faerie realm separated into seven different courts—four seasonal courts, Spring, Summer, Winter, and Autumn Courts, and three

¹ Feyre is still a protagonist in the fourth installment, a novella titled *A Court of Frost and Starlight* (2018). The fourth true novel, *A Court of Silver Flames* (2021)—fifth in the series overall—should be mentioned here as a disclaimer: because Feyre is not the main character and the novel embarks in a different direction centering on different characters and themes, it is not central to this argument.

solar courts, Dawn, Day, and Night Courts—that are ruled by their own individual High Lords, a title inherited typically father to son. The Wall between the two lands was erected following a war between humans and Fae hundreds of years prior to the start of Feyre’s story. This war was led by the King of Hybern, the faerie kingdom located to the west of Prythian, and his general Amarantha in order to maintain the enslavement of humans. The two are representative of the authoritarian side of the power struggle gripping this world, interested purely in conquering those they see as lesser; any being that is not High Fae whether it be “lesser faeries” or humans. Following their defeat, the King continued to cultivate malicious feelings toward humans in hopes of one day engaging in another war. Amarantha, breaking with Hybern’s authority, seized control of the Courts to become High Queen of Prythian, a flimsy title she held for forty-nine years prior to the start of the series. Her society is still very much tyrannical, and her reign is reflective of the bad woman motif of earlier witch representations, such as Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Snow Queen,” Jadis from *Narnia*, and the Faerie Queene from *The Wee Free Men*. The border between the Mortal Lands and Prythian is in Feyre’s time largely known as forbidden by both sides.

At the start of *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, though Feyre knows very little of the larger world and begins as a normal human with basic mortal abilities, she is extremely resilient and resourceful due to her upbringing. In this first installment of the series, Feyre serves as the Beauty to the love interest, Tamlin’s, Beast. The plot of the novel strongly echoes the structure of Madame LePrince de Beaumont’s fairy tale romance. She resides with her two older sisters, Nesta and Elain, as well as with her father in the Mortal Lands. Her mother died when she was young, her father destined the family to live in poverty

after short-sighted business dealings, and Feyre now essentially single-handedly takes care of the family between menial chores and hunting for food, despite being the youngest and least-educated of her sisters. Unlike the original Beauty, Feyre creates the circumstances that force her to leave home. After accidentally killing a faerie in the form of a wolf, she must go to the land of Prythian at the hands of Tamlin, High Lord of the Spring Court, as payment demanded by the Treaty between humans and the Fae. Though initially the two seem at odds with each other, they eventually form a romantic bond and Feyre proves her ability at handling herself within the dangerous lands. That ability marks the departure from the old tale of Beauty and her Beast.

In another parallel to Beaumont's fairy tale, Tamlin, like the Beast, is the recipient of a curse which comes at the hand of Amarantha. This curse reaches beyond just Tamlin and, if he is unable to break it, will rob the High Lords of Prythian of their powers and subject them to Amarantha's continued authoritarian rule. When Tamlin is captured by Amarantha and taken to her lair called Under the Mountain, Feyre must complete three dangerous trials to save him. While there, Rhysand, who will become her mentor and guide—also known as Rhys and High Lord of the Night Court—offers her help if she agrees to spend one week out of every month with him once they are free. At this point, the allusions become less fairy tale and more myth, with Feyre becoming closer to Persephone than to Beauty. Feyre has no choice but to agree. She completes the last two trials, but an enraged Amarantha snaps Feyre's neck and kills her before being killed herself. In order to resurrect Feyre, Rhysand brings together all seven High Lords to put her through the process of being "Made." Through this process she awakes feeling "strong, and fast and sleek. And—and [she'd] become High Fae" (*A Court of Thorns and*

Roses 407). The seven High Lords each bestow Feyre with a drop of their own power, bringing her back to life. However, they also inadvertently gift her with each of their seven powers. At this point Feyre no longer resembles Beauty, and though she has a shade of Persephone, more than anything she is now in a position to become a hero of her own making.

Feyre's development in the second novel, *A Court of Mist and Fury*, sees her unlearning the subjugation she faced previously, as she begins to assert her own power and take control of her own decisions. *Mist and Fury* subverts expectations following the first book which seems to be establishing a fairly traditional romance plot, as the narrative shifts from Feyre's relationship with Tamlin into a story about her asserting herself and discovering and molding her own power and autonomy. Once her world expands past the confines of the Spring Court, she learns the truth of the impending danger from Hybern. With her newfound knowledge about Prythian and the history of oppression the lands have faced, Feyre's arc is set up to embrace her hero role in fighting for liberation. The novel begins with her return to the Spring Court with Tamlin and finds her feeling overwhelmingly silenced and coddled in the wake of the trauma she faced Under the Mountain. Moreover, her trips to the Night Court to fulfill her deal with Rhysand reveal a bond forming between the two, as Rhysand teaches her to read and write, as well as how to control some of her newfound High Fae powers. Until Rhys, Feyre has not had a healthy example of what a relationship with a man should be—this includes her father, whose lack of action forced her to take care of the family, thereby neglecting herself and her own needs. She initially accepts the sheltered lifestyle that Tamlin wants for her because she is not accustomed to her basic needs being met and

sees that as the highest point she may aspire to—and considers herself lucky. With Rhys and the Night Court, Feyre can have wants and desires for herself that aren't contingent on anybody else, which prompts her to look toward a greater meaning for her life. It also helps her unlearn some of the patriarchal subjugation she has accepted previously.

