

SCREAMING, FLYING, AND LAUGHING:
MAGICAL FEMINISM'S WITCHES IN CONTEMPORARY FILM, TELEVISION,
AND NOVELS

A Dissertation

by

KIMBERLY ANN WELLS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2007

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Screaming, Flying, and Laughing: Magical Feminism's Witches in Contemporary
Film, Television, and Novels. (May 2007)

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This project argues that there is a previously unnamed canon of literature called Magical Feminism which exists across many current popular (even lowbrow) genres such as science-fiction, fantasy, so-called realistic literature, and contemporary television and film. I define Magical Feminism as a genre quite similar to Magical Realism, but assert that its main political thrust is to model a feminist agency for its readers. To define this genre, I closely-read the image of the female magic user as one of the most important Magical Feminist metaphors. I argue that the female magic user—commonly called the witch, but also labeled priestess, mistress, shaman, mambo, healer, midwife—is a metaphor for female unruliness and disruption to patriarchy and as such, is usually portrayed as evil and deserving of punishment. I assert that many (although not all) of the popular texts this genre includes are overlooked or ignored by the academy, and thus, that an important focus for contemporary feminism is missed. When the texts are noticed by parts of the academy, they are mostly considered popular culture novelty acts, not serious political genres. As part of my argument, I analyze

third wave feminism's attempt to reconcile traits previously considered less than feminist, such as the domestic. I also deconstruct the popular media's negative portrayal of contemporary feminism and the resulting reluctance for many young women to identify themselves as feminist. I also argue that this reluctance goes hand in hand with a growing attempt to seek new models for empowering female epistemologies. My assertion is that these texts are the classrooms where many readers learn their feminism. Finally, I list a short bibliography as a way of defining canon of texts that should be considered Magical Feminist.

For Andrew, who is *always* my comfort,
and for Maia & Sean, who finally *made* me finish this, and sometimes even “helped.”

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: INVERTING THE IMAGE

“The only thing you can do if you are trapped in a reflection is invert the image.” Juliet Mitchell, qtd. in Jackson 6.

In 1647, Achsah Young is recorded as being the first witch “one of Windsor” hanged in the colonies of what would become the United States (Orians 56). The record of her execution brings to the New World an old hatred, numbered by some as millions dead. There is not really much known about her, other than the matter of fact records of her execution as a witch. She was not the last to be executed for the crime in the U.S., and the records we do have of other witches executed for the crime show that witches were often women who were known to be alone, outspoken, outsiders who challenged the norms of society. Most likely, Achsah Young rubbed someone the wrong way, was accused of being the cause of some disaster or other, and had no one to defend her. She was a victim of a judicial system in which women had no real rights as anything other than property. Her virtual anonymity, from the lack of information we have about her, makes her as interesting from a feminist cultural studies standpoint as Shakespeare’s sister.¹

The figure of the witch is a metaphor particularly bound to the female gender, perhaps even an archetype for a generic kind of defiant woman. In examining how

This dissertation follows the style of the *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.

society deals with and defines witches, we can understand much about how society deals with and defines women. There are certain characteristics that are easily identifiable surrounding the witch, and it is these characteristics that a growing group of popular texts re-write and challenge, revising expectations about what is normal about femininity and what is othered. Some of the characteristics of women as witches persist into stereotypes because there are elements of truth in them, but the untruths about women that the witch shows us are just as revealing. These true and untrue elements continue to teach us about ourselves, especially in the questioning of these elements as “norms” by the writers in the texts discussed in this dissertation. These texts, which I will define as Magical Feminism, take part in a crucial literary project. This project is one that science-fiction writer and feminist Marge Piercy describes as one wherein women writers:

Must break through the old roles to encounter our own meanings in the symbols we experience in dreams, in songs, in vision, in meditation. Some of these symbols are much older than capitalism, and some contain knowledge we must recover; but we receive all through a filter that has aligned the stuff by values not our own. What we use we must remake. Then only we are not playing with dead dreams but seeing ourselves more clearly, and more clearly becoming. The defeated in history lose their names, their goddesses, their language, their culture. The myths we imagine we are living (old westerns, true romances)

shape our choices. (63-64)

In writing such texts, the authors within this canon are reshaping the values of women's lives, "inverting the image" of the defiant female, creating culture, exploring new and old symbols. They ask the question: "what is the witch, and how is she related to women's truths?" Because the witch is automatically a woman with a *different* power than the average woman, in examining how the image of the witch changes or remains static, I also examine stories society tells us about what it means to be a woman with and seeking change and power— both personal and political.

The witch moves from feared and hated devil to much-admired role model and back again in the popular imagination. In so doing, she teaches us how to imagine what being a woman seeking change and power (defined very basically as control over one's own destiny) today means. The witch as metaphor may be fiction, but, as Ann Howey argues in her dissertation, *Once and Future Women: Popular Fiction, Feminism and Four Arthurian Rewritings* (1998):

fictional characters allow readers positions to occupy in imagination, and occupying those positions may lead the reader *to question the differences (or disturbing similarities)* between fictional and real social relations. Fiction with female protagonists [in this case, the witch] gives readers both interesting positions to occupy in imagination and potentially new perspectives on society. Some radical feminists argue that such perspectives are the basis for *social*

change. (10, emphasis mine)

The witch in Magical Feminism, in modeling female agency, allows readers to imagine themselves as agents of and for that social change. The Magical Feminist witch always questions differences as she challenges the norm. By way of challenging differences or bringing out similarities, the witch is one of few figures that can occupy, sometimes simultaneously, both evil subjectivity and saving good.

Within this dissertation, I will examine historical, academic, and popular portrayals of the witch as a woman who defies patriarchal norms, delineating the ways the metaphor of the witch is used by some writers to question reality, redefine, and teach a powerful feminism. An analysis of the witch in popular portrayals helps us examine the current status of women and how women use or are denied power in contemporary culture, as well as revealing the potential for radical change in imagining social roles readers and viewers play in new ways as a direct result of these portrayals of fictional women who question or defy norms. I will use the figure of the witch to define a genre that exists across current defined popular genres such as science fiction and fantasy, as well as contemporary realistic fiction. This is a genre I call Magical Feminism. I will define the category of Magical Feminism and explore its specific differences from the already well known social-protest genre of Magical Realism. The texts examined include Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), Alice Hoffman's *Practical Magic* (1996), Chitra Divakaruni's *Mistress of Spices* (1997),

Sean Stewart's *Mockingbird* (2000), and the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).

I have chosen these five texts because they demonstrate basic principles of the canon Magical Feminism. They are also from multiple epistemologies of witchness and womanhood. These five texts demonstrate the wide variety of types of texts— from film to the middle-brow novel to pulp mass market serials— that can be placed within this genre. The five creators of these texts range from self-identified feminists to those who would prefer to not explicitly call themselves feminist. These texts, while mostly responding to a Euro-centric tradition of witchcraft, still demonstrate multiple types of class, gender, ethnicity, and age. I chose these texts, as well, because most of the novels are available in trade paperbacks, demonstrating a slightly more “respectable” middle-brow canonical status than their mass market compatriots. Perhaps by looking at the more middle-brow texts first, we can illuminate the potential seriousness of the more popular, pulp versions of this story, as well. The analysis of these five texts is informed by theories which show power as shifting, unfixated and unstable.² After making this definition of Magical Feminism, I will make the claim that analysis of these texts and others like them is fundamental to understanding feminism within a so-called “post-feminist” era, redefining our ideas about women and power.

In particular, I want to discuss two major issues. The first of these is the way these texts rescue tasks and concerns still widely considered frivolous and “women’s

things” from seeming pointless and, through their association with witches, rewrite them as possible sources *for* power instead of detractions *from* power. These tasks and concerns are tools and paths to power that many of Magical Feminism’s witches use, including such popularly devalued things as domesticity– recipes/spells, cooking, gardening, sewing– and such things patriarchal discourse calls frivolous such as clothes, beauty, and makeup. The writers of Magical Feminist texts often show these women’s concerns as powerful, not pointless and superficial wastes of time. The second is that the witch within Magical Feminist texts reworks an old, tired stereotype of the evil woman to instead offer alternatives for imagining ways of being a woman that include all possible positions– from good to bad to indifferent. In so doing, the genre reclaims a label used to harm real women and offers a defiant positioning of identity to its readers.

Why Feminism? Why Witches?

GLINDA: Are you a good witch, or a bad witch? [. . .]

DOROTHY: I’m not a witch at all– witches are old and ugly. [. . .] I’ve never heard of a beautiful witch before.

GLINDA: Only bad witches are ugly. *The Wizard of Oz*, 1939.

In her 1984 *New York Times* review of John Updike’s *Witches of Eastwick*, Margaret Atwood suggests “What a culture has to say about witchcraft, whether in jest or in earnest, has a lot to do with its views of sexuality and power, and especially with the apportioning of powers between the sexes. The witches were bumed not because

they were pitied but because they were *feared*” (3 emphasis mine). Atwood’s comments illustrate that in examining witches, we participate in the feminist project of studying the “apportioning of powers between the sexes”— how we understand the connections between gender and power today, and that much of the current struggle with contemporary women understanding and embracing feminism has to do with fear of change. That old and ugly women are bad witches and beautiful women are good witches reveals the various ways and understandings of witches in fiction provides, as well, an understanding of women within the culture that produces that fiction.

Interestingly, Anne Llewelyn Barstow’s pivotal study of real women accused as witches in the sixteenth century argues that the fact “that European women first emerged into full legal adulthood as *witches*, that they were first accorded independent legal status in order to be prosecuted for witchcraft, indicates both their vulnerability and the level of antifeminism in modern European society” (41). This emergence of women as legal entity and witch, at the same historical moment, also shows how strongly connected the concept of independent woman and our modern concept of witch has been ever since. Both feminist and witch are scapegoated as evil, with evil meaning those who endanger society’s family values and therefore who must be punished for exercising powers that patriarchy defines as more rightly belonging to men: independence, outspoken belief in oneself, sexual freedom, education, and choice in occupation. Both groups are women who struggle with patriarchy and power. Susan

Faludi traced a backlash in the late 1980s that still seems to grow stronger, partly because while many people believe in the principals of feminism, many are afraid to identify as feminists for fear of that backlash and corresponding “witchhunt,” represented by the widespread use of denigrating terms like “feminazi” among certain conservative groups.

To be a good witch or a bad witch is one of the central questions of popular depictions of the witch, but it is not as simple as one versus the other.³ Often, through her challenges to patriarchal order, the witch has been considered a “bad witch.” But her actions may be seen as good in a new context, when written not by the victor (patriarchy). It is no wonder that feminists have been particularly attracted to the idea of the witch as a metaphor to explain and exalt the unruly woman for decades. Xavière Gauthier, in a 1980s introduction to a literary review, dedicated to exploring women’s rebellious, non-conformist creativity titled “*Porquoi Sorcières*” exclaims:

Why witches? Because witches sing. Can I hear this singing? It is the sound of another voice. They tried to make us believe that women did not know how to speak or write; that they were stutterers or mutes. That is because they tried to make women speak straightforwardly, logically, geometrically, in strict conformity. In reality, they croon lullabies, they howl, they gasp, they babble, they shout, they sigh. They are silent, and even their silence can be heard. (199)

In her enthusiasm, Gauthier over-essentializes these women as “crooners,” and

“babblers,” defining them as opposite to a “they” (presumably men and even perhaps non-creative women) who are “logical, straightforward and geometrical.” Gauthier is also very much a part of a particular moment of Second Wave feminism when the French Feminists were exploring ideas that have been a part of the negotiated spaces of “feminisms” since the 1970s. But her over-enthusiasm reveals the witch’s appeal for women interested in breaking patriarchal rules; the witch’s very existence defies patriarchy. The popularly depicted witch⁴ is a woman who breaks rules and threatens change, just as the feminist wishes to do. In her analysis of Gauthier’s appropriation of the witch as feminist, Naomi Goldenberg claims Gauthier’s enthusiastic use of witches is a metaphor that connects the attraction of the witch’s speech to the radical unruliness of all creative women, and therefore, making a connection between the magic trans-formative power of the witch and the creative works written about her:

through the metaphor of witches’ speech, Gauthier [. . .] call[s] on the world to pay attention to the new words they want to say– to the words that will be sufficiently deep– in both a psychological and collective sense– that they will sound *intoxicating, transformative, crazy, scary, and above all, powerful*. [. . .]

Using witchy words as magic words, that is, as words to make things happen, was not an uncommon practice in 1970s feminism (203, emphasis mine).

By placing creativity, power, and feminism in the same categories as witchcraft, we define female power, looking at witches within novels and films that are seen as

popular women's texts, a so-called "women's genre," and examine how those texts may make change happen. We examine the "transformative" power of feminism in an entertaining format. Magic, in the hands of powerful witches, can change the world, just as feminism strives to do.

Aleister Crowley defined magic as "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will" (xii). Feminist cultural theorists⁵ are looking at the way people use old myths to explore and change realities, how they challenge the conformity to gender roles within society by force of their collective will. The witch, whether "bad" or "good" illustrates part of the full experience of being a human being who is also female, especially one who is trying to change things, seeking and using power. Rather than pretending that women are innately good and more moral than men, the Magical Feminist witch shows us how women can and do use power. And thus, looking at the witch is a fundamentally feminist project because it shows us how we imagine women relating to and learning about power— for good and bad, which is part of a feminist search for changing epistemologies of womanhood.

Karen Hansen's cultural-sociological study of young women's attitudes, "How Young Women Perceive Ancient Death Symbols in Dark Goddess Archetypes" concludes: "The data suggest young women are searching for sources to revitalize and validate their feminine identities, and are looking beyond conventional American roles for new forms of the feminine. [. . .]Young women are longing for an empowering set

of symbols, myths, and icons that are particularly female and empowering” (iv).

Elizabeth Plummer, in turn, argues that “the women of the 21st century seem much less willing to stay in those old roles [such as virgin, mother, or whore] or to play supportive or secondary parts in male-centered myths about heroes’ journeys and rebellious sons”(169). Cultural theorists argue that women are looking for new roles—and perhaps revising old ones to suit their own lives in relation to themselves as subject, rather than object, of the story. The Magical Feminist witch is one of these new role models.

The Magical Feminist witch has a firm association with goddess worship, as well as a typical defiance of patriarchal norms of behavior and appearance, filling at least part of this urge to find new role models and symbols. As Goldenberg further argues: “witches thus are well-positioned to make institutions nervous by calling attention to that which a dominant patriarchal order must occlude” (205). This definition of witch shows her engaged in a very feminist task, drawing attention to patriarchy’s still hidden, still persistent inequalities. Amber Kisner argues that the second wave of feminism constantly threatened “the master’s house” of patriarchy but the house keeps getting rebuilt, walls shored up, and foundations poured again. Window dressings are redesigned and outer appearances are landscaped over to give it more surface appeal. Dismantling the master’s house has become an increasingly complex enterprise. (137)

Magical Feminism's witch challenges complex, traditional notions of who has authority and power, and in doing so, questions why it is fair to grant one group power and deny another. Cultural theory, examining popular depictions and wondering at the attraction of certain images, combined with feminism, illuminates the witch as a new cultural role model.

How/Why is the Magical Feminist witch different from other women's power figures? The Magical Feminist witch, flying triumphantly out into the night and gathering her sisters for radical change is a much more subversive figure than many of the contemporary images of feminist theory. As Marta Caminero-Santangelo argues in *The Madwoman Can't Speak, Or Why Insanity is Not Subversive* (1998), the trope of insanity so favored by feminists for the last few decades really shows a loss of voice for women, rather than real liberation. Unlike the silent madwoman who cannot speak, the witch's voice is one of her most powerful features, and thus, one that patriarchy fears most. Rather than quietly transgressing norms for herself alone in an attic, the Magical Feminist witch is "in your face"—shrieking poxes and turning patriarchs into toads. The witch has access to her voice— it is one of her main methods of influencing her world. Two of the witch's defining characteristics— the cackle and the wyrd shriek of joyful defiance— are emasculating of patriarchy's constraints. The witch mocks the rules and moralistic constraints placed upon women. Her madness when it does exist is the madness of the wise fool, who can see truths when others more constrained by the

boundaries of reality miss. She rebels out loud, and while sometimes facing severe consequences for that rebellion, still makes more impact than the madwoman in the attic ever could.

The Magical Feminist witch is purely organic, so unlike the cyborg,⁶ she can grow and change in a way that only things that are truly alive can do. But like the cyborg, she also has access to technology; in the spellwork and craftiness of her practice she changes and manipulates her environment. Unlike the mostly mythological amazon and warrior princess, there have been and continue to be real witches— who have suffered real consequences for their different status but have also really influenced the world around them. The witch is not stuck in the constraints of patriarchal society's rules. By her mere existence, the matriarchal witch challenges patriarchy. She worships the goddesses and gods of her choice, not one god forced upon her by a church hierarchy that has historically hated women. There is no rule of polite behavior in the crone, who is past her need for the approval of others. In fact, many of the things used within the legal code to define a witch as evil are things that can be seen as icons of how powerful she is. In her status as a possible shapeshifter you can see her ability to slip away from capture, become something other than what has been used to bind her. In this same status, she has an affinity with wild nature, and thus has often been accused of using nature to harness (via the animal familiar) her magics.

Important to analysis of attitudes about powerful women is understanding portrayals of women as witches in the hands of those sympathetic to exploring the relationship of women to power. We can learn something even from the witch's depiction by those who are not specifically feminist but whose characters end up making us think about these supposed norms of femininity differently.⁷ Examining the witch as a "special" woman, who is empowered through magic, reveals important issues about women with real power today. In order to make my argument, I use a cultural feminist approach to show textual examples where witches are empowered women that the texts' popular audiences come back to because they admire their strength. I claim that these texts are just a small representation of an even larger body of works that are pro-witch, pro-women, pro-empowerment, and above all, pro-feminist.

The first step in achieving power may be the ability to imagine that achievement being possible. Acceptance of powerful females in all their manifestations in fictional texts may be part of that first step towards imagining and then implementing that acceptance in society. As Howey argues:

Creation of complex female characters that defy stereotypes, use of female characters as protagonists of stories which are not solely romantic ones, use of such protagonists as narrators or focal characters, construction of stories which question narrative conventions— all of these strategies in popular fiction

demonstrate the genre's engagement with feminist ideas. (122)

In the popular culture texts discussed in this dissertation, powerful portrayals include characters and authors who rewrite stereotypes, showing witchy women as leaders and protagonists, not just foils on a pedestal for a male hero to rescue (heroes may ride to the rescue, but that hero may just be a woman herself). Readers are ultimately encouraged not to fear these powerful magic women but to admire, and perhaps even aspire to be, these women. Indeed, one could argue, as Ann Howey does, that "Many popular novels [. . .] engage with feminist concerns about society's systemic subordination of women and the role of gender in society's structures of power" (129). In engaging with these issues, the novels, films and television of Magical Feminism's popular works interrogate society's "norms." They also teach new ways to respond to women's struggle to define themselves in their own terms.

There is a way that the depiction of powerful women, including witches, has changed over time. Contemporary movies like *Practical Magic* (1998) and television shows like *Charmed* (1998-2006) do not show these empowered women punished for their defiance of norms; rather, they get away with being "other," remaining powerful without serious consequences for their daring to challenge authority, or even rewriting themselves as that authority.⁸ Therefore, "these texts become part of a process whereby political ideals are disseminated, changed, challenged, refined, recreated; popular fiction is one way that society makes sense of ideas and makes them relevant to large

numbers of people” (Howey 129). The examples I analyze deal with witches as another type of woman, not automatically an evil other, no longer deviant worshipers of a dark devil who should be branded with a scarlet “W” and burned at the stake. In these examples, the witch is rarely a passive victim. These witches are women who make their own rules, frequently in opposition to patriarchal ones that say a woman should endure abuse, suppress her own desires and choices in favor of those of her husband, or father, or accept her fate as powerless victim. At the same time that many of these texts rewrite the old ideas about what a witch *is*, they also allow us a pleasant fantasy-space about what we might be able to accomplish given real power— what a powerful women might *still be*.

These texts challenge our expectations, demonstrating Howey’s claim that: “challenging the narratives that our society takes for granted is an important way for popular fiction and its readers to take part in feminist discourses. Furthermore, writers of popular fiction make feminist ideas relevant to many women in our society” (156). By showing us magical women within a realistic setting, these texts make witches’ explorations of power relevant to their readers. The places these witches appear are not a far-away fantasy lands but almost our own reality. Thus, the texts addressed within this dissertation include those that define witches as powerful women, expanding the discourse about dominant narratives that place women with power as automatically evil or automatically good.