Feyre's time in the Night Court allows her to hone her skills, but also grants her a wider perspective of the simmering political tensions gripping Prythian. She learns from Rhys of the grasps at power the King of Hybern continues to make, and soon becomes an integral figure in the plan to stop him. Following an instance in which Tamlin locks her in the Spring Court manor in a misguided attempt to protect her, Rhysand offers to let Feyre stay in the Night Court as long as she wishes, and she remains to work with him and his inner circle—Mor, Amren, Azriel, and Cassian—in addressing a war brewing between Prythian and Hybern. The Inner Circle is a diverse group of people in part because Mor and Amren are two women who are higher in rank than Cassian and Azriel, two men. Cassian and Azriel also belong to a race of lesser faeries known as Illyrians; Rhys is also half Illyrian. This circle works closely with one another in the face of oppressive struggle and refuses to let authoritarian power succeed because they share the same vision of a liberated world.

In the context of growing knowledge of the world, Feyre grows into her own over the course of the book, given space by Rhys to learn and train but also to make her own decisions and cultivate her own power and freedom. During the climax of the book, Feyre's sisters are captured by the King of Hybern, who uses the power of an ancient artifact called the Cauldron to turn them into Fae, as it is also revealed that Tamlin sold them out and struck a deal allowing Hybern's military entry into Prythian through his

lands in exchange for Feyre being returned to him. This is the point in Feyre's journey that her hero persona becomes integral to the survival of herself and those around her as she now has very significant threatening forces wielding power over her and her friends that only she can overcome.

At this point Feyre's development shifts from her personal journey to gain agency and moves toward the ways in which she responds to events with the power she fought so hard to learn to control. When her chosen family is threatened—an act of war, in her mind—Feyre retaliates, setting in motion the Night Court's first strike against the enemy. After Tamlin's actions in Hybern result in her sisters being violated and turned High Fae against their will, Feyre manipulates Tamlin by playing to his patriarchal beliefs and pretends to be Rhys's prisoner. Once her trap is sprung, she returns to the Spring Court with Tamlin, who is convinced that Feyre is his obedient bride once more, where we find her at the start of the third book, *A Court of Wings and Ruin*. The strategy to destroy the Spring Court, while passing information back to the Night Court, is completely Feyre's idea. At this point, Feyre has become powerful in her own right. She has the skills and the confidence to be able to pull off a plan like this, which is why she ultimately succeeds and, upon returning to the Night Court, allows herself to be known as High Lady of the Night Court—a title previously thought of as an impossibility under the patriarchal standard of Prythian. Feyre takes on the crown of High Lady after it is revealed that she and Rhys share a Mating Bond and were fated to be together. She is “Not consort, not wife. Feyre is High Lady of the Night Court” (*Mist and Fury* 620). Feyre's power is not linked with Rhys's, it is separate. No longer does she only wield physical and personal power—Feyre now has significant political power at the same level as Rhys.

It becomes clear that the imminent war with Hybern can only be won by fully employing Feyre's position of significant influence and power. She and the Inner Circle work to create alliances among mortals and the Courts of Prythian to varying degrees of success, but the most crucial weapon is Feyre's power—especially those that directly tie her with the imagery of witches, such as The Cauldron. The Cauldron is an object of substantial power within the books, central to the creation story of Prythian before the King of Hybern exploits it to destroy the wall separating the Fae and the Mortal Lands, planning eventually to take over the known world. The women that are Made—Feyre, her sisters Nesta and Elain, and Amren, Rhys's second in command and a fifteen thousand year old being from another world trapped in a Fae body—are able to communicate with it, track it, and use its power, which is why Feyre is able to use it to stop the King and his army at the conclusion of the story. The Cauldron is also significant to witchcraft iconography. The symbol was made popular by Shakespeare in *Macbeth*, where the three witches make notable use of a cauldron. It is also commonly associated with the folklore legends of Ceridwen, a white witch who is frequently said to be using an object known as Ceridwen's Cauldron, in stories such as the late medieval *Tale of Taliesin* (Thomas 10).²

Feyre's connection to the Cauldron is the most significant literal connector to the figure of the witch. The Cauldron is introduced in the first book, where Feyre stumbles across a large tapestry in the Spring Court illustrating the creation of the world:

A mighty black cauldron held by glowing, slender female hands in a starry,
endless night. Those hands tipped it over, golden sparkling liquid pouring out

² To make a further connection, Feyre's handmaiden in the Night Court is a half-wraith named Cerridwen. Maas often pulls names from mythology or folklore references, but the choices seem to be arbitrary assignments rather than intentional allusions.

over the lip. No—not sparkling, but...effervescent with small symbols, perhaps of some ancient faerie language. Whatever was written there, whatever it was, the contents of the cauldron were dumped into the void below, pooling on the earth to form our world... (*Thorns and Roses* 114)

In *A Court of Mist and Fury*, Rhys and Feyre learn that it is said “all magic was contained inside it, that the world was born in it. But it fell into the wrong hands. And great and horrible things were done with it” so it was hidden away (199). The King of Hybern finds the Cauldron and wields it against Prythian, but Feyre’s and the other Archeron sisters’ connection to it ends up being Hybern’s downfall. Feyre can track the Cauldron because “It tugged on [her] every breath, hauling [her] to its dark embrace” (*Mist and Fury* 583). Nesta, Feyre’s elder sister, can feel when the Cauldron is about to be wielded (*Wings and Ruin* 468). When Rhys tells Feyre she can forge the broken Cauldron anew, Feyre remembers the tapestry: “It told the story of a Cauldron. *This* Cauldron. And when it was held by female hands...All life flowed from it” (664). The idea of it only bringing forth life by *female* hands is what moves Feyre to try. The image of the Cauldron and the Mother goddess that wielded it is evocative of witchcraft literature and established representations of witchcraft.

There are other important images connecting Feyre’s surroundings to witchcraft imagery. Rhys’s home, referred to as the House of Wind, is a component of a story related in *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*, “the Female Pilgrim of the House of the Wind.” A parallel can be drawn here because it is clear that Maas has found inspiration across mythology and folklore. The foundational religious text for the Wiccan religion, Gerald Gardner’s *Book of Shadows* (c. 1970), took inspiration from *Aradia*, among other

sources. After rising to High Priestess in a Wiccan coven, Doreen Valiente rewrote Gardner's work, but notably left the *Aradia* references untouched because she believed it to be genuine witchcraft practice (53-55). Indeed, Feyre can be classified as a kind of pilgrim to the House of Wind, further connecting her with nineteenth-century witch references, so it is safe to assume that perhaps Leland and Maas shared inspiration in their witch figures, or that Maas pulled from established witch literature texts. The House of Wind is the first place Feyre visits in the Night Court, signaling her introduction to a new possible outcome of her life, one where she is allowed to fully come into her power. Modern witchcraft religion, known as Wicca, is highly personal for every practitioner, but it usually centers on a "chief deity" known as the Goddess, "the deity of nature perceived as an earth Goddess, a moon Goddess, and a fertility Goddess. Witches emphasize the threefold nature of the Goddess: she is warrior maid; she is mother; she is hag of darkness and rebirth" (Russell 158). This could just as easily be a description of the wielder of the Cauldron, known in Prythian as the Mother, their only goddess.

Feyre, too, shares iconography with the celestial Dianic witches from the past, celestial witch imagery from Greek mythology, and even the "moon goddess" of present-day pagan Wicca. As High Lady of the Night Court, much of her symbolism equates her with the night sky. Her crown "was crafted of silver and diamond, all fashioned into swirls of stars and various phases of the moon. Its arching apex held aloft a crescent moon of solid diamond, flanked by two exploding stars" (*Wings and Ruin* 394). Her gown for the Starfall celebration—a winter solstice festival—makes her appear like a falling star. Feyre, with a crown of moons atop her head, hands braced on top of a Cauldron and armed with an ancient spellbook, evokes an incredibly effective image of a

witch (*Mist and Fury* 586-587). Indeed, her epithet of “Cursebreaker” holds true when she burns through spells, and when she does the spell to release Amren, she strikes the true image: “I fought with every breath to get through the spell, my arm half-submerged in the Cauldron as Amren went under the dark water that had filled it. I said the words with my tongue, said them with my heart and blood and bones. Screamed them” (*Wings and Ruin* 659). The High Lady breaks the spell, using the power she learned to wield by sheer desire to be her own person, another mark of a true witch.

Maas achieves parallels to stereotypical criteria of witches and witchcraft representations in other ways as well. Martin Ramstedt comments on the “convergence of fantasy fiction and contemporary Pagan spirituality,” especially in regards to how they blur “the boundaries between ‘mythology’ and proper literary ‘fiction’ (3). While Ramstedt’s argument primarily centers around Dutch media, Maas’s work acts as more evidence to illustrate this connection, because of the repeated borrowing from the modern pagan tradition, which in turn borrowed from the history of the witch. The High Priestesses, mouthpieces of the Mother, ostensibly share similarities with the Priestesses of the Black Mass in Michelet’s *La Sorcière*: pagan, goddess worshipping female priests leading a ceremony. The High Priestesses of Prythian are adorned with moon circlets as well. Feyre’s sister Elain’s ability as a seer—developed after being transformed into a Fae—draws a connection to the power of “divination,” laid out as a component of witchcraft in the Bible and by Pope Alexander IV in his directions to witchfinders and inquisitors. She exhibits this ability by seeing visions and by scrying with bones, both of which are successful efforts (*Wings and Ruin* 554). The word “witch” is even used twice in the series, both in regard to known powerful female characters. While at a war camp,

one of the warriors is put off by Nesta and asks “is she a witch?” to which Nesta replies in the affirmative, and Feyre watches “as nine full-grown, weathered Illyrian warlords flinch[ed]” (*Wings and Ruin* 485). Nesta wears ‘witch’ as a badge of honor to incite fear into warriors she can not face with brute strength, effectively weaponizing the word itself. Rhys also uses the word in regards to his dear friend Miryam, in jest to Miryam’s mate, proving it is not a negative attribute: “Tell that witch it goes both ways” (637). Feyre was Made as Miryam and Nesta were Made and, as such, Feyre takes on the same witch association.