Because they are popular texts, this genre exposes a wider variety of people to feminist ideas, including imagining oneself out of oppressive, (even self-oppressive) violent, or nonfulfilling situations, as well as rewriting women's concerns as important ones. Howey argues, "While popular novels do not represent the last word on feminism, they do allow many people a way to imagine and to make feminist ideas relevant to themselves" (131), further supporting the idea that one might first imagine change possible because of leisure reading. Magical Feminist texts do so explicitly, using feminist ideology to do that imagining. Sometimes these texts are written/created with a feminist goal specifically in mind (as in the inspiration for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* detailed in that chapter), but even when they are not, they succeed in challenging essentialized norms for women in a way that makes at least their ends feminist. In the next section, I will define Magical Feminism more fully, and illustrate the way it is different from other genres which do not explicitly address gender.

Magic Realism vs. Magical Feminism

"Perhaps you are aware that seeing takes place only if you smuggle yourself in between two worlds, the world of ordinary people and that of the witches" (H.P. Duerr, *Dreamtime*. Qtd in Zamora and Faris 172).

Magic Realism is a literary genre that initially grew out of visual art that portrayed unreal, surreal, or magical items or events as though real, normal, and unremarkable. Theorists typically define the genre as crossing into literature largely through the work of Latin American authors. Indeed, the genre's foundational texts

include Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and its critique of Latin American "banana republics" as political lies. Magical Realist books deal with political issues, partly by pointing out the inherent instability of social norms and power's problematic shifts, and exclusions that are part of inequality. Lois Parkinson-Zamora and Wendy B. Faris argue that Magic Realism proves a particularly productive sort of forum for liminality, for slippery boundaries between worlds, challenging social roles and revealing the unstable and inherently problematic categories of class, gender, race. They argue that any category which might be classified as "natural" is instead shown as constructed, and therefore, "Magical Realism is a mode suited to exploring– and transgressing– boundaries, [. . .] ontological, political, geographical, or generic. [It] facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, and systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction" (Zamora and Faris 5-6). Add magic, and imagination can explore real change, real challenges to the situation. Zamora and Faris point out that "magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women" (6). The subversive nature of the Magic Realist genre might make it perfect for feminism, but in reality, the genre often reinscribes traditional gender norms.

Annika Hannan's dissertation, *The Power of Magic: Representations of Women*

in *Selected Contemporary Magic Realist Fiction From Latin America, English Canada, and Quebec* (2001), argues persuasively that most Magic Realism ignores gender issues in favor of non-gendered, supposedly “universal” politics—as if by drawing attention to gender at all you are distracting attention from more important issues. Her analysis of Isabel Allende’s *House of the Spirits* (1985) as a companion text to Marquez, as opposed to a mere copying/homage, also reveals that while Marquez’ novel may transgress boundaries for its patriarchal *male* family members, much of what literary critics have categorized as Magic Realism (especially those written by male writers) reinscribes women as object, further naturalizing the role of mother, virgin, and whore. Therefore, these Magical Realist texts continue to normalize patriarchy and oppressive assumptions about women. Typical Magic Realism, argues Hannan, normalize these essential roles for women at the same time that they question norms and essential “roles” of their male characters.

Hannan’s dissertation challenges the notion that only male authors have used Magic Realism effectively by introducing and analyzing several texts by women writers as powerful examples of the genre which question the reality of women’s roles, pointing out the genre’s potential for subversion of *all* social categories, in the hands of someone who wishes to question all norms, including the ones male Magical Realist texts reinscribe. But Hannan does not note the existence of a companion genre of Magic Realist type novels, that address feminism explicitly. My dissertation takes

Hannan's challenge one step further, arguing that to truly analyze gender, one needs to recognize a new space within literature for a type of feminist metaphor that *expands upon* the largely masculine-centered Magical Realism. I call this literature "Magical Feminism."⁹

Faris and Zamora provide a list of the general characteristics of Magical Realism, several of which I wish to discuss as a way of grounding Magical Feminism as similar in form to Magical Realism, but different in purpose.¹⁰ The first, most important category of Magical Realism for our purposes is that: "The text contains an 'irreducible element' of magic, something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them" (165). Of all the characteristics of Magical Realism, this is the one which all of the Magical Feminist texts also quite strongly feature, and is probably the most important in imagining change. But whereas Magical Realism uses its magical elements to explore general political and social issues, Magical Feminism uses magic elements to specifically explore gender inequity and power for women, modeling a type of empowered female within a realistic world, one step away from our own.

Another characteristic of Magic Realism, as Faris and Zamora explain, is that: "Descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world— this is the realism in magical realism, distinguishing it from much fantasy and allegory" (166). Each of the texts studied in this dissertation takes place in a realistic setting. We are meant to

believe that this is the real world— not a magical place away from our own, nor another time. We are not seeing fantasy, or allegory, but realism enhanced and expanded upon by magical elements, which are seen within the text as normal and everyday. By placing us in a realistic setting, Magical Realism allows us to explore our own “reality” from the vantage point of unreality, difference. Magical Feminism does this same thing, but specifically as reality affects women and their day to day lives. By taking the reader “one step beyond” reality and her own experience, these texts allow for a re-examination of what normal means for women in this patriarchal society where that normal experience can be devalued as trivial “women’s issues.”

The next element of Magical Realism in Faris and Zamora’s discussion which Magical Feminism shares is that: “These fictions question received ideas about time, space, and identity” (167-173). Magical Feminist texts such as *Brown Girl in the Ring* show us cultures beyond the collapse of contemporary spaces of time and identity, showing a civilization where patriarchal narratives have failed spectacularly. Magical Feminism such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* shows us patriarchal cultures in which political power identities, such as those represented by the Mayor or the school Principal, hide the threatening truths of time and reality even in the face of overwhelming evidence (dead bodies appearing regularly in school lockers). Within Magical Feminism, received identities like cheerleader, school nerd, young single mother, old woman who runs a convenience store, and/or spinster aunts are all shown

not as marginal, stereotyped figures, nor are they pushed into the same old inscription of virgin, mother, and whore, but they are rewritten as powerful archetypes who question our ideas about identity. Clearly, challenging received ideas about identity in particular is an important shared characteristic of the two categories, but perhaps one of the most important elements of Magical Feminism. In questioning women's received identities by showing us alternatives to patriarchally inscribed identities, Magical Feminism makes us closely examine issues of women's lives and our preconceived notions of what gender identity really means. It questions how those assumptions are based on inaccurate, loaded, unfair or even oppressive definitions of what it really means to be a woman in society, even after thirty-plus years of the women's movement.

This, then, is my project: to examine the witch as the primary metaphor of the genre of Magical Feminism. Magical Feminism is distinguishable from Magical Realism in that, as a political strategy and pedagogy, it foregrounds gender, and this foregrounding illuminates society's assumptions around and about gender. I argue for the invention/ realization/ naming of Magical Feminism as its own separate genre, and not merely a sub-genre of Magical Realism. I will, in the conclusion to this dissertation, begin an embryonic attempt at defining this canon that crosses current genres. My reasons for this tentative offering-up of a genre/canon is to point others to these texts, so that more study may be done and real literary criticism might further explore the issues and possibilities of such a popular and potentially powerful mode of

teaching feminist politics. The canon I build will be necessarily incomplete, but will contain works of literature, film, and television.

Identifying the genre of Magical Feminism allows for recognition and encourages study of a literary genre within a genre. Much like the creation of feminist utopic fiction within science fiction did, this naming legitimizes serious work/scholarship/study, and identification of the texts and writers, doing this work (a type of Gynocriticism, which I wish to reclaim for the Third Wave as a still useful, unfinished project). Many of the texts which deal with Magical Feminism feature elements that critics might dismiss as apolitical fluff— domestic arts, magic spells, love and so-called “women’s knowledge.” By defining Magical Feminism, we realize the power that these seemingly innocuous or simply “feminine” tasks actually have, and we begin to understand the inherent radicalness of writers who are using these kinds of texts, across disparate genres, with a similar effect, if not intent. The genre teaches and normalizes powerful women, and thus recognizes the actual potential for power present in formerly disparaged tasks (housekeeping, midwifery, gardening, cooking, clothing). Some of these texts fail to find readers exactly because they are shelved next to yet another Arthurian hero-quest, or space opera. They languish in a ghetto of disparaged popular genre fiction, rather than finding a readership which might be receptive to and understanding of the effect of the readings about changing women’s roles.

At a most basic level, what the writers who are working within Magical

Feminism are doing is teaching feminism. By portraying women with a kind of real power to change their worlds, they allow readers to explore various subject positions and imagine themselves with power. Readers who might not be receptive to feminist propaganda find themselves imagining a world where gender does not determine ability to influence the world, where the power they may exercise, domestic and political, is not devalued or trivialized or even made-over as “cute” and weak but instead is shown as possible for radical social transformation. Calling for more study of this inherently feminist genre reveals the vitality and purpose of feminism today. Feminism is not dead, as media pundits like to declare. Feminism, and feminist practice, is alive and well, and writers working within Magical Feminism are continuing to explore what happens when women and power mix. The radical potential of fantasy and imagination can and does affect the expectations of its frequent reader, transforming her into someone who not only can imagine what a woman with real power looks like, but who expects that power for herself as a matter of course.

Rescuing the witch from a saccharine-sweet Disney type as well as the overtly negative evil old woman, Magical Feminism shows her as a multifaceted complex female role model. Magical Feminism also calls into question the popular representation of powerful, patriarchy-defying woman as evil. It does this, in part, by showing society’s normal view of both the witch and what should be done with her. These texts show, through writers who portray more than a flat, stock character, the

potential of such explorations of women and power. Magical Feminism allows fantasy-room for its audiences to imagine a subject position where they might go with power, for both good and bad. The genre allows its authors a place to experiment, to perform feminism, and to think about the real ability to change things, on both personal and political levels (with the wiggle of a nose or snap of a ponytail, perhaps). It also shows how real female human beings actually behave when granted real power, not always, as some idealistic theories of feminism would have us believe, for the higher moral purpose.¹¹ Magical feminism shows us that it doesn't matter what gender your higher power is, and who wears the magic wand in the family; what matters is what you do with your power. Some Magical Feminist texts show us that women with power are just as troubled by it as men; some show us that women with power use it in completely different ways than we might have imagined. This dissertation will argue that Magical Feminism's fantasy-space in popular culture (including television and low-middle brow texts) is a potential force for real social change.

Often buried within the shelves of more conservative fantasy, Magical Feminism uses its revolutionary potential to illuminate feminist rhetoric, examining: "Boundaries, borders, and thresholds [. . .] always key concepts for any reading of the fantastic" (Amitt 1). By showing us places where our boundaries of reality and fantasy overlap (such as a place where it is normal to be able to cast magic spells, or speak with vampires and demons) Magical Feminisms interrogate what we see as normal and the

spaces between normal and new. Magical Feminism applies that interrogation to gender and women's supposedly "natural" roles, questioning boundaries of feminine behaviors. Howey argues of fantasy: "If the narrative persuades us that a situation or a system is unjust, we may realize that that injustice has parallels in our own world" (41). Magical Feminism goes even further than that, to challenge reality for women, in just the same way that fantasy stages:

an encounter between the norms of this world and its others, thereby challenging stable conceptions of the real and its accompanying perspectives on order and illegality, moderation and excess, and so on. The invention of alternative social worlds which are critical of the present have made fantasy of interest to feminist and other writers and readers who see here a way of exploring the possibilities of transgressive gender and sexual roles or of entire alternative worlds. (Brooker 80)

The kinds of popular narratives that make up Magical Feminism as a genre help us imagine new realities, including empowered feminine subject positions, and they transgress those that already exist. Instead of so-called "realist" texts which only reflect what is already there, Magical Feminism's pulp novels, tv, and serial texts are a popular format which allows a growing body of readers to imagine what could be, and lets us think about a world where gender inequalities might be changeable.

Genre and Feminism: Popular Forms and Politics

Two important studies on generic/genre fiction and feminism's appropriation of the popular genre fiction (including movies and television) dovetail into a discussion of why it is important to look at popular texts like *Magical Feminism* and imagine how audiences read and use those texts. Anne Cranny-Francis' *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (1990) and Merja Makinen's *Feminist Popular Fiction* (2001) read as complimentary introductions to and analysis of the genres of feminist science fiction, feminist fantasy, feminist utopias, feminist detective fiction, and feminist romance, and can be applied, as well, to *Magical Feminism*. Most importantly, Cranny-Francis argues that "as a form of political resistance the use of generic fiction has a long history" (6) and Makinen points out that "some genre fiction, romance for example, sells titles in the millions. . . shari[ing] with other popular genres a new, fresh, audience for feminist fiction" (10). Both authors argue that many of the critiques of genre fiction as being oppressively conservative and patriarchal ignore the radical texts being written by feminist authors.

Instead of being only conservative and reinforcing social norms, genre fiction is a place for speculation, for re-examination of social expectations and norms, and for revealing and highlighting the expectations people have for gender, class, race, and sexuality. Its power lies in its very popularity, its ability to offer answers to age-old questions. Cranny Francis also points out that for someone (i.e, a feminist missionary)

who is trying to reach a large audience with a politically charged message, using popular texts that “sell by the truckload” (2) is only logical. In other words, if you have a political goal, why not use a genre– the popular novel– that already reaches a large audience of pleasure-readers and subversively introduce ideas such as equality, changing gender roles, a woman’s right to work, to choose, to age without fear and suffering?¹² As Cranny-Francis further argues:

People of all ages, classes, genders and races read genre fiction. It is unlikely that quite so many, in quite so diverse a cross-section, read postmodernist texts. As a *political practice*, then, the feminist use of genre fiction seems very appropriate. It (potentially) *enables feminist writers to reach markets which might otherwise be closed, even antagonistic*, to them. The feminist discourse which many readers might be totally unfamiliar with is presented within a familiar and much loved format. (3, emphasis mine)

Using genre fiction– fantasy, sci fi, horror, Magical Feminism– can be a political move to reach that wider, more diverse market or audience, an audience who might otherwise avoid and/or be hostile towards the political goals of feminist propaganda. Whereas propaganda has a negative connotation, one could instead see use of popular genres as a way of reaching a population grown hostile to feminism, alert to the dangers of the “feminazi’s”¹³ teachings, and helping a wary population understand the simple goals of feminism not as overthrow of the civilized world, but as a force for ending sexist

inequality. Cranny-Francis points out that a feminist analysis of genre fiction shows that there are often ideologies encoded within the story (17). Magical Feminism encodes ideological information that is specifically about women's power, and consumers of the genre can imagine a female agency and positioning that shows feminine skills and traits as paths to power. Its feminist propaganda exists as a corrective to the typical negative depictions of women and power within traditional fantasy and genre fiction.

Popular genre fiction (especially anything that can be argued to be romance) gets a lot of criticism as being not political, of reinforcing conservative and patriarchal roles and values, and of not connecting with feminist ideals.¹⁴ Most popular and genre fiction does tend to keep to a traditional, linear storyline, using masculinist hero-myth patterns and overall, a conservative set of imagery. In this respect, it is not all that feminist, as feminism has been defined thus far. But, Howey argues that despite popular and genre fiction's tendency to sometimes re-inscribe more conservative views, in general, the progressive nature of small challenges within some texts to "norms" is potentially powerful, and frequently overlooked in favor of big radical change.

Generic fiction, which often re-writes traditional and stereotypical roles, by the changes that are present, inscribes new visions that can be radically feminist and also reflect the degree with which feminism's ideals have become understood in our wider society. Howey argues that it is important to look at even very popular forums,

because: “In contemporary Western culture, debates over values, beliefs, and institutions that embody them occur in various contexts, including popular novels. Acknowledgment of the cultural work performed by popular fiction is often overshadowed, however, by dismissals of it as escapist or conservative”(1). But just as Howey argues that we should not dismiss popular texts because they have some conservative elements, so we should look at those conservative elements and re-examine whether they actually might not be so conservative but instead hold potential power for women. Because of popular fiction’s large scale audience, the feminism that appears has to be wide-ranging and somewhat easy to handle. In Magical Feminism, we often have what feels like escapist conservative narrative but is not as conservative as it seems, having radically unconventional elements.

All literary texts appeal to our need for mythic versions of our reality that explain where and why, including why we are the way we are, and what we can do to live and change and move in the world. They are part of the way we make sense of the world. Thus, feminist popular genre texts, like those I am defining as Magical Feminism, can and do have the power to *change* our perceptions of what makes sense in our world, bringing new stories of power where women are not automatically the passive, receptive, emotional object of man’s stories. In Magical Feminism, women instead are subjects of their own stories. Elizabeth Plummer argues:

because the powers which women have been afforded has been restricted to the

power of the impossibly perfect or good woman, the power of the evil temptress, or the power of the scapegoat, women need their new mythmakers to open the portals to a more complex vision of what their femininity can mean. (82)

Magical Feminist witches are the main metaphor of those new mythmakers. New myths include more than the old traps for women of which feminism tries to free us, and Magical Feminism rewrites those old roles too, avoiding: “an endless succession of *eithers* and *ors*: virgin or mother, nurturer or amazon, wife or whore, daughter or mother, angel or temptress” (Plummer 183, emphasis in original). New myths– the Magical Feminist witch in particular– take away the false binary, allowing *ands* instead of just *eithers* and *ors*, and open up more room for the multiplicity of experiences of femininity that most women experience as reality. New depictions of women as more than “either/ors” show options that previously did not exist for women, and in so doing, challenge our expectations of what being a woman means. Plummer speculates:

Perhaps this new generation of girls, growing up with film images of warrior princesses confronting evil villains, will not internalize the role of victim to the degree their mothers and grandmothers did. By experiencing a more empowered vision of their gender, this next generation may not feel the need to wrest power from men, but simply expect to share it. It is likely that women were never quite so foolish as those Hollywood heroines in the 1950s, nor as angry or aggressive as some of the newer images lead us to believe. (89)

This “new generation,” often characterized as third wave feminists, deserves some critical attention for how things have changed. In “expecting to share” power, they may appear to be complacent of previous generational struggle. But the Magical Feminist text shows us the sites of power struggles that still exist today. Recognizing and analyzing the genre of Magical Feminist texts allows more study into the speculation about an old/new feminist icon of the witch, which is the project of the chapters ahead.

In Chapter II: “How Do You Know She’s a Witch? She Looks like One!”: A Survey of Literary, Art, Movies, and TV Representations of Witches,” I examine a sample of art, film, and a few classic literary depictions of witches that illustrate the popular conception of the witch that the Magical Feminist witch defies and redefines. Using popular yet negative depictions of witches, I show the stereotypes against which Magical Feminist writers imagine female power. I examine woodcuts, paintings, and various images from early Modern society, as well as recent film, literary, and television depictions. This chapter establishes a baseline of the stereotype that depicts the powerful woman as evil, a stereotype against which Magical Feminism’s witches engage in their redefining play. The chapter introduces popular versions of what the witch “looks like” and what is supposed to be done to her for her disobedience, and begins to discuss how Magical Feminist witches re-write the expectations of what a woman can do and be with power.

Next, in “Chapter III: Kitchen Witches: Re-Imagining the Domestic “Home

Plot” as Site of Political Resistance For a Third Wave Pedagogy,” I use a third wave feminist lens to address portrayals of powerful women who use traditionally female or feminine skills as magic power to support their communities, to heal literal and metaphoric illnesses and old historic wounds (slavery, witch-burning, assimilation as loss of identity– among other issues). They are not always positive or good characters, but both what they usually do with their power and the consequences of using power selfishly are intriguing. Focusing on a reading of the domestic home-plot, the analysis in this chapter demonstrates a reading of housework and gardening as empowering. To do so, I briefly define Second and Third Wave Feminist arguments, discussing the persistence in popular media portrayals of the feminist as an anti-domestic, anti-housewife. Texts covered in this chapter include Alice Hoffman’s *Practical Magic* (1996), and Chitra Divakaruni’s *Mistress of Spices* (1997).

Then, in “Chapter IV: Voudun Economics: Possession and Empowerment Through Magical Feminist Capitalism,” I discuss Voudun as an alternative to the Eurocentric focus of witches in the previous chapters. In order to define Magical Feminism as a multi-cultural genre which blurs boundaries of genre, race, class, gender, and place, I include texts from an author from outside the borders of the U.S., Afro-Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and also a male author, Sean Stewart’s *Mockingbird* (2000). This chapter argues that through the Voudun phenomenon of possession by the loa, or spirits, the characters empower

themselves to be fully-realized human beings able to support themselves and their families. The chapter moves briefly away from the third wave feminist focus of the previous and following chapter to demonstrate that Magical Feminism is not just a product of the third wave. Magical Feminism is an explicitly American phenomenon that redefines the boundaries of American Literature to include the diaspora of slavery as well as writing the Gulf of Mexico as “our Mediterranean” and center of literary creation.

Finally, in “Chapter V: The ‘Girl Power Bit’: Buffy the Vampire Slayer’s Witches and a Feminist Mission,” I further define the popular concept of the witch as well as the genre of Magical Feminism by demonstrating how one very popular television show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), which was created with a specifically third-wave feminist mission statement, illustrates a view of powerful young women who can be defined as witches. I will include both those who self-identify as witches and those who are endowed with supernatural powers that make them unlike ordinary women, and who would often be considered witches because of those powers. Closely reading characters from the entire series of, this chapter illustrates how American popular culture views young women’s potential for power. I argue that the series performance of femininity in powerful subject witches who seek and find power at the same time that they remain “feminine” makes it a strongly third wave feminist vehicle.

The conflation of witches and feminists can be found in an empowering genre

of texts that model a positive feminine agency for popular audiences. In this dissertation's conclusion, I argue that one way of defining Magical Feminism is to briefly examine a text that appears to be feminist and magical but actually attacks feminism using a traditionally negative definition of witches, drawn directly from the pages of the most misogynistic of texts. Using John Updike's novel *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984), I argue that not every text with powerful witches in it is a Magical Feminist one. As a means of establishing the genre, the conclusion includes a list of Magical Feminist film, television, and written texts. The list is incomplete but includes many of what should be considered the building blocks of a new canon of Magical Feminism.

CHAPTER II

“HOW DO YOU KNOW SHE’S A WITCH? SHE LOOKS LIKE ONE!”:
 A SURVEY OF LITERARY, ART, MOVIES, AND TV REPRESENTATIONS OF
 WITCHES

In her pivotal feminist text, *The Second Sex* (1968), Simone de Beauvoir describes the process through which women are defined as one of cultural molding, arguing: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female represents in society; it is the civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (267). In this way, de Beauvoir challenges the idea that there is anything of natural biology, predetermined, about what makes a woman a woman, asserting that it is the culture into which a particular female is born that creates the traits considered feminine or masculine. de Beauvoir also places “feminine” on a continuum between masculinity and castrated masculinity, suggesting the female as a type of castrated, powerless male— the “second” of three sexes. In other words, the term feminine is not exactly opposite masculine, but it is defined in terms of the masculine. In this definition, one part of the culture gets to define the other part: the phallogocentricism of language and definition makes the woman a monstrous male.

Each culture defines “normal” versus “monstrous,” and cultures punish or reward successful creations of femininity as they see fit. In just the same way as

patriarchy defines female as an incomplete, perhaps even castrated male, a witch is molded by society's view of women who do not fit within that figure civilization has produced as "woman." The witch is a monstrous woman, all the more opposite man on that continuum of definition of cultural identity. When I refer to woman as a category, I wish to acknowledge the history of feminist rhetoric (represented in part by de Beauvoir) that asserts that there is nothing "natural" about the traits we assign to womanhood, and the feminine. I wish to assert the school of thought that says that any definition of cultural identity is imposed upon us from birth by the society in which we live. In the same way, there is nothing natural or predetermined about what makes a woman into a witch; however, there are cultural markers that define the witch that are intricately tied to the markers that also make a woman, and these markers (and the prejudice that accompanies them) persist sometimes in spite of our knowledge of them. If anything goes wrong— your butter sours, your crop falls victim to a blight— you have an easy scapegoat in the strange, creepy old lady down the street who makes you uncomfortable because she doesn't cater to your needs, smiling and passing out fresh cookies. She has the nerve to be sick and old and grouchy when we expect her to be grandmotherly: kindly, silver-haired and smiling.¹⁵ She's a witch, cause she looks like one. According to popular depictions of witches, then, we have the right to dislike her, to even hurt her, to blame her for our own problems.

In order to introduce these images which are deconstructed and challenged by

the texts I will analyze in later chapters, in this chapter I examine depictions of women as witches in art, film, television, and literary texts. These depictions illustrate common, stereotypical and popular conceptions of the witch that the Magical Feminist witch defies and redefines. This survey of a small but representative cross-section of texts will explain the baseline of the mostly European witchy stereotypes that this dissertation's literary and popular texts challenge. Magical Feminist texts rewrite these images, sometimes using them in a new and different, more interesting way, (and therefore, calling what we think we know about witches and the whole category of "woman" into question) sometimes revealing the stereotypes for the type of harmful misogyny they are, and refusing to submit to the definitions imposed from outside. Most of the texts in this dissertation deconstructively play with the stereotypes of witches and witchcraft and therefore call into question these categories as ways of limiting, defining, and controlling women who step out of the norm, or outside of patriarchal control. Those texts that confirm the stereotypes do so for particular reasons, which will be discussed within the close-reading of that text.

How do we define witches, and how does understanding fictional witches illuminate Magical Feminism's teaching of feminist principles? It's as difficult to get an exact definition of witch as it is to define feminist— but there are many overlapping and easily-agreed-upon traits. Our ideas about witches come from Classical sources such as mythology, folk and fairy tales; historical sources and non-fiction such as the

Salem witch trial records and the *Malleus Maleficarum*;¹⁶ and contemporary sources such as fiction, the movies, television, new age self-help rhetoric, and talk shows.

“A Certain Subtle Art”: Reading the Fictional Witch

“For devils have no power at all save by a certain subtle art. But an art cannot permanently produce a true form” *Malleus Maleficarum*, 2.

First and foremost, witches are women. Since witches are overwhelmingly female, when they are male, they are called something else— warlock, or wizard, or magician. The distinction “male witch” is like “male nurse” or “female doctor”— the need for the qualifying gender adjective shows that the norm is the opposite of that adjective, and, interestingly, these male terms for magic-user do not invariably bear the evil connotation that witches does. Christina Lerner further connects the witch to women, arguing that “witchcraft was not sex-specific but it was sex related” and that the reason for this connection is that “women are feared as a source of disorder in patriarchal society” as well as that “witch hunting *is* woman-hunting, or at least it is the hunting of women who do not fulfil the male view of how women ought to conduct themselves” (83, 100). In other words, historically, the crime of witchcraft specifically connects to a *woman* who defies the rules, a woman who challenges society by being different, and, for that challenge, these women risk the ultimate punishment as outsiders. Ehrenreich and English similarly claim: “An aspect of the female has ever since been associated with the witch, and an aura of contamination has remained [. . . .] This early and devastating exclusion of women from independent healing roles was a violent precedent and a warning: it was to become a theme of our history”(6). Witches are almost always women, and in a “burning time,” nearly all women were vulnerable

to punishment if they did not conform to societal expectations of proper feminine conduct. The aspect of femininity associated with witches means that feminine, in the light of this image, also equals evil.

In addition to her gender, there are a number of common markers that everyone knows make a woman a witch— we see them every year on Halloween, or when we tune into the Thanksgiving day showing of *The Wizard of Oz*, or watch Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Typically, these traditional depictions show the witch as unattractive. Most of these depictions could be illustrations of the text of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and many of our modern depictions of the fictional witch could come right out of the pages of this treatise, first published in 1486. Illustrations that accompany texts featuring witches, such as an engraving from Boydell's nineteenth century Shakespeare (Figure



Figure 1 Witches in Boydell's *Macbeth*.

1) provide examples of the typical image of witches. In this engraving, the witches are starkly contrasted with the muscular and square-jawed super-hero-esque physiques of the male figures— the women are toothless, bug-eyed, wrinkled hags, bodies writhing in devilish, (even orgasmic) ecstasy, with their hands pointing upwards in a profanation of the typical pose of saints in art. According to these depictions, the unattractive old woman is therefore immediately suspect as evil. This is because of the association of old age with ugliness and evil when juxtaposed against the image of youth as beautiful and good.

In addition to ugliness, there are other physical signifiers of witchness. Witches might even betray their hidden evil inner nature with other physical differences— they might have one green and one blue eye, or one brown and one green. They might have milky, white blind eyes that can still see (as in, a seer) because visions and future-prediction are part of a witch's skills— usually inherited at birth when they were born with a caul¹⁷ over their face (*Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* 1991) . They may walk with some sort of terrible limp— an injury probably caused by one of their illicit midnight romps, and another of the damages they are trying to cure with their illicit spells (*The Witches* 1990; *Burn Witch Burn* 1962). If they are not green-skinned, (*The Wizard of Oz* 1939) their faces are overwhelmed with deep wrinkles; their hair is stringy and dirty grey, and thinning with bald spots, or else witches have no hair at all (*The Witches* 1990). Perhaps there are warts on a witch's face— certainly there are warts on her long, pointy, bumpy nose. They might have a hunched back and scrawny, bony knees but they definitely have long, cold fingers and liver-spotted hands. They either have very few teeth, or are blessed with lots of pointy, sharp, dirty teeth. A witch

might have a few extra parts regular women do not have, like a dung-covered fox's tail, (Spenser's *Faerie Queen* 1590) or an extra eye hidden in the back of her head (*The Witches* 1990). These physical deformities are the main reason why witches need to render and eat the fat of all those innocent babies. According to traditional narratives, witches know secret spells to look young and beautiful, (which is one of their greatest desires) and those spells always involve some innocent's painful, tortured death. In short, witches are often women who have had the audacity to age, or become sick and worn out.

As a contrast, Magical Feminist witches range widely in appearance, from beautiful and young to old and unattractive, but these differences do not mark them automatically as "good" or "evil." This myth, about women's lack of attractiveness or unconventional appearance as "natural" characteristics of evil other, or outsider, is a major one that Magical Feminist texts challenge, questioning the emphasis on beauty as the one and only path to power for women, a myth that persists within popular narrative even today. Even still, the Magical Feminist witch does not reject the possibilities for exploring the power within the pursuit of beauty, including such feminine activities as makeup and shopping, and can sometimes use traditional feminine appearance markers and tools as a path to empowerment that subverts those expectations. For example, in one Magical Feminist series by Laurell K. Hamilton, the major character Anita Blake begins to experiment with sexy clothing as a way of demonstrating her growing power and status, but it is her drive to continue working for the good, and her power as Vampire Hunter and Voodoo priestess that keeps her safe when she encounters dangerously bad characters.

Another favorite characteristic of witches that Magical Feminist texts redefine surrounds witches as practitioners of “unnatural” sexuality. In traditional depictions, witches are usually seen as sexually perverse. Their depiction as sexual deviants reflects a fear of women enjoying and/or expressing sexuality, a fear of lesbianism, a fear of spinsters being sexual, and a fear of older women, past procreative age, being sexual. If women as witches are not lesbians (which is defined as a perversity for which witches should be punished) they are deviant in one or more of these other ways— such as the desire for sex without procreation, or the desire for sex when they are no longer attractive to men. In fact, to simply desire sex marks a woman as suspect. The *Malleus Maleficarum* tells us:

all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable . . .
Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort with devils. . . it is sufficiently clear that it is no matter for wonder that there are more women than men found infected with the heresy of witchcraft. (47)

According to these defining myths of witches, women, then, in being filled with insatiable lusts, corrupt men because of their natural propensity for evil. They naturally gravitate towards devils and evil actions, corrupting all that they encounter. The *Malleus Maleficarum* therefore lays the blame for even male witchcraft (when it appears) on women.

The second perversity witches demonstrate in traditional depictions, based on the *Malleus Maleficarum*, is of sex beyond appropriate “age” for women. If witchy women are young, they are being sexually and otherwise corrupted by an older hag, as in Francisco Goya’s 1799 aquatint print *Los Caprichos No. 68* (Figure 2), titled “Linda



Linda maestra!

Figure 2 *Los Caprichos* No. 68: *Linda Maestra*”

Maestra! / “A Fine Teacher!” In this image, the young witch rides behind a haggard old woman on a broomstick, in a grotesque parody and/or reversal of missionary sex, riding a phallic broomstick between their legs while a black owl familiar flies nearby. The title of the picture is ironic; the “fine teacher” of an old witch showing a young pretty women how to fly, is not considered “fine” in either beauty or appropriateness. Instead, she is leading her young pupil into temptation and corrupting her towards a loss of beauty that would be seen as inevitable for a witch. We see this in lack of being “fine”

the old woman's body as haggard, unsexed— except for the feminine gendered “maestra” one could have a hard time guessing her sex. In contrast, the young woman is still rounded and fertile, but she is being taught by the old woman who will certainly corrupt her.

In further definitions from the *Malleus Maleficarum*, women who were sexual were simply considered evil, and therefore, must be witches. If a female, young or old, was sexual, desired sex in a way that was considered appropriate only for a man, then she was threatening to men and most likely she was a witch. Rather than a woman's sexuality being about herself, it was defined in relation to the threat felt by a man for her achieving her own pleasures, sometimes without male influence. As Ehrenreich and English point out:

Central accusations emerge repeatedly in the history of witchcraft throughout northern Europe: First, witches are accused of every conceivable sexual crime against men. Quite simply, they are “accused” of female sexuality. (11)

In the absence of any real crime or proof of witchcraft, all that women needed to be “accused” as a witch was to be sexual and female. If a male had a sexual nature, he was not necessarily evil, but if a woman had one, the general accusation of witchcraft had to do with her sex drive and not any real actions of magic or curses. To sum up the basic premise of most sexual accusations against women as a witch; witches are women who give in to their perverse sexual nature, which is passed through the devil:

“The Church associated women with sex, and all pleasure in sex was condemned, because it could only come from the devil. [. . .] Lust in either man or wife, then, was blamed on the female” (10-11). For a *woman* to gain pleasure from sex is seen as a perversity, rather than a natural part of sex, as it would be for a man.

Commonly in depictions of the evil woman, if she isn't out looking for sex, then the witch is the opposite of sexual. The dried up, unnatural, spinster old maid must be a witch, like the Wicked Witch of the West in the 1939 film version of *The Wizard of Oz*. A woman without a man surely cannot be trusted, even if she is supposedly celibate for religious reasons (because women's deviant sexuality is her natural state, so if she appears asexual, she is lying). Women without men are depicted as evil, dating back to the beginnings of our definition of witch. The spinster witch is so evil that the witch in the *Wizard of Oz* cannot even tolerate a child; this is the reason why the witch wants to hurt Dorothy who is the maiden filled with budding attractiveness and young exuberance. Because she doesn't have or doesn't want children of her own she cannot even tolerate a pet (why the witch focuses so hard on getting rid of Toto).

When witches do want children, it is not for the same reason that normal women want children. In Disney's *Hocus Pocus* (1993), the mostly unattractive witches try to suck the young children's essence—represented as a green mist—out of the children's mouth to enhance their own vitality. Another category or stereotype

about witches that Magical Feminist texts challenge is that witches are always child-haters. As a direct result of their ugliness, witches are, if nothing else, child-haters who would rather see a baby tossed into a big black metal cauldron and rendered into soap than dandled on a knee. The *Malleus Maleficarum* deals with this trait early in its second question, establishing the “very common” practice of witches is “the horrible sacrifices of small children” (21). The only use witches have for children are as an ingredient in a youth spell/potion and the only use witches have for them is to use in those potions. The *Malleus Maleficarum* blames witches for: “destroying the generative force in women, [. . .] procuring abortions, [. . .] offering children to devils” (47).¹⁸ Witches literally destroy re-generation, or the new generation of people, and offer children to the devil. Thus, any woman who does not have or want children is suspect of having a desire to destroy all natural life. Witches hate new life, and since children are a representative of that life, the popular depiction of her has to be as child-hater.

As part of this desire to destroy life, witches not only hate children, they hate men and want to see them castrated and/or killed. The assumption goes that witches have never been married, or, if they were married, they used up their husband and turned him into dust in a sort of ultimate castration, consumed him, or killed him and hid his bones in the backyard. They may have turned him into an unwilling and disloyal zombie servant, as in *Hocus Pocus* (1993). According to popular depictions, probably originating in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the thing a witch really wants from a

man is his penis, which she really only wants to use as an ingredient in spells to get power over other people, and/or unnaturally extend her own life. This is an ultimate kind of Freudian penis-envy: the power of the penis is not symbolic but literal— an ingredient in a powerful magic potion designed to subvert society. As the *Malleus Maleficarum* reports:

And what, then, is to be thought of those witches who[. . .]sometimes collect male organs in great numbers, as many as twenty or thirty members together, and put them in a bird's nest, or shut them up in a box, where they move themselves like living members, and eat oats and corn, as has been seen by many and is a matter of common report?[. . .]For a certain man tells that, when he had lost his member, he approached a certain witch to ask her to restore his health. She told the afflicted man to climb a certain tree, and that he might take whichever member he liked out of a nest in which there were several members. And when he tried to take a big one, the witch said, “you must not take that one,” adding, “because it belonged to a parish priest” (Kramer and Sprenger 121)

In this quotation, the absurdity is in the idea of a witch keeping a man's penis “in great numbers” as a sort of pet, feeding it corn, but it is considered “a matter of common report.” What is behind this image is a fear of women's procurement of power and consequent removal of male power. The penis as castrated pet is a symbol of that

power. The witch castrates the man because she does not need him, but she still might want to keep a penis around as a trophy. What the witches want is not only a man's power, but the literal source of that power— the phallus. Therefore, in a society where the parish priest would be in power over a majority of people, of course his would be “the big one” (remember, this is written by the priests, not the witches). The woman who wanted power, the witch, would covet the largest source of power she could find. But still, according to these popular depictions, witches do not want that phallus for sex, in a “normal” way. They want their power in absence of males, a desire that has left any woman who wants to be powerful without a man quite open to being labeled evil. In typical representations of the witch, on those instances when witches are young, (probably because they successfully did up that spell with the rendered baby fat) they are always sexually carnivorous *femmes fatales*— women with outrageous cleavage and heavy make-up who stalk the dark streets for honest women's husbands, who they intend to use up and toss away like old Kleenex, like the young blonde witch in *Hocus Pocus* who coyly winks at the men in the crowd as she is about to be hanged to death. These kinds of witches can't get an unmarried man to look at them, but for some reason, they have an immense amount of power over married men, which is, of course, the type of man witches most covet. This image reinforces the patriarchal notion that all women really need or want is a husband, even if it is someone else's. It also reinforces her as a danger to a “normal” woman (i.e., one who sticks to patriarchal

structures like marriage) and keeps such normal women both in fear of her own status as protected by her position related to a male, and in opposition to any woman who is not. Those married men are helpless to resist even the attentions of an ugly old hag witch; when the witch is young and beautiful, it is obvious that her beauty is the power that drives the man to any madness. The adulterous man in the equation bears no responsibility for his actions when his partner is accused of witchcraft. Again, this is shown in *Hocus Pocus* when Sara Jessica Parker's blonde *femme fatale* flirts with Peter Marshall as a man dressed up in a Devil's costume on Halloween while his wife looks on wearing curlers and cold cream and lumpy pajamas. The wife and the witch are thus placed in a natural opposition in competition for the man.

Even if that married man could work up some resistance, it wouldn't matter— whichever age the witch is, she is oversexed, says the patriarchal definition of women as witch, and all men are her helpless victims. The disgusting “old witch” is all the more terrifying in this respect because she refuses to settle into her dotage with lovely pink cheeked grandchildren, and insists on desiring and having sex herself, to the horror of castration anxiety filled men who worry about the unnaturalness of an older woman who still actually *has* a sex drive, especially one absent from what patriarchy defines as the only redeeming value of possible procreation, (which makes it okay for a woman to desire sex).

When not the result of a stolen penis, the assumption is that witches get their

power from a male, to whom they are generally in a sexual thrall. Very importantly to most accusations of witchcraft as a natural progression for independent women, and a characteristic that Magical Feminism's texts firmly challenge, is the idea that witches are Devil worshipers who get their power from the male Devil and worship him through the practice of magic. At the meetings where the witches meet the devil and receive their powers from them, "witches were supposed to have gotten pleasure from copulation with the devil (despite the icy-cold organ he was reputed to possess) and they in turn infected men" (Ehrenreich and English 11). Part of the evidence of this sexual activity with the Devil in exchange for her power is the extra nipples witches have. In order to prove a woman is a witch, one need only find the extra nipples on the body from which her familiars suckle, in a perversion of the motherhood witches shun. In this way, her body is marked by her sexual deviancy, but this marking comes from corrupt relationships with more powerful males.