The negative incarnation of the witch is also included in the story. The character of the Weaver is a dangerous being that resides in the middle of the woods in a cottage made from the bones and hair of those who enter her home. Described as having “thick hair of the richest onyx, tumbling down to her slender waist as she worked the wheel, snow-white hands feeding and pulling the thread around a thorn-sharp spindle” and singing a song, the Weaver spins human hair (*Mist and Fury* 218). Feyre is tasked with entering her house unheard to retrieve a ring for Rhys. Once she is heard by the Weaver, the door shuts and Feyre is trapped. The heroine being locked inside a witch’s cottage deep in the woods is referential to the witch of fairy tales, down to the appearance of the witch herself. When Feyre finally sees the Weaver head on, she sees: “Above her young, supple body, beneath her black, beautiful hair, her skin was gray—wrinkled and sagging and dry. And where eyes should have gleamed instead lay rotting black pits. Her lips had withered to nothing but deep, dark lines around a hole full of jagged stumps of teeth—like she had gnawed on too many bones” (223). Even the Weaver’s true name, Stryga, is a reference to either the she-demon Strzyga of Slavic mythology, or strega, the Italian

word for witch. The entirety of the Weaver's appearance calls back to the old hag from Roman mythology and later, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Weaver is notable for having imagery straight out of German fairy tales—the witch in the woods that is presumably going to eat Feyre. The fact that Feyre is able to get away using her wits and physical abilities speaks to her own developed abilities and contrasts the contemporary idea of the witch with that of classic fairy tales; Feyre physically upsets the bad woman/evil witch fairy tale trope within this scene (*Mist and Fury* 223-226).

Maas employs naming that makes use of significant names of powerful women from mythology for characters other than the Weaver. The Morrigan—though in the series she is known mostly as Mor—Rhys's cousin and third in command, takes her name from an Irish war goddess. Mor's power is truth and she is fearsome on the battlefield. Feyre's last name, Archeron, is a modification of Acheron, the river commonly known in Greek mythology and the river to the Underworld. Clotho, a Priestess working in the library in Velaris, the Night's Court's capital city, is named for one of the three Fates of Greek Mythology. Clotho had her tongue cut down, a crime committed against her by men, and is accompanied at the library with other Priestesses who need a safe haven. The names of some of the most powerful women in the story stand as references to powerful women throughout mythology, connecting them further to strength.

A large part of the witch representation seen in Michelet, Leland, and later Gage, focuses on the witch's social rebelliousness. This can be seen in small part in Feyre during the Tithe, a biannual event in the Spring Court in which faerie residents offer a gift to the High Lord based on their income in exchange for continued protection. Faced with a water wraith who cannot pay her taxes, Feyre takes off “a ruby-studded gold

bracelet from [her] wrist,” a gold necklace, and diamond earrings and hands it over to the wraith (*Mist and Fury* 93). Tamlin berates her for it, and she responds “We have a damned house full of gold and jewels... Why shouldn’t I give them to her? Those things don’t mean anything to me. I’ve never worn the same piece of jewelry twice! Who cares about any of it?” (94). Feyre, who knows the reality of starving, is critical of Tamlin’s grandiose display of wealth and it moves her to rebel against his feudalistic hierarchy and unjust taxes.

Similarly, though Feyre’s journey begins as an individual, personal journey, more and more women—especially powerful women—that she connects with are pulled into her orbit as the story progresses, eventually establishing a strong community of women that see the battle through to the end with her. She begins somewhat at odds with her sisters Nesta and Elain but eventually they become central to Feyre’s progression and integral to the actions of the story after they are granted their own powers when they become Made by the Cauldron. Feyre notes that she believes Elain “had always been gentle and sweet—and [she] had considered it a different sort of strength. A better strength. To look at the hardness of the world and choose, over and over, to love, to be kind” (156). However, after being Made into High Fae, Elain begins to show signs of being something more than simply kind. A seemingly disconnected comment turns out to be a vision and Amren proclaims “The Cauldron made [her] a seer” (334). She later uses this power to try to track the Cauldron. Nesta, the eldest sister, also begins to manifest powers. In her rage at being Made, Nesta took something from the Cauldron; she “made it give something back” (255). The Night Court wonders if “that was why the Cauldron couldn’t shatter the wall. Not because its power was spent. But because Nesta had stolen

too much of it” (319). Nesta, like Feyre, refused to submit to the plight she was handed and fought back to such a degree she forced the all-powerful Cauldron to yield to her in some way, forging a power for herself in the process. Nesta and Elain slaughter the King of Hybern in the end, so it was his hubris that prompted him to wield the object that ultimately became his undoing (653). While living in the Mortal Lands, Feyre’s relationship with her sisters was strained at best but by sharing in their power and learning to protect each other with their respective abilities, the Archeron sisters find common ground. This camaraderie pushes Feyre’s development even further, by introducing her to healthy relationships and empowering displays of magic.

Including her sisters, Feyre is surrounded by strong women after finding a home in the Night Court. She begins to forge bonds with other women, which inspires her to want more for herself but also heals her in many ways. After repairing her relationship with her sisters in *Wings and Ruin*, and nurturing wholesome female relationships, her growth is stimulated even more. Amren and the Morrigan, or Mor, Rhys’s Second and Third respectively, act as role models for Feyre during her quest to true freedom and independence. Feyre is taken aback at the idea of Rhys having women so far up his chain of command, after being acclimatized to Prythian by Tamlin (*Mist and Fury 148*). Mor goes through a particularly traumatic experience with her family in a particularly violent microcosm of the patriarchal standards of Prythian. In Mor’s part of the Night Court known as the Hewn City, virginity is prized above all else, and Mor is sold to a cruel son of the High Lord of the Autumn Court to be used as what amounts to “breeding stock” (397). When she rebelled and lost her virginity on her own terms, making her unmarriageable, her family left her for dead at the Autumn Court border with a note

nailed to her body saying that she was now their problem (397). Mor's story and survival is part of what prompts Feyre to want to help her sisters: "I want them to hear your story. And know there is a special strength..." As I spoke I realized I needed to hear it, too. 'A special strength in enduring such dark trials and hardships...And still remaining warm, and kind. Still willing to trust—to reach out'" (*Mist and Fury* 239). The women of the series aid each other in embracing their shared—and individual—strength by supporting each other through lives punctuated with trauma and grief perpetuated by a patriarchal society.