As Ehrenreich and English argue, according to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, "In the imagination of the Church, even evil could only be thought of as ultimately male-directed. As the *Malleus* makes clear, 'the devil almost always acts through the female, just as he did in Eden'" (12). As part of this assumption that even deviant women must be under male-control, traditional depictions of witches show their spells written in a huge book, called their *Book of Shadows*, given to her by the Devil, which they hide in a closet, or an attic, which has all of her spells written down (usually in

blood) with lots of self-incriminating pictures of evil acts.

In *Hocus Pocus*, the witches' Book of Shadows is bound in leather (maybe human skin) and has a living human-looking eye in its center. Reinforcing this negative image of the source of her power, Bette Midler's character thanks the Devil for giving it to her in one scene, calling him "Master" and fawning over him.¹⁹ Because patriarchy traditionally has defined women with any kind of academic knowledge as just unnatural, associating women with the body and men to the mind, the assumption of traditional witch hunts has been that this book has to have been given to the witch by some male, and not from her own exploration of women's traditional knowledge and lore. Patriarchal institutions wanted to believe that her power could not be self-contained; it must come from some male source, usually the Devil. In contrast, the texts I will analyze show women's power coming from many sources, and not always (or even not usually) men.

The Magical Feminist version of the Book of Shadows is often more like a cookbook or recipe journal, or even a history textbook, as we can see from the Book of Shadows in *Practical Magic* (1998) as well as the one in the television series *Charmed* (1998-2006). In *Practical Magic*, we see two books of shadows: the large compendium from which the Aunts work, which looks very much like an herbal enchiridion and the diary-like journal written in girlish script of the young Sally, with flower petals pressed into the book's pages. Similarly, on the television series

Charmed, the Halliwell sisters' Book of Shadows rests on a podium in the attic, resisting the touch of any evil person or thing by forcibly closing and flying across the room. The Halliwell sisters' book is a huge history of the family of good witches' encounters with evil, compiled by their witch ancestors, and it lists all the magical beings the Halliwell line has encountered over the centuries as well as collected spells. It is passed down not by the devil but by the matriarch of the family, Melinda Warren, and the sisters consult the text when they are stuck with a problem. It is received knowledge and a history that is innately female, and an integral part of their powers. While the Magical Feminist text, such as *Charmed* and *Practical Magic*, uses the idea of the Book of Shadows, it does so in a way that redefines it not as the stereotypical text of evil works, given to witches by a devil or male figure, but as a journal or history that records the feminine knowledge of generations of women. In this way it is a record of the silenced female history that was not generally written in the mainstream textbook.

What Do We Do With Witches? Burn Them!

In addition to redefining witches by appearance-based markers, Magical Feminism especially challenges definitions of women's relationships to community and punishment for defying patriarchy. In most traditional depictions of the witch, she really has very little real power. She may be able to pull a few magic tricks out of her pointy hat, but in reality, she has very little influence on the world around her and what

she does have is eventually caught when she is shown to be a charlatan out for her own good instead of the good of others. Punishment rides right along after this, because once the witch is inevitably revealed for her wicked devil-worshiping ways, she is punished by a righteous community and has no power to escape those just punishments. In Question One of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the punishment for “all those who are commonly called sorceress, and those too who are skilled in the art of divination, incur the penalty of death” (5). Witchcraft is defined by Kramer and Sprenger, and therefore, the Catholic church, as “high treason against God’s majesty” for which “they are to be put to the torture in order to make them confess” (6). So, popular depictions have developed a very common way of dealing with the witch. The favorite method for putting to death? “Nowadays, they are burnt at the stake, and probably this is because the majority of them are women” (*Malleus Maleficarum* 6). It is not, however, clear if being burned was supposed to be a kindness because of the probability of their majority as women or a more just yet severe torture because of the perversity of their crimes.

In Monty Python’s *The Holy Grail* (1975), we find a humorous depiction of what happens when someone “looks like one!” (a witch) in a long scene where villagers accuse a young woman of being a witch, hysterically shrieking “burn her; burn witches.” One villager even claims that she “turned [him] into a newt.” When questioned, it turns out that the mostly male villagers are the ones who “dressed her up like that.” With a pointy nose, hat, and broom, she looks like a witch, if only

superficially. In this movie, it is as easy as forcing a woman to wear a costume to get her accused of punishable-by-death offenses. The scene is meant to be funny, but like most of Monty Python's satirical history, it does represent a scary truth about the reality of historical witch hunts—without some male's protection, and in the absence of a representative law/authority, a young, unattached woman runs the risk of bored villagers turning on her, just for kicks, and literally threatening her life with little or no real reasons to suspect her of any illicit activity. They can “dress her up” as a threat and very little she does can defend against the verbal outcry of the majority.

It is the dangerous consequences of being called a witch, as the woman in Monty Python finds out as they carry her away to be burned, that are an interesting element for study from the perspective of a feminist understanding of power for women and an element Magical Feminism rewrites. The typical consequences of being accused/found guilty of being a witch, or in just stepping out of the “norm” of feminine behavior are potentially devastating. As Willem de Blécourt argues:

Patriarchy protected women who stuck to the norms. The making of the witch was a social process and the ties a woman had within her community determined whether an incidental accusation could stick. If poor, old and widowed women figured prominently among prosecuted witches, it was not only because post-menopausal women were likely witches, but also because they had less access to the defense mechanisms present in common law. (301)

What happens to those women who do not “stick to the norms,” who dare be old, unattractive, sexual, outspoken, not “normal”? Often, as we have seen, such a woman is automatically suspect as a witch, and has very little with which to defend herself against the often male authority figures who are her accusers. Especially in a pre-nineteenth century world where a woman could not even serve on a jury, there was no representative legal system for *any* woman, let alone one accused of such a crime as living without a male authority. What do traditional patriarchal texts do with the witch, then, legally and socially?

Society’s typical response to witches is also quite well illustrated in popular movies and/or artwork. Carol Karlsen also points out that “statistics can establish the extent to which New Englanders [among others] considered witchcraft the special province of women, but they cannot convey the vindictiveness that characterized the treatment of female suspects” (qtd in de Blécourt 293). As soon as the image of the witch appears, we also begin to see the overwhelmingly vicious response of society to women accused as witches. In image after image, witches are grouped together, being burned, tortured, or hanged, while crowds made up predominantly of men look on in amusement, solemn judgement, or condemnation (and a combination of all three). These illustrations reinforce that a woman who steps out of her place must be punished, severely, lest she inspire other women to question their positions.

A woodcut from 1555 illustrates the consequences of defying patriarchy, and

importance of the witch's punishment as threat to all women. This woodcut shows a group of women being burned while a winged devil claws at their hair. In the background, one woman crouches under a sword—presumably to have her head cut off. Someone who looks like a local Lord holds his hand up in a symbol of authority and the executioners stoke the fire (Figure 3). This illustration adorns the cover of one of the most recent reprints, the 1971 Dover edition of the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Similarly, in a print from the early 1900s, titled *The Duckingstool*, by Charles Stanley Reinhart, an old woman with long, stringy grey hair is being ducked into a pond while a crowd of Puritans looks on. The few women in the crowd watch grimly;



Figure 3 Witches Burning, from a German Woodcut.

one comforts a crying girl, one holds a baby to her breast. The women's shared vulnerability is obvious and emphasized by the mass of men in contrast with the few women; a few women in a crowd of men with swords and pointy pikes must keep silent and obedient or risk sharing the fate of the woman being tortured on the ducking stool. As Willem de Blécourt points out, "the overall male hegemony, and subsequently the subordination of women in European and North American society was (and sometimes still is) articulated through witchcraft discourse" (289).

Men are in charge in this picture, by sheer numbers and strength of force—women who are not in proper roles, nurturing children and keeping grimly silent, risk everything, for themselves and their children. In this way, women participate in the hegemony that keeps them powerless, reinforcing their status as weak by not helping those who are outsiders. It is important for this picture to show us these women in the crowd who are *not accused* and punished in order to enforce the idea of how women *should* act (like children— seen and not heard) and the dangers of stepping outside the hegemonic norm.²⁰ A distinctly upper class looking man, clad in more sophisticated worldly clothing than the Puritan black and white of the rest of the crowd, gazes in self-righteous pleasure as the "witch" is drawn out, gasping, from the water, holding desperately to her chair, eyes wide, face tinged with green and shocked. The caption reads "a witch being punished"— but there is no evidence of what engendered the punishment beyond her appearance and apparent lack of protection. She seems to be

merely an old woman whose qualifications as a witch is that “she looks like one.”

Again, what is most important in patriarchal hegemony that defines othered women as those it does not value, is your appearance and your relation to a male. Without patriarchal markers of normality, a father, son, or husband, you might be suspect as an “other,” and therefore, probably evil and certainly vulnerable.

In short, witches are to be punished severely and executed because their power threatens the natural order of males in charge and women as passive; even a man who ought to have been good is corrupted by a witch and it is every good man’s duty to take care of her evil influence. Because witches are women who defy the rule of law, all patriarchal forms of justice (the courts, priests, male witch hunters, roving saints, the rightful heir) must uphold their duty to restore peace by killing them. Witches, then, fit the category of women who defy limits placed upon them and generally our literature and art shows these deviant outsiders as obviously evil, and obviously in need of punishment. Women with power, as well as women outside of male control, in these examples, are assumed to cause anti-social, even evil behavior, especially if that power is not firmly in hand of a man. Witches are women firmly positioned as other, defiant to male authority and therefore evil. As Rosemary Jackson explains:

The concept of evil, which is usually attached to the other, is relative, transforming with shifts in cultural fears and values. Any social structure tends to exclude as ‘evil’ anything radically different from itself or which threatens it

with destruction, and this conceptualization, this naming of difference as evil, is a significant ideological gesture. . . . the other is defined as evil precisely because of his/her difference and a possible power to disturb the familiar and the known. (52-3)

In this context, a feminist examination of the witch as ultimate outsider/others to patriarchal norms seems not only necessary but obvious. In defying patriarchal norms, Magical Feminist witches use power in a way that demonstrates performance of a kind of power that is tied to the feminine. Witches defy male authority and are therefore natural feminists. In the following chapters, we will see Magical Feminist witches who escape these punishments, however, and rewrite our expectations for the consequences of unruly female behavior. The way our Magical Feminist authors challenge the accepted norms of power and witches the most is in the negative consequences (and usually lack thereof) they show for the women who are witches in these texts.

Finally, my theoretical approach to the texts in this dissertation, and the witches and women that these Magical Feminist texts portray, rests on this foundation: these texts, I believe, lay a groundwork for teaching and practicing a feminism wherein bell hooks' simple defining goal of feminism as the end of "sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks 20) is foregrounded through the texts' powerful fictional representations of women with power that does not rely on patriarchy for its authority and which show diverse kinds of women as powerful. Especially when the witches

within the genre use powers traditionally associated with women and therefore assumed to be weak and easy, Magical Feminism consists of subversive rewrites of these previous images of the witch and what happens to her, and these texts counter that underground “witchhunt”/backlash against women as they depict magic and power in women as a good thing, or at least, not a bad thing.

At the same time, they avoid the essentializing trap of saying all women are essentially more moral and good than men are, a trap that can be as limiting as the negative one. We do not necessarily see “good” and “bad” witches in these texts, but rather people (some female) *with power* who use that power either for good actions or bad ones— but these negotiations of power are shown as human— not just male, not just female. In this way, we see that women deserve power and equality not because they are inherently benevolent and good (an argument easily disproved by examples of women who use power selfishly) but because equality and fair distribution of power is simply right. Just as some men using power selfishly does not mean all men should have those choices taken from them, so, just because some women are not moral and sweet does not mean all women should play limited roles in their own destinies. This is feminism for reality, not a utopia where women are perfect and men absent.

In Peter Brooker’s *A Concise Glossary of Cultural Theory*, he defines an important part of feminism’s second wave as the movement that “inaugurated a critique of patriarchy, of taken-for-granted sexist attitudes and ideologies in institutions, literary

and cultural texts and personal behavior”(81-2) and “above all, through the slogan ‘the personal is political’ it raised to general awareness the invidious distinction between woman’s supposed domestic sphere of home and family and the male-defined public sphere” (82). What the texts that this dissertation addresses do is critique and redefine patriarchy in a second wave manner, while using and revising the idea of women’s issues, to include rewrites of domestic space, appearance, age, control by men, and other “feminine” elements of a woman’s life in a third wave reading. These typically “feminine” elements are not depicted as something feminism needs to change and resist and reject but instead are a part of women’s inherent power and therefore, not to be ignored.

Magical Feminism is a feminist praxis, and as Patrocinio P. Schweickart argues: “The point is not merely to interpret literature in various ways; the point is to *change the world*. We cannot afford to ignore the activity of reading, for it is here that literature is realized as *praxis*. Literature acts on the world by acting on its readers” (*Gender and Reading*, 1986 39). Schweickart also argues that “gender will have a prominent role as the locus of political struggle” and “literature– the activities of reading and writing– as an important arena of political struggle, a crucial component of the project of interpreting the world in order to change it” (Schweickart 39). Magical Feminism uses reading (and viewing) to redefine the world for a specifically feminist practice, modeling a kind of female agency for its readers and viewers to try on and

imagine as an option for themselves.

In the next chapter, I will address several popular literary texts that illustrate witches who use so-called “traditional” domestic feminine skills and practices as a form of magic empowerment, which I will argue reveals a third wave feminism implicit within the portrayals. These witches exercise their power, defying the stereotypes of the witch that this chapter illustrates, and are rarely punished for the transgression of the norm for feminine behavior. The texts produce a reader/viewer response of being more comfortable with the idea of the powerful female of all types, and resist punishment for unruly feminine behaviors.

CHAPTER III

KITCHEN WITCHES: RE-IMAGINING THE DOMESTIC “HOME PLOT” AS SITE
OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE FOR A THIRD WAVE PEDAGOGY

In this chapter, I will examine two modern novels, including Alice Hoffman’s *Practical Magic* (1996) and Chitra Divakaruni’s *Mistress of Spices* (1997), that show how domestic women’s culture has changed, reflecting new ways of looking at women’s sources of power outside of the essentializing tradition that values the domestic as feminine, and codes feminine as inherently more moral and passive. To do this, I will first examine third-wave feminism as a feminism that is not *post-feminist*, but that instead strives to realize feminine skills and concerns as paths to power instead of oppressive traps.

These are the stereotypes of feminism the popular media likes to portray. “Feminism is dead and good riddance to it;” we are in the era of the post-feminist; women today are largely considered to be either ignorant of or hostile to the gains that feminism has made in the past 30 or more years. “According to a 1998 article by Erica Jong, *Time* magazine alone has declared feminism dead at least 119 times since 1969” (Baumgardner and Richards 93). The idea of feminism’s timely demise is fostered very carefully by the popular media, of which *Time* is probably one of the most respected examples. For a graphic representation of the generational conflict/catfight the media perpetuates, consider Ginia Bellafante’s *Time* magazine cover article of June 1990. As

a means of fostering competition between generations of feminists, trotting out a young woman to write an article about her generation's lack of interest in feminism is hardly a surprise. The cover featured a cutout photo of four women's heads on a field of black: Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and fictional character Ally McBeal,²¹ over the red-lettered caption "Is Feminism Dead?" The article itself argued that feminism was irrelevant to a generation of women concerned with "lip gloss and self-obsessed sexual solipsism" (Baumgardener and Richards 92). Conservative pundits of course pounce on characterizations like this one, despite the fact that the comparison is facile—three *real* women of various times and political arguments ranked as representative of a multi-vocal era's political movement, and then compared to the photo of a single *fictional* character, privileging the fictional character, whose feminism on the show was troubled by self-doubt and confusion.

An even more powerful indication of *Time's* answer to the question of feminism's status was shown by the fact that Ally McBeal's photo was in color (spotlighting her often contradictory position on feminism). The old, dated positions of the three feminist icons were depicted in black and white, indicating graphically that those ideas were antiquated and passé. McBeal was posited as *the* representative of modern young women, as though there simply weren't any real women out there who could represent the face of feminism today since it is irrelevant and therefore dead.²² The popular media's hostile attitude towards feminism illustrates how important a

vibrant presence of academic feminism, including gynocritical projects and fundamental feminist analysis, must remain within classrooms today— even those that might not be expected to teach feminism, like a basic composition or general literary survey course.

This dissertation proposes the idea that this presence of feminism might be promoted through subtle popular texts characterized as Magical Feminist, especially since many of the texts and films in *Magical Feminism* fit into such frequently under-analyzed but widely read popular groups like sci-fi and fantasy. Expanding women's literary canon formation to include a theory that combines a third wave feminist rhetorical reading, that is updated and relevant to younger readers, plus the sort of close-reading strategies with which literature classes are familiar, can provide a basic understanding of what feminism's relevance is to popular texts. This then places feminist literary theory in classes beyond women's studies and canonical women's literature courses. Iris Yob explains of postfeminists in "Feminism in the Schools in a Postfeminist Age," that for many young women "feminism is now passé, a tired form of political correctness" (2). It is particularly disturbing when "Young women in particular, who are the recipients of hard-won gains by earlier feminists" (Yob 2), ignore or dismiss the relevance of looking at a text with an eye towards what negative or positive things it has to say about women, as well as what norms and stereotypes it reinforces. As Yob explains, a predominantly young group, often called "nonfeminist"

or, in a more hostile naming, “antifeminists,” may be interpreted as those who “want to enjoy all the benefits and undertake none of the struggles to have the opportunities and choices available to women today”(2).²³

Thanks to this generally negative portrayal of the women’s movement in the popular media, younger women and men coming into the academy might have an ambivalent, hostile, or fearful relationship to Feminism as praxis which makes them wonder “why bother?” The popular media²⁴ has a particular part to play in this love/hate relationship for people who shift between expecting the gains of feminism to be there for them (the right to attend college, to speak up in class, to get a job offering equitable pay), and yet have an aversion to the political movement which helped get them those rights. The same hostile media have also done their best to assure young men that they either cannot possibly be feminists or that feminists are “man-haters,” thus solidifying an adversarial position for otherwise like-minded men and women, who could work to effect social change and gender equity. The popular media love to characterize Feminism in stereotypes writ large, directly because of a hostility toward and “distaste for active, assertive women” which has “turned all ‘feminists’ into a frightening fringe element,” (Beck 139) as Debra Baker Beck found in her 2001 study “The ‘F’ Word: How the Media Frame Feminism”:

While most American women support the basic concepts of feminism, they tend to shy from the feminist label. For instance, in a 1989 study, only 33% of

women surveyed indicated that they considered themselves feminists despite overwhelming support for the issues the movement addresses and the widely-held perception that it has helped the status of women overall (Wallis, 1989).

“I’m not a feminist, but . . .” is a common refrain among women who reject the label. (Beck 140)

Women’s studies and feminist literature classes aside (wherein students who have willingly enrolled are at least provisional members of “the choir”) it seems likely that a large portion of those whom we expect to carry on the debate about gender might be either ambivalent about or hostile to feminism as an organized political movement, finding it obsolete and irrelevant.

Rather than being irrelevant to young women students’ lives, however, a third wave feminist-oriented genre, including a canon formed around Magical Feminism as a genre, rather than just a sub-culture of women’s literature, with an emphasis on rehabilitating the metaphor of the witch from its image as an evil woman out to destroy society, problematizes the facile stereotypes of the popular media of feminists, which often runs along the same lines as those the witch has faced. A theory-driven close reading of this genre of literature that equates magic with power, and power with feminism, as well as showing feminism in a third wave light. One foundation for the genre is the rhetorical definition of the third wave by Heywood and Drake provide:

feminism’s third wave as a movement that contains elements of second wave

critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures, while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures. [. . .] [L]earning from these histories and working among these traditions is the development of modes of thinking that can come to terms with the multiple, constantly shifting bases of oppression in relation to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity, and the creation of a coalition politics based on these understandings—understandings that acknowledge the existence of oppression, even though it is not fashionable to say so. (3)

Instead of being hostile to second wave feminism, a pedagogy of Magical Feminism’s reading-strategy will acknowledge the second wave’s multiple layers of multi-vocal influence, realizing that identity is not a single element but made up of intersecting axes of oppression. This theory of Magical Feminism recognizes the critique of elements of “feminine” culture, re-viewing them as not necessarily oppressive in the hands of those who are deliberately using them as power-sources.