These portraits of powerful women, who still remain loving and kind, are extremely significant to Feyre because they exemplify the possibilities for her own life. Exposure to these women also comes at a formative time because she meets them while she herself is learning to control her magic. Amren and Mor show their powers repeatedly. Amren single-handedly defended half of the city of Velaris in an attack from Hybern, and Mor, "whose gift was pure truth" fought in a war five centuries prior (125). Feyre is also exposed to similar examples from the well-respected and headstrong Viviane, wife of the High Lord of the Winter Court, who stands up for the weak and acts as an additional model for Feyre's growth. Viviane stays in the Winter Court while the High Lord sits trapped Under the Mountain, "never ceasing her hunt for finding a way to free him. Especially while Amarantha unleashed her horrors upon his court to break them, punish them. Yet Viviane held them together" (411). Viviane is the first to pledge her help in the war with Hybern, before the High Lords (445). Finally, Feyre learns of Nephelle, who defied all logic and possibility to save her friend Miryam. A cartographer with a malformed wing unable to bear weight, Nephelle stubbornly carried Miryam,

racing the sea that was coming crashing down: “Nephelle, who had been passed over, who had been forgotten...She outraced death itself...yet her too-small wingspan, that deformed wing...they did not fail her. Not once” (309). It is Nephelle’s story, told by Azriel, that gives Feyre the motivation to learn to fly on her shapeshifted wings. Miryam, when killed in battle, was Made as Feyre was made, as Amren and the other Archeron sisters were Made (163). It is not just one of these women, but all of them together that are able to save the world by using the Cauldron. Being Made gives them a special, closer connection to the Cauldron, and it is especially significant that only female characters have the power to win the war against Hybern. “We need to get to the Cauldron, girl. *All of us*” Amren says, and Feyre observes that “she didn’t mean the High Lords. But rather the four of us—who had been Made. Me, Amren...and my sisters” (599). Together, they could withstand the power that nearly killed Feyre when she took it on alone (600). The Weaver—who Feyre is able to enlist for help at this point in the story—carves a path for them to reach the Cauldron to diffuse it. Amren admits once at the Cauldron that the “spell of control” she found in the Book of Breathings—an ancient book with the ability to nullify the powers of the Cauldron—was a lie; instead, it was “an unbinding spell” to unleash her on the entire enemy army (657). Amren, with Feyre’s help, renders the enemy into clouds of dust. Feyre, however, has the power to forge the broken Cauldron anew after Amren’s departure. The tight-knit community of the women of the Night Court are able to defeat Hybern because of their trust in each other and in their power.

Similar ideas can be traced back to other representations of the witch and women. Feyre’s community of women shares similarities with the covens of witches depicted in *Aradia* and *La Sorcière*, also presented as a tight community. *Aradia* makes the assertion

that, at heart, all women are witches, establishing the idea of a community of women who share similarities and are able to build on each other's strength. The New Woman gender equality activists of the 1890s can be seen as their own community in the same fashion. Terry Pratchett's Tiffany Aching is educated by elder witches and has access to an entire community that she can reach out to in times of need. These various representations are all illustrative of a shared idea: that of a community of women as inherently strong, and whose power comes, in part, from their ability to rely and lean on each other and to effectively work together.

Ironically, Feyre's powers are all derived from men, as she takes on the powers of all seven of the male High Lords when she is Made. However, this facet of her character is ultimately used to demonstrate the ways in which she utilizes the supposed power of men to bolster her own strength and independence. Indeed, Feyre is far and above the most powerful, or at the very least the most uniquely gifted, character in the series. When she captures the Suriel, a being that can answer any question, for the second time in the series, it tells her how to save Rhys. It also tells her that she and Rhys are mates, at which point the Suriel corroborates her power: "He is the most powerful High Lord to ever walk this earth. You are...new. You are made of all seven High Lords. Unlike anything. Are you two not similar in that? Are you not matched?" (493). By the end of the second book, Feyre is capable of shapeshifting and healing, she can cast and break spells, she can infiltrate the minds of others, she can teleport—a skill known in the series as "winnowing"—and she can wield fire, ice, wind, and shadows. This is all in addition to the power that she cultivates that is unique to her. It is this insistence of wielding her power in a way that benefits her own life that makes her synonymous with the witch

figure. She uses power to affect change in her life at every turn and does so to the effect of bettering her situation and the lives of the women around her.

Significantly, Feyre's journey to control and successfully wield her power only occurs after she is associated with the Night Court and its celestial symbols, but in the Night Court she is encouraged to use her power as she sees fit and to use it to her advantage. Rhys remarks that the powers Feyre displays are "usually the first indications among our kind that a High Lord's son might become his heir" and that Tamlin was intentionally ignoring this fact to keep her subjugated in a role that best fit his wishes (*Mist and Fury* 73). Feyre's selfhood and her connection to her own autonomy prevent her from just being an imprint of the seven High Lords. During her training with Rhys, she combats his practice assaults on her mind in a unique way: His power comes in the form of claws embedded in her mind and she thinks: "It'd take me forever to unhook each claw and shove the mass of his presence out that narrow opening. If I could wash it away—A wave. A wave of self, of *me*, to sweep out all of him" (63). She weaponizes her autonomy and her freedom to control her own power literally, by using the powers given to her by others and morphing it to serve her own purposes. She does this again when she is conscripted into helping Rhys locate the Book of Breathings. Rhys lets her know that again that she is made of all seven High Lords, which is "like having seven thumbprints. If we've hidden something, if we've made or protected it with our power, no matter where it has been concealed, you will be able to track it through that very magic" (207). The spell protecting the Book is linked to the power signature of Taquin, High Lord of the Summer Court. When she is faced with the locked door containing the Book, she literally *becomes* Tarquin: "*I am summer; I am warmth; I am sea and sky and planted*