Even most feminists seem to get their definition of feminism from someplace negative— such as, cartoon-character Quiche Lorraine’s definition in a June 16, 1982 *Bloom County* strip (Figure 4). When asked by Kennedy-esque playboy Steve Dallas: “What does the term ‘Liberated Woman’ mean to you,” Quiche replied: “Fat, manless and hairy legged.” These kinds of stereotypes remain one reason for a fear of identification with feminism for young women. One such young woman in one of my

classes this semester apologized for her accurate feminist reading of comic-book characters on the TV series *Heroes* (2007-) with the disclaimer “not to be a feminazi, but...” As Beck sums up, “this sampling of reasons young women gave for rejecting the women’s movement shows how deeply influenced they are by stereotypes commonly found in the mass media– none of them referring to feminism in general versus individuals within the movement” (143). By showing women in more



Figure 4 Bloom County cartoon, June 16, 1982

complexly layered, influenced, and nuanced ways, Magical Feminism– as a mostly

popular genre that challenges notions of the “other” and the “evil man-hating woman” who endangers society– is one method of combating this negative media portrayal of feminists. Recognizing and teaching Magical Feminism as a possible site of pedagogical rhetoric for the third wave of feminism is a crucial step in this wider rehabilitation of the popular notion of feminism for young women and men.

For there to be post feminism there ought to be an end to feminism, a “post”

period where the goals and ambitions of feminism have either been successfully reached or abandoned as impossible to achieve. This “post” period does not, in reality, exist. While many of feminism’s goals have been accomplished, there is still a long way to go. As Carol Stable argues “there is”

something durable about masculine domination that has the effect of eternizing androcentrism, of making masculine domination the kind of structuring system that endures beyond massive changes [. . .] I use the term androcentrism following Bourdieu here– to underscore that very durability in ways that the historically specific term “patriarchy” doesn’t. [. . .] although women may appear to have made huge strides within the capitalist economic system, the true bastions of power (be they in the university, the government, or business) remain segregated by gender. Women who transgress these gendered boundaries (who do not recognize their proper place) risk being ejected from the game itself. (316-317)

In spite of, or perhaps because of, this enduring androcentrism, there is another school of feminism available to young women than simply rejecting what they think of as an outmoded political system. There is an approach to contemporary feminism separate from the nonfeminist or anti-feminist groups that are often mistakenly grouped within the third wave. In fact, the third wave could very well be said to have begun in the second wave– with the questions raised by women of color and women interested in

injecting issues of class and age into what they saw as second wave feminism's largely middle-class, white system. Feminists as a whole responded to these concerns by re-examining their theories, shaking up, or shifting through some of feminism's rhetoric, much more like Catherine Orr describes as a wave doubling up on itself as it hits the shore, becoming many small waves within the larger body of water one might call feminism²⁵. Thus, work by theorists that generationally would fit into the second wave is actually what I want to define as third wave thinking— negotiations of borderlands, class theory, body-image theory, gender-as-performative— all of these things are fundamental to the third wave's basic definition of itself.²⁶ This is to say that the third wave is not a new and separate wave, beginning where the previous wave ends, but a continuation of the movement that has come before.

Toward a Third Wave Pedagogy of Magical Feminism

Thus far, much of what has been called third wave feminism has appeared in texts that are stylistically similar to second wave consciousness raising testimonials: autobiographical moments that describe personal experiences of sexism today and how they may differ from those of our second wave “foremothers.” These third wave texts are not very theoretical and thus have been seen as journalistic autobiographical accounts of individuals and not theoretically or even historically driven. These texts include Rebecca Walker's *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995); Barbara Findlen's *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist*

Generation (1995); Marcelle Karp and Debbie Stoller's *The Bust Guide to the New Girl Order* (1999) Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards's *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (2000) and newer "activist-centered" text *Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism* (2005). However, there is also a growing attempt to form a theory-driven rhetorical space within academic feminism that acknowledges a difference between women who founded the study of women's literature and feminism in the academy and those who are their students, now becoming professors themselves.

Along with *Hypatia's* Summer 1997 complete issue devoted to the third wave which strove to find theoretical definitions of the third wave within feminist philosophy, one text in particular stands out as striving for a more academic, theoretical form of third wave identity: Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake's *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (1997). Heywood and Drake state, as a way of avoiding the "slippage" from labels that place third wave feminism as postfeminist (common in the media): "'postfeminist' characterizes a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave" (1). Heywood and Drake define themselves as third wave rather than postfeminist in order to avoid the idea that there is a "post" to feminism, or that feminism is over. They argue that the theoretical third wave should instead be defined as a rhetorical and practical continuation of the work of second wavers, one that

recognizes and hopes to integrate many of the arguments that have created a world where a both groups of feminists can co-exist– one that has gained from feminism, and the women’s movement. Work done on third wave feminism since this text generally uses its definitions of this feminist theoretical moment, making Heywood and Drake’s text a definitive foundation for future (and my own) explorations of contemporary Third-Wave feminism.²⁷

Aside from a certain usefulness for feminist theoretics, the main purpose for building a genre, as this attempt to define witches as part of Magical Feminism does, would be for both canon formation and greater recognition of a group of thematically linked texts. From a practical standpoint, defining a genre would be most helpful in an academic setting; beyond simply trying to find more books that appeal to an individual’s taste, most people who read popular fiction are not sitting around wondering about how a novel or film fits into a canon. Academically, creating and analyzing literary and popular film/TV texts from the standpoint of their inclusion in a genre called Magical Feminism is most useful from a pedagogical standpoint.

Locating and reading Magical Feminist texts participates in trends begun by the Second Wave’s gynocritical project of not merely finding voices that speak in a feminist way about women and men. In addition, this project seeks to explore what it is these texts do when a reader experiences them as liberating or inspiring. At the same time, I wish to apply third wave theories, related especially to the domestic as powerful,

readily acknowledging that those third wave arguments build on the second wave argument that axes of power are constantly in flux, multi-influencing, and multi-layered. The second wave theories that implicitly inform my third wave approach include theorists bell hooks, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, Judith Butler, who explore power from multiple subjectivities.²⁸ My genre-building project builds on the pedagogical work that scholars like Nan Bauer Maglin (1979), Martha A. Donovan and Marissa E. Walsh (1991), Mary Helen Washington (1977)²⁹ and others describe, but the difference is that my approach features what has commonly been seen as feminine and therefore unimportant women's work. My approach also uses popular culture as its main focus. Therefore, I read domestic texts as high Art rather than mere lowbrow craft, seeing the domestic as filled with potential politically charged power.

The idea of the domestic as a site of political resistance, as a method women have used to speak, to resist the pressure for silence, has been addressed.³⁰ As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes:

Our concern with the private, the domestic, and the intrapsychic has altered our methodology and our hierarchy of historical significance. On the most elementary level it has demonstrated the need to expand the nature of our sources [. . .] We begin to question whether women's peculiar experiences and needs may have causally affected developments in the public sphere. We have, in short, redefined what is significant about our past. (qtd in Maglin 890)

As Maglin explains, “By redefining what is ‘significant’ in our past, Smith-Rosenberg implies that the interest in the private sphere, far from being merely an isolated study of sub-culture, can fundamentally change the way we look at history” (890). Second wave feminists did this sort of work in domesticity, and the “small things” of women’s lives, from the start. It is no accident that “the personal is political” is a fundamental tenet of feminism. But the personal of domesticity must be even more political, because it shapes all of us. Frances Howe explains in a 1976 issue of *Radical Teacher* that

the very idea of a canon of literature may emerge as one tactic, a kind of literary credentialing process, for limiting the potential strength of the female sub-culture. Similarly it may become evident that the division between what is generally considered “art” and what is generally considered “handicraft” are themselves ideologies, serving key roles in the sexual politics of culture. (10)

Howe’s approach to teaching and reading women writers chronicles the discovery of the “scribbling hordes” of women writers, and types of women’s writing, that was taking place during the Second Wave. In her article, she traces many of the ideas about the domestic lives of women that emerge in “images of women in literature” (4) courses and predicts many of the changes that have, in fact, occurred. But the reason for bringing this up again today is that what was once considered “radical” may now be old hat to most students and teachers alike. If literature studies have not fallen into complacency about the strength of women’s literature, (with women’s genre courses

taught at most universities but perhaps not required of students the way a course in, say Renaissance literature is), many of these kinds of women's writing-as-a-genre scholarly and teaching projects have focused on formats such as autobiography, diaries, oral histories, letters, and unpublished journals, often not looking at fictional texts as another way of expressing the same kinds of experiences. To participate in this type of gynocriticism is a way to pass the knowledge of how a woman's individual choices affect her political life. These texts participate in and help teach a subtle form of feminism I define as part of a third wave that "recognizes the contextual nuances of notions such as equity, gender, sex, oppression and women's issues. [. . .] differentiat[ing] more clearly between men and patriarchy, and between women and oppression, acknowledging that women can be implicated in patriarchy and some men as well as women are oppressed within and by patriarchy" (Yob 3). A third wave reading of domestic texts strives to claim the domestic as a woman's issue, exploring women's power not as only the oppressed but as actors with real power.

A Lineage of Domesticity as a Feminist Site

"My grandmothers are full of memories/
smelling of soap and onions and wet
clay/With veins rolling roughly over quick hands/
They have clean words to say" (Margaret Walker "Lineage" in *For My People*, 45).

In the now canonical women's literature text, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf speculates on the silenced voices of women writers of the past, including Shakespeare's fictional sister "Judith." In addition to Shakespeare's sister, Woolf

imagines an elderly woman's memories of her life, saying that she can "remember nothing" important:

for all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children set to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. . . All these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded. (93)

The domestic as part of these "infinitely obscure lives" has often been seen as a form of silence, actions that vanish with time. But what if we instead see, as one may read Alice Walker doing in "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens," the domestic as a source for and sometimes even a product of an expression of art, and the histories and biographies recorded in the lives of the people who were cooked for, washed up, "set to school?"

As the epigraph above says, there are memories of women's work that tell stories of power and history that, before feminism, may not have been properly appreciated or even recorded. An entire lineage of women's lives lies buried in their kitchens, and crafts, and the products of their hands. What of a genre that defines power as not so much moral essentialism that claims women as purely "good" teachers (as in such philosophies as the nineteenth century Cult of True Womanhood)³¹ whose natural desire was to teach by their domestic example? This genre focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of the imperfect women and men who, nurtured by these

“silenced” artists, went forward and forged a world where women as well as men could express art, tell history. In a world where women’s writing does not *have* to be about the domestic, where several generations of the Women’s Movement have guaranteed access for women to other realms of self-expression and therefore a choice, literature that features domestic situations should be examined for the stories it is already telling. The silences are only there when we refuse to value the stories, calling them instead retrogressive, or calling the things the stories describe forms of oppression, or even rejecting them outright as valuable for feminist study. In this chapter, I will examine modern works that show how the domestic women’s culture has changed, reflecting new ways of looking at women’s sources of power outside of the essentializing tradition that values the domestic as feminine, and codes feminine as inherently more moral and passive.

Linda McDowell argues that “the home/the domestic— as a building, a style, a form of representation, and ideology, a material object, a symbolic representation— has become a key site of feminist work” (McDowell 815). Her claims are part of feminist scholarship that shows that for at least as long as women’s rights have been at issue, the home has been part of the battleground— whether the battle centers around a woman’s right to work outside the home to whether a woman deserves compensation for the work she does inside the home. Reconfiguring as a feminist site a form of literature which includes texts frequently dismissed as “craft” instead of “art” as well as popular

rather than “highbrow” literature, “recognizes the meaningfulness of women’s daily lives and validates the forms in which it has been transmitted” (Maglin 891). The struggle to redefine power, and the relationships between men and women in that struggle, relates to how long “the domestic has been coded feminine;” you can see something of that struggle as “the differential positions of women and children as compared with those of men are well captured in the folk saying ‘An Englishman’s home is his castle,’ the place where a man might assume the right to treat ‘his’ family as possessions” (816). While the home is seen as a castle for a man, a place where he can relax and rule, the same place is often seen by and for women as a trap, confining, and stagnating. But what if we redefine the domestic as a source of power, rather than a place where nothing important happens, can we then trouble a paradigm that tends to valorize so-called “male” traits— working in the corporate world, aggressive self-assertive personas? The domestic has been coded feminine— does that *still*, thirty-plus years into women’s rights, mean it has to be coded weak?

Ann Romines’ critical study of nineteenth and twentieth century domestic novels, *The Home Plot* (1992), is one of the foundational texts for revisiting the domestic novel as a way of participating in a gynocritical study of women’s voices in literature. Her study of novelists who used “at the most basic level of metaphor, the practice of housekeeping [. . .] problematically associated with women’s work and with female power” (5) argues that there is a definite “plot” or tradition of women’s writing

that differs from that of the male canonical tradition, and that in analyzing this plot, one analyzes a silenced and undervalued tradition, or women's narrative related to the domestic. Magical Feminism contains important elements of Romines' home plot, including characters and plots that androcentric reading habits have ignored, silenced, or dismissed as trivial, which are a critical metaphor of women's power. Romines argues that

the story of housekeeping, the "home plot" of domestic ritual, has generated forms and continuities very different from those of the patriarchal American canon and pushes readers to attend to texts that are not inscribed in conventionally literary language. Domestic language often seems invisible to those who have not learned to read it. (17)

When it is not invisible, it is "misread" by literary scholars who are used to valuing the androcentric hero-plot, as Romines points out that Joyce Carol Oates' does in her 1969 reading of Eudora Welty's fiction as a "bizarre combination of a seemingly boundless admiration for feminine nonsense— family life, food, relatives, conversations, eccentric old people" (qtd Romines 9). Romines further notes the typical devaluing of such domestic plots as when Ernest Earnest "characterized Jewett's and Freeman's domestic fiction as 'minor tragicomedies. . . nice safe subjects'" (qtd Romines 9). When work is done towards reading the domestic home plot, often it is mistakenly assumed to be an essentialism that reifies women as natural, passive holders of culture and ritual instead

of active creators of art, culture, and ritual. To value the way women writers have written this home plot, rather than naturalizing women's lives as passive will show how much work and power actually exists within creation of the domestic plot. Romines claims valuing the domestic "opposes the confines of essentialism. It implies, instead, that women's traditional lives are worth thinking about, worth writing about, worth reading" (296). Romines argues that the home plot's archetypal symbol— of Hestia as goddess of the hearth, or Circe, as the witch who enchants the male hero away from his quest— rewrites the heroic myth from women's perspective, telling a story in a voice that has not been previously heard in male-centered narratives. Magical Feminism participates in this same project of "drawing on the condensed associative and emotional power of archetypal symbols"(Felski 153), by including the witch with the crone, the mother, the virgin, and the wife, in order to point to changes within the archetypes that reflect a change in values about what is properly "feminine" and how that feminine archetype resonates with us today.

Throughout this dissertation, I wish to use close-reading as my main strategy for evaluating these domestic novels from a feminist standpoint, invoking them as a gynocritical genre. At the same time, I will close-read popular texts, thus taking Gallop's arguably second wave approach into the third wave's "favorite battle ground." Jane Gallop, in her readings of feminism *Around 1981* (1992), explains her practice of close- reading several feminist anthologies as a method of deconstructing new criticism

in order to truly analyze a text for what it hides as well as what it reveals (7). As she further explains,

Applied to culturally powerful texts, symptomatic reading can be a tool for diminishing their power. Turned on culturally marginalized texts, it may also, because of its mixed heritage from new criticism, have the at least momentary effect of promoting a text to canonlike status. To devote such close attention to a text is to treat it as rich and powerful. (9)

Thus, in closely reading a text *not* considered highbrow great literature, a literary critic may grant it the same attention as canonical literature, thereby destabilizing the very categories of “lowbrow,” “middlebrow,” and “highbrow” which have so often devalued women’s texts and plots as unworthy of critical attention. Paying very close textual attention to texts which feature the home plot grants this feminine plot, and characters who follow that plot, the same critical attention as such classic archetypes as the hero, and the mythic quest-motif or *bildungsroman*³² At the same time, applying a third wave feminist perspective that sees power as constantly shifting within these narratives, coming from places that may have not been seen as powerful before. Thus, the reading revises the archetypes that are associated with power for women and sees the changes within those archetypes as reflective of great attitude change. Close reading then becomes a way of not ignoring the feminist political situation surrounding a text’s composition but a way to draw attention to the changes in society that those textual

elements reflect.

The novels closely-read in this chapter center women's feminist rhetoric within an intimate, domestic space, showing powerful women who have gained economic control and self-determination, using domestic magic as a way of visualizing and implementing change, and through that change, serving their communities. In this way, their power does not alienate them as the witch on the edge of town, othered and outside, but strengthens their bonds with their immediate and extended community, showing a sort of magic and feminist "thinking globally, acting locally." One finds the fictional witch, as a dangerous outsider, normally and firmly associated with the home as a site of her dangerous activities. Like the witch, while "middle-class women might have been characterized as 'domestic angels,' working-class women and women of color who were present in the public or outer world of the streets and workplaces were constructed as a threat, as active, sexualized, and dangerous women" (McDowell 819). When women of all classes began to resist being confined to the home, demanding equality in all aspects of their lives, they became a new threat to patriarchal order, and began to be classed as dangerous.

Like the witch, as Debra Baker Beck points out, "for feminists, being cast as outsiders, trouble-makers, even evil women, is inevitable since they challenge the very basis of a patriarchal society" (Beck 140). The fictional witch tends towards a view as a dangerously sexual being, and like her, "some historians have also suggested that part

of the impetus to women's restriction to the private sphere and their idealized purity lay in fears of all women's sexuality, not just working-class women" (McDowell 819).

One foundation of Magical Feminism remains this domestic power center of the home as a site of both women's construction as idealized "domestic angel" and dangerously sexualized being when outside the home. Finding women's political narratives within the domestic is not unusual, as Laura Patterson explains: "novels that depict home-related concerns [. . .] are domestic, and at the same time often politicized and replete with meta-narratives on women's places in the realms of finance, education, and the production of both history and art" (918). But the political nature of the home-site and home-plot, analyzed within a framework of magic as power for women certainly seems unusual so far.

Magical Feminism blends the ordinary acts of women's domestic work with the extraordinary presence of magic as a way of drawing attention to the arbitrary nature of such categories; that there is no such thing as a natural or unnatural category in fiction helps us to notice the lack of some kind of organically grown way of being in nonfictional life and politics. The media, still dominated by dualistic binaries that need to "emphasize opposition and dichotomies" (Beck 140), also still controlled by men who see a good story in the representation of strong, powerful women as outsiders and evil, still controls how many people perceive what performances of gender are "good" or "bad." The "reality" of women's lives is up for grabs in popular portrayals of what it

means to be a woman in and outside of the home: “even a concept as basic as ‘woman’ is riddled with cultural codes conveyed and interpreted in various media texts we encounter on a daily basis” and “there is no objective ‘feminine’ [. . .] only a culturally-defined concept created and perpetuated in part by media texts” (Beck 140).

Discussion of domestic by critics literature remains centered in the nineteenth century tradition of “sentimental novels,” and aside from this academic discussion, the domestic novel stays dismissed as mere entertainment for women.³³ Domesticity as a theoretical semiotic languishes in the daily drudgery of home-life, cooking, child-rearing, and housework, with no political content, overt or covert. This neglect of the so-called “sentimentalist housewifely tradition” wrongly imagines the domestic as isolated, not affecting anyone but the immediate family.

There was a trend in some prominent second wavers’ discussions of feminism toward wholesale rejection of women’s domestic tasks as not feminist enough, and this rejection reified the assertion that anything traditionally seen as feminine was therefore insignificant and mindless. McDowell, traces a

long history of women’s natural association with the home and domesticity, the spacial separation of women from men who inhabited the public world of work and politics, and the challenges to these associations that were to become the central focus of the second wave of feminist scholarship from the 1960s onward. (819)

The challenge was also a rejection of those natural associations of women with the home as anything essential. It was the domestic that was to blame for women's oppression, went the argument for some people in the early women's movement.³⁴ Many feminists interpreted Betty Friedan's overall premise to mean that gender inequality was oppressive to women because they were trapped within the "problem with no name," a brainless drudgery of domestic home life, stuck in the home with no outlet, confined to "food and things"—insignificant and pointless daily efforts. It was not simply that women were not allowed to work but that they were only allowed to focus on these mindless domestic existences. While Friedan and Steinem cannot represent the whole of feminism's wide-spread opinion on domesticity, it was an idea that was simple for the media to catch on to and hold as representative of the entire movement's ideas.³⁵ C.J. Smith, in "Living the Life of the Domestic Goddess" argues that in the Second Wave, the unrest of the "cultural climate" of the 1960s meant that "emphasis on the home was replaced by social activism" (679) in women's relationships to their lives. Smith further notes that "feminists urged women to combat 'the housewife's syndrome' through creative work of their own" (679). Smith continues that this "alienation" for women, guided by feminism's Second Wave, "went into the next two decades as more and more women opted for employment outside the home" (679). As it searches contemporary "chick lit" for its relationship to the 1950s Home Ec guide for women, what Smith's argument reveals is the prevailing idea of the

replacement of the domestic home with the political “elsewhere,” and the response contemporary women have to that attitude of alienation with the domestic: a search for new meanings, new symbols, new ways of being domestic.