field...Until I *was* him, and it was a set of male hands I now possessed, now pushed against the door” (349). Feyre uses her power by manipulating the parts of her that come from the High Lords and using them to her advantage. Feyre learns to shapeshift so she has working wings identical to those possessed by Rhys and his friends Cassian and Azriel, thereby manipulating Tamlin’s shapeshifting ability, a feat also emblematic of the use of her powers. Additionally, in a scene where Feyre must defend the Night Court city of Velaris, she takes down flying creatures by creating water animals that soak the enemies, at which point she “clench[es] [her] fingers into a fist” which turns the water to ice and freezes the creatures solid (*Mist and Fury* 566). Here, she merges the power of two separate High Lords (water for Summer and ice for Winter) into something that protects the city that she has chosen as her home and has helped her to realize her power. Similarly, during a High Lord’s meeting when she is disrespected by the High Lord of Autumn Court, Beron, she uses the full breadth of her powers to blast him with fire—actually using his own power of fire against him—encircle him in a bubble of water, and use the spell-breaking “white light of Day” to punch through and disable his shield, all in order to assert her authority in the face of being belittled by a man (*Wings and Ruin* 441).

She is not relegated to experiencing her powers through the same modes as the men do—she establishes ownership over them. The use and transformation of the powers of others is a conscious effort on Feyre’s part. She says definitively: “The power did not belong to the high lords. Not any longer. It belonged to me—as I belonged *only* to me, as my future was *mine* to decide, to forge. Once I discovered and mastered what the others had given me, I could weave them together—into something new, something of every court and none of them” (451). Feyre’s intentions are clear: she intends to create

something that is entirely her own, refusing to submit to being subjugated by men in any way. She exists in a different league, because no other High Fae has the power of all seven courts. In addition to their powers, however, she has her own: the power of “an immortal with a mortal heart,” which works to her advantage as well in the Summer Court. To reference again a time she was moved to charity by a poor water wraith who could not pay her taxes in the Spring Court, true to the ways of the Fae, this incurs a debt between the wraith and Feyre, and it is a group of wraiths that rescue Feyre and Amren—Rhys’s Second—from the trap when they take the Book. If not for Feyre’s mortal heart, they would not have made it out alive.

If not completely separate from male characters, Feyre is independent of them, and her advancements in her society are not the result of successes in a patriarchal system. She wilts in such a system that would see her prim and silent in the Spring Court and leaves it to carve out a space where she might thrive in the Night Court. To hark back to her conversation with Tamlin before their wedding when he tells her “there is no such thing as High Lady,” she is willingly and intentionally crowned in the Night Court “at each and every meeting and function... long before [Feyre] was his mate, long before [she] was his High Lady. Even Under the Mountain” (*Mist and Fury* 24; *Wings and Ruin* 392). Where she had once been afraid of being in a position of such power, she “indeed had never fretted over it when it came to Rhys. As if some small part of [her] had always known that this was where [she] was meant to be: at his side, as his equal” (*Wings and Ruin* 394). She only gets to this point because of her time in the Night Court. Her power as High Lady is a physical manifestation of how far her character comes from the day in the woods she felled the wolf. Her yearning for freedom and autonomy grants her the

highest power of all, being the first High Lady, and the most significant part is that it was her choice to do so.

Feyre's relationships with men throughout the story offer interesting perspectives on her ultimate desires for autonomy, particularly her relationship with Rhys. It is important to note that Rhys, a male character in a position of power, is the one who gives Feyre the opportunity to come into her power; to give her the space to learn, as it were. In *The Feminization of Quest-Romance*, Dana A. Heller remarks on Rachel Blau DuPlessis's argument about marriage plots in women's quest narratives. According to DuPlessis, women's quests are ended, and women "stop by marrying," if the heroine exists in a world where men hold power (94). Heller synthesizes this by arguing "female heroism may backfire...by reinforcing customs that empower patriarchy and consequently serve the very principles that keep women in their 'proper' place" (11). While Rhys does hold power—in fact, he is repeatedly subtitled the most powerful High Lord in history—he insists on allowing Feyre the space to make her own decisions and Feyre notes this more than once: "Always—it was always my choice with him these days" (*Mist and Fury* 208). While Rhys's presence may appear to serve a greater patriarchal standard of gender roles at the outset, the truth is that Feyre's decisions are all her own, just as her power is all her own; his character serves as the romantic catalyst to escaping her stifling situation in the Spring Court.

Feyre's circumstances at the Spring Court are direct effects from the way she is treated by Tamlin, who serves as a major contrast to Rhys in the ways each of them suppresses and encourage Feyre's development, respectively. Under Tamlin's domineering rule, Feyre feels like she is no more than a prisoner, unable to make her own

decisions and constantly told how to act (*Mist and Fury* 263). She rebels against her own complacency: “I’d let him erase me. He’d offered me paints and the space and time to practice...he’d saved my life like some kind of feral knight in a legend, and I’d gulped it down like faerie wine” (171). Rhys acts as his opposite, allowing Feyre to think for herself and emboldening her to harness her true strength. It is important to recognize that Feyre does not act at the behest of Rhys, however; that is to say, though with him she finds her autonomy, she does not become unconditionally subservient to him because of this. She falls in love with Rhys and their relationship blooms, but it is always a choice she is able to make on her own terms. It is through Rhys that she allows herself to be treated with respect and to expect more out of a man, rather than the warped perspective of love she had received with Tamlin. She comments on how much she has grown in this regard, by being vulnerable to Rhys, in an incredibly mature display of honesty:

I’m thinking that I must have been a fool in love to allow myself to be shown so little of the Spring Court. I’m thinking there’s a great deal of territory I was never allowed to see or hear about and maybe I would have lived in ignorance forever like some pet...I’m thinking that I was a lonely, hopeless person, and I might have fallen in love with the first thing that showed me a hint of kindness and safety...And maybe that worked for who I was before. Maybe it doesn’t work for who—what I am now. (156)

Feyre’s spurning of Tamlin, who represents an oppressive and patriarchal society, and her love for Rhys, who represents a society of equality and egalitarianism, mirrors her battle against Hybern. It is evident in the separate ways they align with each other: Tamlin with Hybern, and Feyre and Rhys fighting together for the sake of a liberated world.

Feyre is not the only woman whose positive relationships with men echo their greater sense of destiny and purpose. Tiffany Aching encounters a similar dichotomy in *I Shall Wear Midnight*, in which she and Preston, a young guard, decide to embark on a relationship as they discuss how to make it work with her witching and his doctor training. Tiffany embraces this love despite learning early on that it is common for witches to remain unmarried because they are “apart” and people harbor “a kind of fear as well” about witches (*I Shall Wear Midnight* 9). Tiffany’s fledgling connection with Preston is another example of a positive relationship in which the man does not seek to stifle the powers of the witch, nor is the man afraid of her. This also parallels nineteenth-century reclaimed witch representation such as in Egerton’s short stories in which the men are not afraid of their lovers’ practice of witchcraft. The fisherman in “A Cross Line” is pulled into the protagonist’s thrall because of her witch attributes (5). The woman’s former lover in “An Empty Frame” puts in his letter that he dreams of putting her, the witch, above him (119). Reflecting a period of time in the late nineteenth century, in which women were pushing out of the “Woman’s Sphere” and advocating for emancipation, destigmatising the witch identity works to establish a narrative in which witch figures can be capable of love and power and are not forced to be “other,” existing on the fringes of acceptable society. This exemplifies the lasting effects of witch representations of the nineteenth century, as prior they were feared as devil worshippers or otherwise as an entity that has been othered. The modern witches like Feyre and Tiffany are shown as being accepted and worthy of love—able to exist outside of negative connotations while making these decisions of their own authority.

Feyre's character is a direct descendant of the reclaimed witch of the 1880s and 1890s, a period which also heavily influenced the establishment of fantasy as a distinct genre. Feyre fits into the definition of a witch and stands as an example of the modern reclaimed version of the figure because of her powers, certainly, but also because of her inner strength and self-assuredness as well. Acting as the exemplar of current young adult fantasy trends, characters like Feyre are the natural progression in witchcraft literature, following a period when the terms "witch" and "strong, liberated, free woman" were conflated pridefully. Maas's series is undeniable as an investigation of powerful women in relation to contemporary understandings of the figure of the witch.

V. CONCLUSION

At the start of my research, I imagined iterations of the witch to be points on a line, drawn back in time from the nineteenth century, through the early modern witch trials, the Renaissance, Greek and Roman mythology, back to Mesopotamia. Indeed, these interpretations still ostensibly exist on a timeline, but more than that, versions of the witch figure are stacked one on top of the other, building on the previous version with each renewal. Incessantly influenced by social, political, and religious aspects of society and culture, the witch morphed and changed with each shift in thought. As society changed, as the witch became a composite image of iconography borrowed and stories fused, it is only natural that the definition of the witch would change as well. During the nineteenth century, fueled by a combination of a resurgence in the popularity of early modern witch trial accounts, Spiritualism, and the rising feminist movement, the figure of the witch became conflated with feminists and the New Woman. The term, initially leveled at women with negative connotation, was adopted by advocates for women's liberation because the witch's attributes were a desirable fantasy: a woman with the power to control her life, living separate from a patriarchal society, is a captivating idea for subjugated women. Reclaimed as a feminist symbol, a positive role model version of the witch began to appear in literature of the late nineteenth century in response to its usage by gender equality critics. Because of the way it was used in the New Woman period, the witch persists as a feminist symbol, synonymous with female power and liberation.

The fantasy genre also grew primarily out of the late nineteenth century, and it is in fantasy works that the witch remains so pervasive. I define the witch—based on her

evolution—as a woman who uses power to affect change in her life, by means magical or otherwise, or a woman who lives outside the societal pressures forced upon them by a patriarchal system. Often, witches of fantasy literature and media borrow or adapt familiar stereotypical accoutrements—a pointy hat, a broomstick, a Cauldron, an animal familiar, a black dress, etc—as illustrated in witches from works such as *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Harry Potter*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Charmed*, and *Hocus Pocus*. It is also common to glimpse references to fairy tale tropes in the characterization of witches. By building on the long history of witchcraft literature and witch representations in culture, modern fantasy authors then looked to extrapolate from the image of the New Woman witch, herself a product of previous iterations.