The early prevalence of the stereotype of the feminist as much concerned with the rejection of “food and things” can be seen in articles like the one appearing in the *Times* in 1975, where feminist sociologist Ann Oakley, reacting to how people perceive her as “different” from most feminists, wrote about the stereotype of the “feminist as domestic slattern”:

A feminist doesn't do much housework because dirt and untidiness do not upset her the way they do most women. Her main aim as a feminist is to make “ordinary women” unhappy. She wants to stir up trouble in the kitchens of the world, so that her theories about the female condition become self-fulfilling prophecies. (qtd Hinds/Stacey 161)

This kind of belief, begun by such icons of feminism as Betty Friedan as a way of opening a discourse about women's work and symbols of the oppression of the past, has made its way into post-feminist works and persists as one of the most common and oft-voiced stereotypes about women and power. Contemporary depictions frequently echo the ideas that feminists or independent women do not do housework, or if they do, they certainly do not enjoy it or find it at all empowering.

The common misconception about feminists as anti-domestic appears in the

popular press in Hermione Eyre's 2003 article featuring an anti-domestic sensibility. A not-atypical article in the Features section of *The Independent* brags that young women often glorify the idea that they "can't cook" believing it is a sign of their independence, and using the lack of skills as a way of rejecting the "key indicator to a woman's power" of the past (*The Independent* Aug 2003). Power, according to this article, rests in "bragging about being clueless in the kitchen" and "looking pathetic" and instead of cooking for oneself or others, being the consumers and proudly "colonizing restaurants" (*The Independent* Aug 2003). Eyre cites as her evidence Linda Blair, a clinical psychologist and nutritionist, who argues, "this is a generational issue. In the Eighties, many feminist mothers decided not to teach their daughters to cook. 'We're slap bang in the middle of that post-reactionary generation'" (*The Independent*, August 2003). So the question becomes, as men and women of this "post-reactionary" generation continue to struggle with the issue of who does what in the home, how do those decisions reflect and affect attitudes about the importance of "women's" tasks versus "men's" tasks and how does fiction deal with the gender gap of the domestic as a contested site of power struggle?

As recently as November of 2005, the popular press, in a kind of antagonistic glee, reconfirmed the idea that women being bad at the domestic is a continuing part of the feminist struggle for equality when "all hell broke loose in Britain when celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay declared" that women "know how to mix cocktails but can't cook

to save their lives” (qtd Fillion para 1). Kate Fillion asserts “The celebrity chef says women can’t cook? Damn right they can’t!” and argues that “poor salesmanship is the main reason this particular feminist project” of “getting men to help with their fair share at home” has “failed so spectacularly” (para 8). Fillion further opines “it’s probably already too late for the rest of us, but young women would be well advised to embrace any criticism of their abilities and hightail it out of the kitchen while they still can” (para 9).³⁶

Theoretical ideas about housework as drudgery that feminism seeks to liberate women from have evolved within the academy. This evolution begins even during the second wave with complex texts like Audre Lorde’s *Zami* and Alice Walker’s “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” recognizing the fallacy of this overall assertion in applying to all women, and all feminists. Unfortunately, the idea that to be feminist one must work outside the home, rejecting all things domestic and “feminine,” still rather firmly persists as part of the popular definition of feminism³⁷ with which most people are familiar, and has survived well into the third wave generation. Buying the idea that the domestic (along with anything “feminine”) is something the modern, liberated young woman should avoid buys the masculinist notion that women who do domestic work do nothing all day, that they are not performing worthwhile tasks. It also plays into the assumption that “man’s work” (read: outside the home) remains the place for a truly driven, ambitious, empowered woman, in spite of the fact that many

women do work outside the home and yet participate in domestic tasks every day, anyway. This trivialization shows in Hermione Eyre's chatty dismissal of cooking as relevant to young women, along with the casual and unapologetic admission that "men are, conversely, becoming increasingly confident in the kitchen" (*The Independent* August 2003). Dismissing and therefore trivializing women's experiences in the home values patriarchal definitions of women's so-called "feminine" tasks as powerless; in contrast, Magical Feminist narratives recenter and reinvent those experiences as a source for real power. If domesticity can be just a fun little easy hobby for men to pick up, then what were those early feminists complaining about?

Magical Feminism's domestic magic reclaims the so-called "feminine," including acts of domestic work within the home and various other sites and explores various "aspects of resistance" (Purvis 105) to male-valuing definitions of women's work as weak, frivolous, and pointless. Magical Feminists using domestic magic as a form of power take this realization a step further and use the home and the domestic as a symbol of women's potential to reshape their lives through bonds with other women, as well as through economic power and self-determination. Instead of the domestic remaining only a trap for women, a place at home alone where the "problem with no name" is hidden and yet pervasive, Magical Feminism shows the potential for women to change and empower their ordinary lives. This site of potential rejects the belief that the home limits one's choices, depicting instead a type of power *through* the domestic

that can actually expand and revolutionize choices. This reclamation does not only apply to women who stay home all the time; the domestic—cooking, household chores, child-rearing—is part of most people’s lives even when they do work outside the home. Thus, its power can be chosen by anyone. In several narratives, though, domestic work within the home and in its surrogate, the domestic retail shop, actually grants a woman a path to choice—in shared community with other women, in feminist awareness, in rebellion, in sexual freedom. Such a woman can then explore an alternative form of liberatory action, both in and out of her domestic space.

Magical Feminism, including the important metaphor of the domestic witch, can make great societal change possible when it makes an individual’s imagination of change possible. Critics have worried about what they see as a superficial power reflected in the ultimately conservative form of sentimental domestic romance. In her stereotype-shattering cultural studies approach to the romance novel, Janice Radway worried that even when appearing to feature strong independent characters where heterosexual love and romance, family and marriage are often featured, what seems to be power is instead a kind of escapism. She worried that the inherent escapism of the romance novel might actually allow women to remain happy with, and complacently accepting of, their still unequal status as women in a patriarchally unequal culture. However, in order to change one’s circumstances, a reader must first recognize herself in a newly defined role and then dream of extending that role to a wider community of

like-minded people, thus changing her situation through new choices.

Magical Feminism, and especially its core metaphor of domestic magic, allows a population of women—popular domestic romance readers— who may be unfamiliar with radical feminism (and possibly even hostile to it) to learn and integrate into their lives basic power ideas of feminism. Within the “conservative” domestic romance, one can see the complexity and constant shift of power and gender. Therefore, this chapter’s novels, and the powerful witches within them, demonstrate Patterson’s claim: “In ignoring domesticity as both a dominant topic and an important ideological, spatial, and narrative tool, feminists face the danger of reiterating the message that domesticity is ‘women’s work’ and therefore not significant” (Patterson 922). Magical Feminism frequently centers the domestic as a source of power and education that is particularly female yet strongly untraditional, rather than simply reinforcement of the conservative value of “the feminine,” as critics worry. When these novels depict domestic witchcraft as a stand-in for feminism, they thus examine women’s power and possibilities in both traditional and new places. Power in these novels shifts, grows, and challenges patriarchal definitions of womanhood as weak, isolated, and on the fringes of real power. The witches in these novels are depicted in a way that is particularly productive to examine from a third wave feminist standpoint.

This third wave standpoint includes certain ideas that take their origins from second wave feminism but acknowledge a changing perspective on those ideas for

women and men who have grown up in the last thirty years. The third wave does not reject second wave feminist ideas but acknowledges that the same issues second wavers began working on years ago are still in play. Combine this acknowledgment with an awareness that third wavers, coming in a generation behind the second wave's radical change have different perspectives on gender and power relationships. A third wave rhetorical idea that these novels, and their witches, address includes an awareness of appearance, (particularly "feminine" ideas like make-up and beauty products as sites of contention for women) not necessarily unilaterally as oppressive but under negotiation as flexible statements of women's choice, and therefore possibly empowering. Third wave theory also includes an ongoing reassessment and resurgence in popularity of such "feminine" skills as sewing, gardening, and cooking, as part of tasks that can be satisfying and potential sources of power, income, and self-realization.

But third wavers still recognize the second wave argument that these are not biologically linked skills, essential to the female and thus "innate" elements of a "natural" femininity. What makes interest in these domestic tasks feminist and not part of postfeminist backlash against feminism is the attitude of free choice to not do them, and its accompanying freedom for the tasks to be done by anyone. These skills are not necessarily limited to women, and must be freely chosen and negotiated by whoever does them best and enjoys them as a task.

Third wave theory important in reading these novels recognizes that power

always multiply influences and is influenced by various communities of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic position, occupation, education, geography, and age. Third wavers acknowledge the second wave theory that each person is always negotiating these sites of complex, shifting, positional axes with relation to power, that we are not all unilaterally represented and/or oppressed in the same way. Thus, the texts I have chosen in my canon of Magical Feminism include women from multiple communities, multiple ages, and multiple sites of struggle. They are also texts that are not canonized or considered “mainstream fiction”— they are listed as genre-romance or science fiction, and are classed as middle-brow at best. They are written in the last ten years by authors who would fit within the definition of third wave either generationally or from membership in one of the communities listed as a site of struggle above.

Discussed in this chapter are Alice Hoffman’s *Practical Magic* (1996), and Chitra Divakaruni’s *Mistress of Spices* (1997), but they could also include texts from other sections of the dissertation, as well.

These novels show that even in everyday lives, women may have the power to influence others, for radical change, even when those changes or influences might be called simplistic or unimportant by patriarchy’s male-centered definitions. These novels challenge the stereotypes of women as evil witches by showing them as vibrant women who matter within their communities, not powerless old hags on the fringes of the community who earn and receive their just punishments for anti-community

behavior. In doing so, the novels revise the home plot to show what happens when women have a choice between rejecting outright so-called female practices and using them for their own advantage to gain economic freedom, community strength, personal maturity and advancement, and cooperation between rather than competition against other women. When these novels depict witchcraft as a type of female empowerment, they examine women's power and possibilities in both traditional and new roles and powers as shifting, growing. They challenge patriarchal definitions of domestic womanhood as isolated, weak, and mindless, and brainless. The community that grows around our magic women is strengthened by their use of domestic magic; it is not an individualistic, selfish source of power.

Northeastern “Yankee” Herbalism: *Practical Magic*

Domestic Magical Feminism occurs in Alice Hoffman's *Practical Magic*, in both novel (1995) and film (1998) versions.³⁸ The text depicts the story of several generations of New England witches who are “cursed” to lose the loves of their lives. The current generation, sisters Sally and Gillian, rebel against their matrilineal heritage as witches, seeking other paths. They resist the tradition represented by their Aunts, and attempt to find life outside the town. However, because of a haunting by one of Gillian's bad boyfriends, the sisters eventually reconcile with their Aunts and family tradition. The novel was developed into the popular film with many of the elements intact. Within both texts, the depictions of women exploring their roles as witch and

single mothers, spinster aunts, young women coming of age, and women who refuse to accept domestic abuse, the novel and its companion film adaptation examine the way power shifts for women depending on their ages and economic situation. Both texts transform the archetype of the witch, showing these emotionally loaded symbols as positive modern women. The texts show that even categories some think of as stable—magic or the mundane— can change lives when the stability of such a category suddenly changes. Through her unconventional matriarchy of witches, Hoffman’s narrative calls certain negative stereotypes of “the feminine”— the spinster, the wild witch, the old woman on the edge of town— into question.

In both film and novel, the power of the Owens women’s magic rests upon domesticity: common sense advice or old wives tales, cooking, herbalism, gardening. These are all typically seen as “women’s things,” devalued in our patriarchal society (which values the big budget action-hero over the romance). In this movie and novel, the domestic *is* powerful, and important. Thus, the movie and novel participate in the ongoing project to rescue these skills from all-negative associations of feminism as anti-domestic. Instead, both texts show how much strength can be present for women in their traditionally but wrongly devalued as weak “typical” women’s-space: home and hearth. These places are revised as significant, important, and not a site of lost identity, anger, or depression. As Rachel Moseley argues,³⁹ in the film,

the domestic kitchen is a significant site. It is interesting to note that while

witches *were* once understood as women who disordered domestic spaces, and in particular the kitchen— for instance, turning milk sour— recent articulations of discourse around witchcraft and magic centre on the domestic in quite benign ways, repeatedly privileging the alignment of witchcraft with cookery and the production of natural remedies and cosmetics. (emphasis in original 418)

Moseley’s correct assumption about a reconfiguration of the domestic as someplace contemporary witches are centered, which privileges domesticity, illuminates a third-wave restructuring of formerly non-feminist things. Moseley goes on to claim that the film “draws upon ideas of witchcraft as a discourse about natural, domesticated femininity” (418) calling our attention to the nature of some of the negative stereotypes of witchcraft (in the scene at the end of the film where the Owens women dress in striped stockings and pointy black hats while the neighbors gather to watch them “fly” off the roof) at the same time that it privileges such domestic space as a powerful site. Moseley makes the very third wave argument⁴⁰ that texts like *Practical Magic* represent witchcraft as a type of “glamour” that, “whilst informed by second wave feminism, reject the feminist identities associated with it, instead celebrating and understanding conventional modes of femininity as *not necessarily* in conflict with female power” (emphasis in original 419). *Practical Magic*’s portrayal of the domestic as a power source, then, is worth examining in more depth for the way it shows a site of re-vision of feminist ideals within the third wave.

In *Practical Magic*, we find the domestic home plot placed center stage in a way that makes a third wave point of re-examining such items. The “practical magic” of the title represents both the small cures and herblore as well as the practical power of self-control and independent strengths of the novel’s individual women. In the scenes that deal with domestic violence by using magic and spells to stop domestic abuse, as well as the establishment of an economic power base through domestic-centered small business we find domestic magic as a way of defeating negative power-structures that might have limited, controlled, or harmed women. The novel depicts strength rather than weakness in domestic magic, reconfiguring women’s traditional, “feminine” knowledge through herbalism. In both novel and film, it is partly the herbally-based spells through the spells that the town’s women purchase from the Aunts that provide the Aunts with economic support, and a position of influence within the town. They have no other visible forms of income, but they can control their own lives through their practice as the town’s herbalist healers or wisewomen. Still, even as the town blames “those women” for their bad luck, taunting them and gossiping about them, and fearing the consequences of any slight, it also relies upon the Owens women. When we apply third wave principles of power as shifting to the texts, acknowledging the complex nature of power, we see a re-imagining of power in domesticity that has two sides.

Power is shown as a shifting, potentially problematic thing— maybe especially

for women. The Aunts power remains an important part of the community, even as the “dark side” that the community needs but does not like to acknowledge. The narrator explains “the truth was that most of their mothers had gone to see the aunts at least once in their lives”(12) acknowledging the role the witches play in the town’s foundation and history. The women of the town visit the aunts for herbal remedies (stomach complaints, nerves, etc) but “their real specialty was love”– potions to force a man to love them, to abort an unwanted child, to punish an unfaithful husband. In this way, the Aunts seem to fulfill the stereotype of the witch, stereotypes that the newer generation of Owens women question. Everyone from “fifth grade teacher” to “pastor’s wife” is credited with visiting the Aunts for their services.

In other words, the Aunts are the town’s spinster witches, needed, and reviled– perhaps blamed and scapegoated so strongly because they are needed so fiercely. Because they have power over people’s love-lives, they know secrets and could be hated. Indeed, the start of both novel and film lead us to expect this dislike and hatred to continue along stereotypical lines of the hated and punished outsider witch. But Hoffman’s narrative rewrites these expectations and shows us, instead, the new generation of young witches using domestic power to control their own lives, heal their communities, and live a “normal” life of their own, not as spinster outsiders but as real women with specialized knowledge. These rewritten expectations are illustrated in several scenes. As the younger women negotiate their own use of power, they

demonstrate the choice most women who work must make, but their choices are made even more interesting to the audience by the addition of the possibilities in magic.

Both novel and film depict one part of the women's source of power as domestic herblore, and what some call superstition and "old wives tales," and through featuring these "feminine" items as sources for control over one's fate, both texts reconfigure what we know about the so-called feminine as weakness. Recipes, gardens, and spells are the most powerful ways the Owens women influence the town, as well as have control over their own lives, and these domestic items come to them through their matrilineal hereditary knowledge of magic. Two main sections begin, and the novel ends, with the "practical magic" housewitchery sort of advice the novel is titled for, advice related to housewifery and cooking, clothes and gardening, but also to control:

If a woman is in trouble, she should always wear blue for protection (118);
 Always keep mint on your windowsill in August, to ensure that buzzing flies will stay outside, where they belong (194); Always throw spilled salt over your shoulder. Keep rosemary by your garden gate.[. . .] plant roses and lavender, for luck. (286)

The movie privileges these bits of "practical magic" lore in early visuals and several voiceovers, including some of the wives-tales advice word-for-word, showing such knowledge as a teaching moment— the Aunts relating to the newest generation of

witches, Sally's daughters, their place in the Owens history. (At the same time, directing the audience's attention to this knowledge out of the stream of the story's direct action also directs the audience to understand the importance of this information). The Aunts' advice shows the potential for power in the *everyday* events of a woman's life, a version of the feminist "click" of consciousness-raising. In a realistic world, these would seem like pithy bits of superstition, or Home-Economics advice manuals, but in the novel's magic, they are real ways of controlling the daily moments of life, and choosing one's own path because of that control. In casually relating such items like herblore as having the power to change one's life, instead of easily trivialized "old wives tales," both novel and film revalue the advice of traditional women's knowledge.

In addition to placing value on the everyday items of domestic power, both texts stress the idea that change, and empowerment, is in each individual woman's control, even through simple, everyday choices. The repeated symbolism of domesticity as power stresses the truth that the mundanity of feminine skills are important, not necessarily oppressive. This symbolism then replaces male-centered values that place anything "womanly" as trivial with values that see those same things as potentially part of real influence. But both texts also show that power for women is not only about good, positive things, trapping women in an essentialist argument that feminine values are more moral and pure, but can be just as life-changing when the signs are of bad

things. In this way, both texts acknowledge the nature of power as shifting and intricately complex. It does this through a series of supernaturally-charged household omens that might be dismissed as old wives tales that come true within the course of the narrative, and therefore, are strongly intuitive foreshadowing:

just when people are beginning to dream, of cut grass a blueberry pie and lions who lie down beside lambs, a ring appears around the moon. A halo around the moon is always a sign of disruption, either a change in the weather, a fever to come, or a streak of bad fortune that won't go away. But when it's a double ring, all tangled and snarled, like an agitated rainbow or a love affair gone wrong, anything can happen. (68)

The film version simplifies these omens in a scene where Sally watches the moon, and sees first a ring, and then “blood on the moon”— a red coloring that she, and then Gillian, take to be a dangerous omen. This bad omen predicts the arrival of Jimmy— macho patriarchal sociopath and “villain” of the text. When he comes to town, all Hell breaks loose, causing the sisters to have to work together with their magic to defeat his controlling power.

In addition to acknowledging the double-nature of power as both good and bad, both novel and film show domestic magic's most powerful symbolism in Sally's garden. The main reason the garden becomes significant is the way its magic helps Gillian and Sally overcome the domestic abuse in Gillian's bad-boy relationship gone

wrong. This relationship between the garden and bad love demonstrates the way feminist rhetoric has pervaded popular culture. The film makes the connection even more graphically dependent on feminine knowledge when we see the scene with the bottle of tequila that Jimmy's ghost sends the women. We see Jimmy as corrupting the magic feminine space of the garden, but being thwarted by Sally's magic. Thus, the new generation of witches, guided by domestic intuition, rejects the forces of negative violence and the stereotype of women ganging up on each other that Jimmy attempts to foster. The scene featuring "Midnight Margaritas," begins in a decidedly witchy moment when the Aunts blend tequila and lime chanting over the blender (an ersatz cauldron), chanting alternating rhymes spell-like. The tequila that makes up the margaritas, which we find was left by ghost Jimmy, leads into a confrontation which causes the women to fight and cackle like shrill witch-shrews. In this scene in the film, we see graphically brought to life the idea that powerful women will not get along as we see the women "rip into" each other with playful insults that grow more hurtful. The Midnight Margaritas begin with the women dancing and playful, and degenerates into insults and negativity, with the camera showing close ups of their faces contorted and ugly, camera circling rapidly around them beginning from Jimmy's ghostly viewpoint on the outside, through the window from the garden. The power here is Jimmy's, until Sally recognizes the danger and pours the tequila down the drain. Her intuition about herbal magic (represented in part by the name of the tequila) shows her

strength as more intense than that of the Aunts. The bottle is labeled “Diablo del Flores” and its magic appearance illustrates Jimmy’s negative power to turn the women against each other in unknowing competition. If unrecognized, the scene could degenerate into a major conflict for the Owens women, and Jimmy’s complete victory over Gillian. Their rejection of the negative power *because of* Sally’s feminine “intuition” that the tequila is responsible for the Owens’ women’s nasty turn shows how the feminine in the film can instead “fend off and punish male violence towards women” (Moseley 418).

While not as graphic as the above movie sequence, in the novel, gardening as a way of physically manifesting women’s magical intuition is a power source. The roses of the film version replace the novel’s lilacs that magically bloom there in late summer, following Jimmy’s death and burial at their roots. But in both, because Sally knows how powerful the Aunts’ garden is, she chooses her garden to try to get rid of Jimmy’s possessive power over Gillian (and herself). These lilacs are an element that Hoffman uses as a symbol for regret and desire, and the power of hidden emotion to influence us (sometimes for the worse). Just after the sisters bury Jimmy in the back yard, under the lilacs:

what happens to the lilacs while everyone sleeps is extraordinary. In May, there were a few droopy buds, but now the lilacs bloom again, out of season and overnight, in a single exquisite rush, bearing flowers so fragrant the air itself

turns purple and sweet[. . .] bees grow dizzy. Birds won't remember to continue north. For weeks people will find themselves drawn to the sidewalk in front of Sally Owens's house, pulled out of their own kitchens and dining rooms by the scent of lilacs reminded of desire and real love and a thousand other things they'd long ago forgotten, and sometimes now wish they'd forgotten still (85)

The lilacs are a magic symbol of powerful, dangerous love, its possible influence on others overnight, and dangerous regrets when that desire for influence goes badly: "girls in the neighborhood had begun to whisper that if you kissed the boy you loved beneath the Owenses' lilacs he'd be yours forever, whether he wanted to be or not" (88). Because of Jimmy's possessive negative haunting, the lilacs feed off of negative emotion and amplify this reservoir of the regret and the sad memories people experience in front of them, somewhat like a pitcher plant that lures flies in by a sweet scent. The garden thus represents aggressive male control over a woman's thing, which Sally thwarts.

Gardening's power is shown as double-sided and complex in the novel, when Jimmy's malevolent ghost uses the power of the lilacs' influence on people's memories as a source of energy, an aura. He feeds his own possessive, negative power, and the lyrical description in the novel builds the tension between beauty and danger:

reach[ing] in to dip his hands into the purple-red shadow above him, smear[ing]

the aura of the lilacs all over himself . . . making a mess of things. Every time he breathes, horrible things come out of his mouth: little green frogs. Drops of blood. Chocolates wrapped in pretty foil, but with poisonous centers that give off a foul odor each time he breaks one in half. He's wrecking things just by snapping his fingers. He's making things fall apart (131).

Like chocolates, Jimmy is something foul in a pretty package, the "secret" buried deep in someone's roots, both literally and figuratively. It is in the relationship between Jimmy and Gillian that the film simplifies and clarifies the more subtle, less direct feminist rhetoric of the novel. By focusing in on the abusive relationship and omitting some significant details from the novel, (such as Sally's daughter's coming-of-age narrative and Gillian's healing romance) the film demonstrates how strongly feminist ideals about domestic abuse have become part of popular culture. As a murderer, drug-dealer, and abuser, Jimmy represents the dark side of power, using his own knowledge of magic and power in gardening against others in life. In death he has even more power to harm others because he becomes pure hate, absent any real human limitations. He strongly symbolizes the way harmful aspects of traditional patriarchal marriage can oppress and destroy women in the absence of free choice over their own lives, especially those who are made to believe that they "deserve what they get" from the abusive situations in which they find themselves. Jimmy's machismo results in the most blatant bit of feminist rhetoric in the film and novel, and dealing with his threat

eventually leads to even more awareness of the power in domesticity, in both home and community of women, as a power-source.

The depiction of the Owens women's response to the dark side of domesticity in domestic violence reveals even more rhetorically feminist moments of both novel and film. The film simplifies and makes Jimmy even more evil, turning him into a serial killer, allowing audiences to see no shades of grey in the relationship between Jimmy and Gillian, and feel no remorse when he dies and is finally banished by the Owens' women's magic. While the second wave of feminism may have to struggle to convince people that domestic abuse is a feminist issue rather than a private and personal crime, third wavers are able to build on the legal challenges made by their foresters to demonstrate a righteous indignation that is safe, and not too heavy for a chick-lit popular film billed mostly as about "love." Domestic abuse is addressed in Jimmy and Gillian's relationship, and especially the way Gillian believes the patriarchal propaganda that she needs a male in her life in order to have any status, that her own powers are useless, and the way she surrenders to his control over her. In this way, the novel and film demonstrate how entrenched a popular consciousness of some basic feminist principles actually is, but the film's simplification, paring it down to the most basic graphic representations, makes the argument even stronger, for a wider audience.

Ideas about women's rights to self-determination and freedom from violence

show up in the film, billed as a “star-vehicle” pop chick lit romance starring actresses who are not normally associated strongly with political movies. The film features ideas that would have seemed radically revolutionary at the beginning of the feminist movement, about a woman’s right to escape her abuser, even in defiance of patriarchy’s “normal” modes. Jimmy wants to possess Gillian– and this possession would be sanctioned in marriage, and his rights would be assured in the not-so-distant past when a woman could not accuse her husband of rape– if she was his possession, the law went, then he could do what he wanted with her. The belief that a man couldn’t legally rape his wife was, of course, before the women’s movement demanded that the law change to protect women from those who would harm them, even if they had a legal tie. In the movie, we see this idea of a man’s possession of a woman and her willing surrender graphically depicted when Gillian smilingly accepts Jimmy blindfolding her from behind. What might seem at first like a titillating moment of sexy romance is instead a precursor for what he will do to her in their relationship– separate her from her family, make her believe she is weak, and then almost kill her. In the movie, Jimmy tries to “brand” Gillian as his possession, with a heated ring, and as he reaches to strangle her, he screams over and over “I want you to be my wife.” When his violent sociopathic behavior corrupts a traditional symbol of possessive marriage– the ring– which he heats with a lighter (and clearly means to use as a literal branding iron on Gillian’s body to show his possession of her as personal property) the film draws

attention to a dangerous kind of self-loss for women.

This film reinforces the pop-feminist rhetoric that men do not have a right to “possess” and own a woman; but rather than seeming preachy, the film’s tone stresses the wrongness of Jimmy’s act of branding Gillian as matter of fact. Sally’s shocked face shows this as the moment that she believes Jimmy deserves to disappear from civilized society. Jimmy’s act of branding/possession (which might have seemed only a little extreme to many before the women’s movement). In stead, by virtue of this as an act by a sociopathic serial killer, the film compares possession of women to an extreme kind of crazy behavior. It is only through the strength of Sally’s (and then the Aunts’) intervention that Gillian is saved from being another victim of Jimmy’s sick possessiveness.

One of both texts’ strengths is when they show the power of women’s intimate, domestic community to come together and overcome the deadly possessiveness of domestic violence, literally using domesticity (cooking and sweeping) to combat Jimmy’s isolating, possessive violence. While in the novel Jimmy’s haunting simply takes over the back yard, causing tempers to flare and small objects to be lost, the film translates the haunting into a feminist message about women’s fundamental rights, as well as the need for support of a community and choice in relationships. By depicting the frightening ghost of Jimmy *literally* possessing Gillian’s body and then needing an exorcism, performed by a community of townswomen come together, the film makes a

strong feminist statement on the dangers of any kind of abusive possession. Even women who have shunned and feared the Owens sisters arrive, brooms (or hand held dustbuster) in hand, to help them deal with Jimmy's negative and evil influence. They may not know why they have been asked to come, but the film stresses the idea that "sisterhood is powerful"—both literal sisterhood in the relationship between Gillian and Sally and the sisterhood of fellow-women of the town. As the makeshift coven clasps hands and chants, their communal togetherness forces Jimmy's possessive spirit out of Gillian's body. The novel and film deliver this feminist message to its willing audience about what is not acceptable and asks that its audience re-evaluate understandings of roles that are sometimes accepted in an uncritical manner. The possession in this film may be a little extreme, but its example should resonate with anyone who has ever dealt with this kind of abusive situation.

Another of the novel and film's subtle third wave moments comes when they explore economic independence and self-determination through women's business entrepreneurship. An important symbol of domestic magic, and the economic power that traditional "women's work" can provide, is the Aunts' black soap, which also directly relates to the ingredients they use to banish the ghost of Jimmy and get rid of the body. Most importantly, the Aunts reflect on how the soap "wrapped in clear cellophane [which] can be found in health-food stores in Cambridge and several specialty shops . . . [which have] bought not only a new roof for their old house but a

state-of-the-art septic system as well” (268). The helpful side of their herbal work provides them with a potent economic power, self-reliance, and control over their economic situation. If they can adapt this traditional way their family of witches has helped the town to a kind of modern boutique capitalism, they can make a living from their skills and have freedom to choose their own path, at the same time they help others.

The film takes the Aunts’ magic one step further as it shows Sally using her natural abilities as a witch, combined with the matrilineal knowledge passed on to her through the Aunts. Her small-business, centered in herb-lore, is to open a boutique botanical shop. Based on the packaging and appearance of the products, would be very high-end and potentially profitable. In the novel, Sally’s job is as a secretary at the local high-school, but the film recasts its message of economic independence *through* her witchcraft, rather than in spite of it, much more clearly. The opening of the shop is shown as part of Sally’s recovery from depression after the death of her husband, and we learn that the store features more herbal-witchcraft style botanicals when a man complains that the cure for baldness he bought isn’t working. Sally tells him to “try to remember where I told you to put it” as he says he’s been rubbing it on his balding head. She makes a suggestive face, and aims her eyes downward, as he realizes the cure should go on the “other” are associated with male virility. Thus, the film highlights herb-lore and traditional witchcraft as a place for Sally to join the

community and gain economic self-sufficiency. Still, it's all well and good to find feminism in Goddess religion and dance skyclad in the wood, but where the real power comes from is money, and the film crystalizes this message in Sally's domestic-magic centered witchcraft and herbal small business.

This blending of a female-powered voice with common sense magic normalizes the Owens women's strength and independence, showing readers a female-centered domestic power and women who can help themselves out of complicated problems because of their special woman-centered powers. Building on second wave action that demanded the rights of women to discuss sexual harassment and domestic abuse, the film especially implements changes that have happened in the last thirty years by showing women taking financial and personal control over their lives. Where the novel only suggests the briefest idea of the witches using their domestic-based magic abilities as a business, the film goes very third wave, using herbal "beauty products" that some second wave theories dismissed as only a means of controlling women to instead show them as possible paths for women to use to gain that economic control and authority. Through these examples of personal, as well as economic empowerment, the novel details a legacy of matriarchal, domestically-based-witchcraft which has given the Owens women significantly more control over most aspects of their lives than the other women of the town. Thus the texts illustrate a form of female empowerment that might help inspire more confidence and trust in their own abilities.

Desire, Change, and Community in *Mistress of Spices*

In “Indo-Trinidadian Fiction: Female Identity and Creative Cooking,” Brinda Mehta argues “the kitchen offers the necessary supportive space [. . .] enabling the women to perform *every day magic as a means of controlling their circumstances*” (156). She analyzes several texts of Indo-Trinidadian women writers’ depiction of the kitchen as a “ground of resistance” (160) to cultural assimilation and a means to control their limited space within an immigrant culture. Mehta points to Badran and Cooke’s “question[ing of] the western feminist assumption that locates power within visible or manifest levels of activism, by distinguishing between visible and invisible feminisms” (160).

This act of finding control and power through everyday situations such as cooking resonates as a powerful theme in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices*, where the strongest type of Magical Feminist power is in the domestic magic of cooking. In this way, the novel revises and refigures cooking and its companion herblore as a source of control over the protagonist’s destiny, giving her real choice because of her domestic powers. This novel describes the life of Tilo, who is born a poor Indian girl with magical powers. She eventually trains on a magic island to be a “Mistress of Spices,” characterized as a magic-woman and servant of her community. As part of her role as Mistress, her teacher transforms Tilo’s body into that of an old woman, and she is sent to Oakland, California where she is forbidden to leave the store,

her magical center. There she tries to help the immigrant members of her Indian community as she runs an Indian food store. She helps them primarily by placing spices into their bags, but finds it more challenging because of the special needs of a traditional community within a modern U.S. culture. Her magic role forbids personal involvement, but Tilo rebels and eventually intervenes more significantly into several community members' lives. She also uses her magic to help herself in a love-relationship with Raven, a Native American man who comes into the store. For this rebellion, the punishment is supposed to be death. The novel ends with Tilo relinquishing her role as Mistress, by causing a major earthquake in the town but being forgiven for her rebellious acts by the magic powers represented by the personification of the voices of the spices. The implication at novel's end is that she tries to recapture earlier more intuitive magic and lead a life as an influence to her community, in a more mundane role.⁴¹

Dieter Riemenschneider⁴² argues that Divakaruni's "central concern" in *Mistress of Spices* is to "take risks, to push boundaries; boundaries that separate communities and people [. . .] and that we create in our own lives" (19). His argument is that the novel's fantasy or magical world retreats to the background in favor of "transcending the manifold boundaries that separate human beings" (19). However, Riemenschneider largely ignores way the novel foregrounds the magic of the spices, featuring their advice on each chapter subheading. The spices are also present in each

encounter with the community members. He claims that most of the novel's fantasy strain is relegated to the narrator's "memories" and "an inner voice" and says that the magical fantastic is "not tangibly co-present" (19). His reading foregrounds outer actions over inner, and largely ignores the way the novel deals with intimate details of the daily act of kitchen magic. In contrast, I focus on how the novel reconfigures, through its interior and direct actions, a centering of the domestic, challenging our understanding of power for women of color and immigrant communities. This challenge in turn places the voice of the minority community at the center.⁴³ The novel also repeatedly questions the definition of said minority as exotic magic, especially in the relationship with Raven, who idealizes and romanticizes Tilo's community. The novel's setting then demonstrates commonality among disparate communities without the subordination of a post-modern U.S. culture appropriating such communities.

Tilo, the novel's protagonist, comes of age to learn the domestic magic source of her own womanly power, and how she can control her own life and influence her community for the mutual good, even when her decisions lead to the destructive force of radical change. The influence that Tilo, (as "Mistress of Spices,") has on her community arises out of domestic magic. Through the properties of various common and uncommon spices, and the spices' magic abilities to predict and then try to control human actions because of each person's hidden, most secret desires, Tilo explores her own powers. The novel blends bits of women's lore that patriarchal narratives have

dismissed as mundane women's work and thus trivial, recasting such "trivia" as instead power. The novel argues women's secrets could provide power and influence in all cultures if we only knew how to use the magic, revealing the feminine of domesticity as a power instead of a weakness. Early in the novel, as we are being introduced to Tilo and her immigrant Asian/Indian shop, she thinks of how desire controls human behavior:

And in the corners accumulated among dustballs, exhaled by those who have entered here, the desires. Of all things in my store, they are the most ancient.

For even here in this new land America, this city which prides itself on being no older than a heartbeat, it is the same things we want, again and again. (4)

Tilo learns to manipulate desire as a form of power for herself, as well as her disenfranchised community. Through both, she takes a firm place in a world which sees immigrants as weak. She thus refuses to submit to the dominant culture's definition and finds her own source of power. Power in this novel comes from being able to help people with their desires, especially using Tilo's intimate knowledge of spices, of cooking, and of hearth-magic. In many popular depictions, cooking has often been dismissed as inherently female, weak, or unimportant thing, but in this novel, the power of cooking lies not merely in satisfying biological hunger. Through food, spells, recipes and spices, the magic woman of the novel learns to exercise power over her community's choices, conflicts, and dreams and then induces a radical change that

unleashes both destruction and potential for the future.

Tilo's strongest magic is also tied to economic power in the shop Tilo keeps. The spices that Tilo and her community add to their food eventually allow for real exploration of power and self-control. Tilo searches for the perfect spice to solve each customer's problems. These customers are mostly Indian immigrants who see her as a nostalgic reminder of the conservative, "Old World" India they left behind. But, in spite of the potential for change, she does not really change their lives until she breaks the traditional rules and steps out of her position as a distant "Mistress" who dispenses only spices. When she desires her own life, which she gets through domestic magic's power, she really changes everyone's life. But none of the novel's exploration of power would exist without the magic of the domestic spices. As Tilo describes how it is mundane simplicity that has the most power, she explains that spices: "all hold magic, even the everyday American spices you toss unthinking into your cooking pot. . . You have forgotten the old secrets your mother's mothers knew"(3).

Power resides in these traditions, these forgotten secrets of spice-lore, "your mother's mothers knew." These traditions include both simple herbal cures (described as ways of granting the desires of the people who fill her shop, or protecting them from the dangers of their immigrant community, helping them to empower themselves as they are consumed). According to the novel, they are ways to control one's own destiny. There are spices to grant power over pain: "chandan, powder of the

sandalwood tree that relieves the pain of remembering” (42). But while this power over pain and memory is impressive, most importantly, the feminist-inspired domestic-magic of the spices are also more than herbal cures. They can even grant the substantial voice and power of negation, to refuse to be ruled-over, to choose one’s own way and to influence others to see things to your benefit: “Seed of black pepper to be boiled whole and drunk to loosen your throat so you can learn to say No, that word so hard for Indian women. *No* and *Hear me now*” (83). Tilo also calls on spices to grant equality: “Fennel equalizer, who can take power from one and give it to the other when two people eat of you at the same time” (111). All of the spices are ordinary ones that are used in daily cooking, that one could find in almost any grocery store. But Tilo points out that it is in the ordinary that we find the most familiarity and influence, the most hidden power, and eventually, she uses these spices for more than herbal cures. In addition to spices, other implements of domestic kitchen-witchery life are powerful.

In the novel, even her small mundane knife grants the power of domesticity, in that it is: “Most ordinary, for that is the nature of deepest magic. Deepest magic which lies at the heart of our everyday lives, flickering fire, if only we had eyes to see” (*Mistress of Spices* 54). The knife, like the black soap in *Practical Magic*, is a symbol of the double nature of power– it can be used to help or to harm, to prepare food and serve daily life or to cut and kill. Power, then, is clearly something that must be carefully understood, and Tilo’s story is one wherein even the wisewoman of a

community struggles to understand the nature of the interactions between gender, class, race and power, all issues which *Mistress of Spices* explores in one form or another.

Tilo “serves the spirits” of magic and power personified in the spices. Eventually, she bends and then breaks these rules, because she believes in her own power and authority to make new rules, and it is when she breaks the rules that the magic resting in the domestic spices destroy the old ways, clearing a way to creation of a new community, with potential, and real power to control its own destiny. One of Tilo’s powers is to travel into the minds of others in her community, a magically accelerated form of empathy. She lies in her magic center, her shop, which has closed for the night, and sends her thoughts out. One of the novel’s more powerful images appears when we see the women, visualized as individuals but also the whole community:

a woman in a kitchen, cooking my rice [. . .] she mixes garam masala to bring patience and hope. Is she one, is she many, is she not the woman in a hundred Indian homes who is sprinkling, over sweet *kheer* that has simmered all afternoon, cardamom seeds from my shop for the dreams that keep us from going mad? (63-4)

The cardamom that soothes dreams, allowing one to resist the madness of lost hope represents one way Tilo helps her community, but eventually, Tilo also learns to question “patience” and “hope.” Tilo eventually learns that she can only help the

women when the women can empower themselves, through lack of patience, through aggressive change brought on by that lost hope. Thus, she slips “seed of black pepper to be boiled whole and drunk to loosen your throat so you can learn to say No that word so hard for Indian women. *No and Hear me now*” (83). By causing women to learn something other than “yes” and patience, Tilo grants them the power to resist, to say “no”, and to demand change. In this way, cooking and herblore/spices are domestic magic ways to gain control over their lives.