Two series that exemplify the modern state of the reclaimed feminist witch, Pratchett's *Tiffany Aching* and *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Maas, do so in vastly different ways. Pratchett's witches are a tongue-in-cheek response to the mythos established by the late Victorian witch trial interest and to long understood fairy tale tropes. The witch trial accounts published and republished in the latter half of the Victorian period were primarily based on the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*, not on any concrete historical fact, which ignited a series of exaggerated pseudo-historical monographs that persist to the present day. Pratchett plays on this, subverting well-known myths from the revised early modern period and using them to make a comment on the treatment of women in general. The main character, Tiffany Aching, starts her journey as a young witch just beginning her training. She is cast in all the familiar aspects: she has a broom, a pointy hat, and she keeps a talking toad in her pocket on occasion. However, she rarely does magic. The largest portion of her power comes from her cleverness and

her willingness to problem solve. In this way, Pratchett links Tiffany's identity as a witch—and does so explicitly and repeatedly—to her wits and her autonomy, while still clinging to stereotypical features. Pratchett's witches are also consistently defined by their commitment to one another and in their dedication to helping each other as a community. This kind of witch representation opens the door for characters such as the ones found in *A Court of Thorns and Roses* because it shifts the parameters for what counts as a witch to include a far wider reach.

In the case of Feyre Archeron, Sarah J. Maas makes no direct connection or insinuation that her protagonist is a witch, but because the term has been made synonymous with, essentially, “strong woman,” Feyre is recognizable as a witch. She starts out as a powerless human living in poverty and ends as High Lady of the Night Court, crowned in stars and moons like Diana herself, with the highest degree of power in all of Prythian. Feyre is recognizable as a witch because, as the definition demands, she uses her power strictly to her advantage. After being given power accidentally by seven men, Feyre learns to manipulate her magic into something new to serve herself and her chosen family. Maas also leans on celestial iconography from the Night Court to signal Feyre's transition into power, along with specific witch imagery, such as what the Cauldron and divination invoke.

Maas's series and Feyre's representation are the product of the current popularity of a young adult fantasy genre that frequently centers teenage female leads that experience a shift in their lives or societies and are forced on a quest to save themselves/the world, typically casting them as heroes. Feyre may not be a witch in name in the way Tiffany is, but she exemplifies the major attributes and patterns leading up to

modern-day interpretations. This trend mirrors reality similar to the ways the New Woman writers used the witch in their writing. The fantasy genre is a natural progression of witchcraft literature, moving away from fairy tales and pseudo-historical monographs. Fantasy, with the presence of a secondary world, allows for the challenging of social systems: “by going past reality, by plunging through and beyond it, fantasy can offer an interesting, at times disturbing, perspective” (Baker 437). By reading fantasy, the reader is directed to a new, perhaps “emancipated subjectivity” regarding the world around them (437). Baker argues that fantasy, in the same way as science-fiction, has a potential to be socially progressive, because of its freedom to draw new worlds and interrogate the reality of our own. Baker also posits: “The secondary worlds of fantasy portray radical extensions...and breaks from the real, implying dissatisfaction with realistic representations of daily life” (450). Women’s rights movements are still common in the twenty-first century and strong female characters are an alluring image of catharsis. Female-led heroic tales are prime examples of this illustration, and stories about witches go even further. A novel about a strong woman indeed subverts heroic tropes, and the witch does the same, while also challenging stereotypes about witches.

Witchcraft is still very much alive in contemporary society. After the rippling effects of the late Victorian witch—manifested by Tiffany Aching and Feyre Archeron—the figure has taken on an inherently feminist connotation. It now exists even outside of literature with the popularization of Wicca in the 1970s—which claimed *Aradia* as a foremother and typically is associated with Dianic witchcraft. The term is now practically synonymous with female power and authority. The political activist group W.I.T.C.H., Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, founded in 1968, took the name

in jest as an ironic reference (Russell 155-156). Since its inception, the acronym has taken on other meanings, such as Women Inspired to Tell their Collective History, Women Interested in Toppling Consumer Holidays, and other variations (Brownmiller 49). Their manifesto referenced the witch-cult hypothesis that early modern witches were members of a surviving pre-Christian pagan religion and that nine million women were burned at the stake for witchcraft, a claim also substantiated by Matilda Joslyn Gage, essentially “Proclaiming that witches were the original female rebels, hounded, persecuted, and burned at the stake because they had knowledge that men wanted suppressed” (Brownmiller 49). W.I.T.C.H. is still active today, their activism now centering around advocating for all oppressed people—women, the LGBTQ+ community, people of color, and others. This interweaving of the association with the feminist figure of the witch and political activism is an intrinsic union: “Feminism is a wide and diverse movement whose main thrust is political. But within feminism a cultural movement exists, and within the cultural movement a spiritual movement, and within the spiritual movement, the feminist Craft” (Russell 156).

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the witch is an empty vessel that women can imprint themselves onto to register facets of themselves within the symbol of power the witch has become. Because the parameters of what defines a witch have changed over time, a trajectory has been established that should be seen as a reflection of how the status of women has developed. So entwined have the image of the witch and a powerful woman become, that the two have become inextricably linked together through these developments, as is reflected in contemporary fantasy novels that regularly concern the exploits of such women. The witch and womanhood: the two in tandem as an ultimate

delineation of rebuking submission to the status quo, one forever inseparable from the other.

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