When Tilo slips these spices in to allow women to begin to assert themselves, it leads intimately to one of the most important bits of feminist rhetoric subtly woven into the storyline of *Mistress of Spices*: the discussion of domestic abuse. Lalita, a young woman who has come into Tilo’s store, is raped and beaten by her husband, a man who misrepresented himself in their arranged marriage and turned violent when she did not respond well to him. Lalita feels trapped by this marriage because she is cut off from her family after moving to the U.S., and she lives within the novel’s immigrant community, which keeps its secrets. But Tilo refuses to stay put in her own domestic surroundings, and tells Lalita “no man, husband or not, has the right to force [you] into his bed” (287). Instead of being content to “soothe” and “calm,” Lilo begins to agitate. At the same time Tilo counsels Lalita, she also gives her a magazine in which a domestic violence center for Indian women is advertised. Lalita, fortified by Tilo’s advice and spices, leaves her husband for this place. Lalita says in her letter to Tilo:

“who shall I ask to bless me? Ram, who banished poor pregnant Sita to the forest because of what people might say? Even our gods are cruel to their wives” (289). Tilo responds to the question by “pound[ing] almond and chyavanprash for mental strength and physical and set it outside the door for the wind to carry to the woman-house where you wait” (290). However, she knows it is not just the spices’ magic, alone, that works. She also recognizes that for a community still trapped in Victorian-style gender-roles, the most important domestic power was in the choice to *reject* the domestic and leave the harmful home for a new, more radical community. Tilo gives Lalita more than the power to say “no.”

This is feminist rhetoric at one of its strongest arguments: that of a woman’s right to control her own body, even in a traditionally patriarchal place like marriage in the novel’s conservative setting. By including this example, the novel introduces a potentially radical feminist idea to a reading community that might not have thought it applied to them. Divakaruni, who is active in and one of the founders of MAITRI, a south Asian domestic abuse and crisis center, found that “a lot of problems [in the Asian immigrant community] stemmed from issues of domestic violence” (AsianWeek.com “Mistress of Self”). Thus, the feminist ideas surrounding domestic abuse, which is common throughout the country but perhaps less talked about in more traditional communities, potentially expand a radical new argument to a reading community who may see themselves reflected here in a way they had not previously

thought possible. Divakaruni has reflected that her writing has reached the community that previously resisted ideas of “American” culture, saying: “Young South Asians have come up to me and said, ‘I really relate to this story. This story has helped me understand my mother, helped me understand my culture’” (AsianWeek.com “Mistress of Self”). Her novel thus creates a commonality between the traditional and the new, U.S. inspired rhetoric of change.

In the story of an immigrant community’s struggles to come to terms with the new desires of the U.S., and the woman who uses domestic magic to help that community, especially through rebelling against tradition, Divakaruni’s text emphasizes the need for change. She stresses this need for change within both her own and the wider community, and the novel thus demonstrates what is good about tradition and what is good about rejecting what is unhealthy. The novel’s message is third wave in that it stresses the need for diverse communities paying attention to the changes within each group, applying gains a white feminist community might take for granted to an immigrant community where silences and secrets may still be commonplace. Her domestic-magic empowered kitchen-witch manages to influence her entire community, change the rules, and survive to continue working in a new, more acceptable form of her own life. She is not ultimately punished but rewarded with a new life for her disobedience— she is allowed to regain her youth and finds love with a magic man— the Native American Raven. The novel emphasizes how her community improves through

domestic magic traditions, but also emphasizes how the community must learn to adapt those traditions to its new surroundings.

Adapting and Revising Power in the Home Plot

The novels in this chapter revise a number of assumptions about women's power by showing us witches who use traditionally feminine or conservative domestic elements, what Romines calls the home plot, in ways that ensure their economic and personal freedoms. Using domestic magic, which includes cooking, sewing, and gardening, the kitchen witches redefine women's roles as powerful through their domesticity, rather than weak and frivolous. The witches also blend those roles with more traditional and "masculine" ones to make new revolutionary roles. Rather than merely rejecting what was known as "women's work" in the past. These feminist kitchen witches revise the domestic, finding new sources of power within the traditional. When we see these kitchen witches serving their communities and even gaining more power to control their own lives, we also see several feminist arguments being very subtly articulated. What is seen as traditionally female does not have to be devalued as weak and trivial; women do not have to be defined by their relationship to a male; "patience" and "hope" can only go so far before one has to learn to say "no." Using domestic magic, these novels show domesticity in a new light as potentially revolutionary power. By doing so, the domestic kitchen witches allow their readers to see that *choice* is most important in imagining more possibilities for their own lives.

Popular media representations say there are rigid ways to be a feminist. But these novels illustrate that there are more choices available.

These novels' use of domestic magic results in one of the most obvious departures from what patriarchal culture says is the proper way for a deviant woman—be she witch or feminist—to be dealt with. Instead of punishing the witches who use traditional “women’s work” as a form of empowerment (by burning, hanging, or ostracization) these novels show witches who participate fully in their communities, gain economic power, find love, and even acceptance and healing. Traditional witch narratives would tell us society should hate these women, but instead, they adapt to a changing world, and revolutionize the roles that might have been seen as rigid and unchanging into new, flexible choices. When there are consequences, they actually serve to make the witch even more powerful and influential in her community. In *Mistress of Spices* because Tilo loses her business and position as “Mistress,” she actually gains a real, potentially fulfilling life and a body that fits her inner soul. This new life rejects her culture’s restrictions that do not allow women with power to be young and fertile. Her new name of Maya reflects this. Tilo explains that Maya means “Illusion, spell, enchantment, the power that keeps this imperfect world going day after day. I need a name like that, I who have only myself to hold me up” (*Mistress of Spices* 338). She becomes a normal woman who negotiates each day with change and self-power, rather than staying the same all the time, holding herself up in an “imperfect

world.” Instead of death and punishment, and even after disobeying “the rules” and striking out on her own, Tilo finds, like the witches of *Practical Magic*, a new life, as well as the power to produce her own fulfillment, and to question received reality.

These women as witches make their own power-structures, and are not “punished,” miserable lonely women living outside of society; instead, they have great influence and help to strengthen their respective communities. Their domestic magic power shows women with power as a norm, thus the novels normalize both the idea of empowerment and the idea that it can come through everyday tasks that have previously been ignored or dismissed as trivial women’s work. Domestic Magical Feminism is not *either* power *or* feminine skills like the domestic, but power *because of* domesticity. Through characters who negotiate themselves into powerful places of “and/and,” the witches in these texts are important for feminist study for a number of reasons. As texts that feature women struggling with various positions of authority and power within contemporary culture, these Magical Feminist domestic fictions reflect how much feminism has permeated all aspects of modern life, so much so that many of the issues these characters and texts deal with are not portrayed deliberately as about feminism, but about life in general. While none of the witches we encounter are unproblematic poster children for feminism, their portrayals demonstrate multiple layers of complex negotiations of gender and power, (as well as race and class) in a manner that reflects contemporary feminism’s continuing, complex need for dialog

about these categories of influence on our lives.

In this chapter, I discussed the way in which the image of the domestic witch has been rewritten as a positive force for empowerment, including economic self-reliance, through the kitchen witch's use of traditional women's knowledge, for example, domesticity and other so-called "feminine" wiles. This chapter relied on a third-wave feminist idea that feminist arguments had missed the power in so-called traditional women's actions. Moving slightly away from third-wave feminism, in the following chapter, I will examine how economic empowerment might be found through a religious framework that includes ideas considered "magical" like possession and foreknowledge of the future. Though very different from the European witch, the Voudun magic-woman uses magic in a way that is very much related to her abilities as a woman, and she is often mis-characterized, like the European witch, as evil because of her difference from mainstream culture. In this way, both European witch and Afro-Centric Voudun priestess bear enough similarities to invite comparison and discussion of the differences and strengths; both the witch and the Voudun priestess are feminist in the sense that their very existence challenges Eurocentric patriarchy's strangle-hold on power, and in so-doing, allow readers of texts which feature them to examine woman's power in new and revealing ways.

CHAPTER IV

VOUDUN ECONOMICS: POSSESSION AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH
MAGICAL FEMINIST CAPITALISM

“Got a black cat bone/ I got a mojo too/I got a John the Conqueror Root,/I’m gonna mess with you.” “Hoochie Coochie Man” Muddy Waters, 1954

“You will do well, but you need the Black Cat Bone. Sometimes you have to be able to walk invisible. [. . .] We went out to catch a black cat. I must catch him with my own hands. [. . .] when the water boiled I was to toss in the terrified, trembling cat. When he screamed, I was told to curse him. [. . .] The bones of the cat must be passed through my mouth until one tasted bitter. [. . .] Before day I was home, with a small white bone for me to carry.” From *Mules and Men*, 220-221. Zora Neale Hurston. 1935.

In 1980, during his presidential campaign, George H. Bush used the phrase “voodoo economics” to describe Ronald Reagan’s economic policy. The phrase was a home-run, a soundbite moment of speech writing which has stuck with us since then as a label that means manipulative, fake, and even deceptive policies put forth by government agencies, especially related to the economy. The phrase has not remained limited to the economy, though, and as John Bartkowski points out, the phrase has expanded beyond economics and into the popular imagination, supported by the media, to rest on the characterization of Voudun⁴⁴ as “lies, impotent superstition, and trickery” (567). Bartkowski reveals that as recently as the 1990s, “the Army’s leading expert on unorthodox religions,” Chief Warrant Officer James Dibble, portrayed Voudun and Santeria⁴⁵ in *Mother Jones* magazine as “analogous to the drug threat” and stated that

the U.S. has “a problem with nontraditional groups in this country.” Dibble further alleged that “Both Satanism and Voodoo have potential for diabolical use” (qtd in Bartowski 566). As this misrepresentation shows, in the public mind, Voudun remains a murky, dangerous threat, akin to devil worship. Descriptions of magical rituals within these non-white cultures seem frighteningly alien and exotic to the “middle America” that the government was playing to when Dibble made these claims, and any mention of alternative beliefs instead are portrayed as evil. Bartowski’s article argues that in popular culture in the U.S., Voudun has been portrayed as “black” or “hex” magic for a long time, and that these portrayals largely ignore any evidence that suggests Voudun as instead a religion practiced by many African-American and Afro-Caribbean people (as well as whites) that “has acted as a positive force in the lives” of those adherents and has “played a pivotal role historically in sustaining the African cultural continuum and in promoting Haitian liberation from colonial domination” (559). Arguments like Bartowski’s, however, do not seem to get very far at changing the perception of Voudun as at best, fake, and at worst, evil.

In direct opposition to this portrayal of Voudun as an empty, superstitious cult of black magic where practitioners use fakery and human sacrifice to frighten the populace into submission, or even a system of manipulation or deception, this chapter argues that the Afro-Caribbean Voudun in Nalo Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and the Voudun-inspired gods created in Sean Stewart’s *Mockingbird* (2000)

are Magical Feminist forces for modeling positive empowerment in the lives of the novel's characters, largely because of the monetary empowerment those characters are able to acquire via those systems of magical religious belief. That these characters then use the self-reliance provided by new financial power– the Voudun Economics– they acquire to support their infant children shows the inherent feminism in economic empowerment, and allows both texts to function as a means of teaching the feminist philosophy of power through self-sufficiency. It is no accident that the famous quotation from Virginia Woolf that a woman needs “500 pounds and a room of one's own” to be a woman writer has become a slogan for feminism, and not just for women writers. Women need economic self-sufficiency and privacy in order to seek and gain any kind of success. Money is power, and in these novels, the ability to earn money and therefore support one's family directly equals power for these women.

Viva la Voudun!: Religion as Féministe Resistance and Preservation

“Marassa élo, I have no mother here/who can speak for me./ Marassa élo I have left my mother in Africa./ Marassa élo I have left my family in Africa/ I have no family to speak for me/ I have no relations to speak for me/ Marassa élo.”
(invocation to the Twins, Qtd. in Métreux 152-3)

Voudun is popularly best-known and much-maligned as a form of black⁴⁶ magic wherein its practitioners dance around killing chickens and creating zombies,⁴⁷ but in reality, it is as much a powerful anti-patriarchal religion as anything else, and often a force for positive power and change within the communities wherein it has flourished.

As the invocation to the Twins⁴⁸ in epigraph shows, Vodoun is a way of speaking the unwritten history of family, and through it, preserving (even if with changes) a culture that might have been completely lost from (among other things) the oppression of slavery. Vodoun is an example of a type of religious magic which, in its foundation and innate nature, resists hierarchy, empowers the poor and disenfranchised, and has preserved hope and history in several non-dominant cultures. As such, the greatest real-world magic of Vodoun may be its ability to inspire great societal change. As early as 1959, Alfred Métraux, in his foundational anthropological study *Voodoo in Haiti* (1959), wrote about the complex hegemonic exchange of power and fear in Vodoun's history as he asserted about the complex relationship between those with power and those without:

Man is never cruel and unjust with impunity: the anxiety which grows in the minds of those who abuse power often takes the form of imaginary terrors and demented obsessions. The master maltreated his slave, but feared his hatred. He treated him like a beast of burden but dreaded the occult powers which he imputed to him. And the greater the subjugation of the Black, the more he inspired fear [. . .] it was the witchcraft of remote and mysterious Africa which troubled the sleep of the people in "the big house." (15)

In "troubling the sleep" of those with power, Vodoun gave its practitioners a little bit (and eventually, a lot) of power over their own situation. If "the master" feared the

hatred of the slave, and feared the consequences of pushing that slave too far into dangerous magic, perhaps fear mitigated his actions somewhat. Certainly, the more cruel such a master was, the more s/he had to fear from a slave population's hatred. Voudun, mostly, gave the slave enough hope, power, and social connection to continue resisting complete acceptance of slavery.⁴⁹ Voudun's power to resist and to shape events amounts to more than superstition, more than even religion.⁵⁰ The religion is a hybrid of complex power exchange between what should be competing forces which, in the mind of the Voudun believers, live in harmony: traditional folk beliefs and Catholicism. In an article about Marie Laveau, Professor Ina Fandrich quoted the saying "in Haiti, 80 percent of the population is Catholic and 20 percent is Protestant, but 100 percent is voodoo" (Calongne para 13). As a religion which is a fusion of the Catholicism of patriarchy's slave-owners and the often more matriarchal religions brought along with the slaves, Voudun takes what it likes from the oppressor's religion, reshapes it, pays lip service to the rules and then radically rewrites the society in which it thrives. As a literary trope, then, Voudun is compatible with feminism in its means, ends, and goals. Both Voudun and feminism work to overthrow an oppressive status quo that gives one group power over another on the basis of an unfair system, and both do so by using "the tools of the master" but in a way that transforms those tools so that the slave has power over the master, the weak over the strong.

Voudun provides a way for those out of power to fight back against those who

would abuse its devotees, as Métreux argues: “for the slave, the cult of spirits and gods, and of magic too, amounted to an escape; more, *it was an aspect of the resistance which he sustained against his lot*” (emphasis mine, 31-2). Voudun allowed the slave the ability to resist complete assimilation into an alien society that treated him/her as chattel. For example, Voudun played an important role in the slave uprising and subsequent rebellion of 1791-1804 which made Haiti the first black independent republic, as Sidney W. Mintz argues: “*vaudou* surely played a critical role in the creation of viable armed resistance by the slaves against the master classes– and against the armies of other powers besides France, interested in resubjugating the once immensely powerful colony” (11). Haiti was able to retain that hard-earned independence from other countries because many feared the strength of the country’s leaders, who in turn, traced at least part of that strength to their religion. But even more importantly, Voudun helped form the cultural memory of the people of Haiti, and its art, literature, and folklore are all influenced by the religion, in one way or another. Métreux argues: “In spite of brutal uprooting from their own social milieu, the slaves contrived to resurrect, in exile, the religious framework in which they had been brought up” (30). In resurrecting this ancestral religious system, the slaves created the first black-led New World country, where they were in at least some control of their lives, and they managed to create a hybrid system where the past, present, and future were under their own control rather than the control of slaveowners.

First, we should briefly examine the structure of the religion. While there are so many different types of religious practice that can be characterized as Voudun, and each practice is as individual as the people who practice it and the places where it can be found,⁵¹ there are some similarities that most Voudun practitioners have in common. These include a “body of basic beliefs and practices that typify *voudou* throughout Haiti: the twin cult, the *loa* and their specific personifications, the phenomenon of possession, the role of the dead, the relationship between gods and the land, and much else, [which] provide a core of belief” (Mintz, in Métreux intro 13). Voudun is not organized in the same manner of Christian religions— there is no one leader, or head of the church, and no established doxology. Within Voudun’s pantheon we do find acknowledgment of an all-powerful god, but he is believed to be distant and unconcerned with the daily workings of human life. As Mami Gros Jeanne explains in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the *loa* are “the ones who does carry we prayers to God Father, for he too busy to listen to every single one of we on earth talking at he all the time” (Hopkinson 126). So, Voudun practitioners appeal to the *loa*, patron gods based (sometimes loosely) on a transplanted African pantheon, for help in various daily aspects of their lives. In a sense, the *loa* are very like Catholicism’s saints— instead of bothering a distant God, who is “too busy” for the everyday problems of humanity, the Voudunienne asks Erzuli for help with matters of love, Baron Samedi for help with issues of life and death, Ogu for help with disputes, etc. In return for intercession, the

loa might possess the body of the querant, to fulfill the god's needs and pleasures. The religion varies depending upon where it is practiced, from Cuba to New Orleans, and each individual practitioner may have a different focus and ritual. Aside from the basics, with all the differences in Voudun, it would be hard to briefly pin down an exact nature of all aspects of the religion, which is one of its strengths. Therefore, for the purposes of our discussion, we will focus on at least defining the ritual practice of possession by the *loa*.

Possession is defined by Métreux as when “a *loa* moves into the head of an individual having first driven out [. . .] one of the two souls that everyone carries. [. . .] The relationship between the *loa* and the man seized is compared to that which joins the rider to his horse. That is why a *loa* is spoken of as ‘mounting’ or ‘saddling’ his *chual* (horse)” (120). Métreux argues for possession’s “fundamental role in the framework of Voodoo” (120) and devotes a large portion of his discussion to the conditions under which a person is possessed, how they appear during possession, and what kinds of possessions might occur depending upon the needs of the possessed. According to those possessed, the *loa* are there to protect the Voudun practitioner when s/he has no power to protect him/herself, to give a person strength and information. Métreux records a “profession of faith” that he says “sums up, fairly well, what the devotees of Voodoo expect from the *loa*” (95):

The *loa* love us, protect us and guard us. They tell us what is happening to our

relations who live far away, they suggest to us remedies which bring us relief when we are sick . . . If we are hungry, the *loa* appear to us in a dream and say: “Take courage: you will earn money” and the promised money comes.” (95)

The *loa*, then, offer the help that extended family, lost forever in the Middle Passage, would give to those who have been taken away from that family. The *loa* are the larger community of influence that would have provided comfort, aid, and protection for the individual in the world. The *loa* guide their “horse” on decisions of great importance in their lives, and often provide the answers for the possessed when no other help can be found. In a large way, the *loa* influence the daily lives of the Voudun believer in a way that the distant Christian God never does, and thus, one can see their appeal for helping change an unfair system, and their usefulness in a work of fiction that speculates on great, yet intimate and immediate societal change.

Partially using possession, characters addressed in this chapter find a way to empower themselves financially, and by embracing the benefits that the period of being possessed grant them, each character finds her own way of dealing with the issues at hand, and finds a means to empower herself financially, for the good of herself and her family’s lives. In this way, Voudun becomes a partner to feminism, becoming a means for the women of the novel to resist the problems of poverty and lack of control in their lives.

Afro-Caribbean Voudun and Speculative Fiction in *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* was a winner of the Warner Aspect First Novel Contest. Hopkinson has received many awards for her work, including the World Fantasy Award, the John W. Campbell Award, the Phillip K. Dick award for science-fiction in paperback, and the Ontario Arts Council Foundation Award (Collier 443). The novel also won the Locus Award for Best First Science Fiction Novel (Nelson 97). Her work has received this critical acclaim largely because it challenges genre expectations, manifesting a richness of culture that transcends definitions of fantasy, science fiction, or women's writing, and makes us aware of the power of all storytelling that challenges expectations of identity.⁵² Sarah Wood argues that "Hopkinson locates *Brown Girl* at the margins of science-fiction, thus making use of the malleability of this territory's boundaries in order to offer a space for possible new emergent identities" (216). The novel uses this malleability in the margins of several genres to create several new epistemologies of women's power. The text is part science-fiction and fantasy, part post-apocalyptic coming-of-age story and part age-old mythic folktale— and most importantly for its status as a Magical Feminist text, it uses many of the elements of the religion Voudun to develop the story's search for power and identity. These elements include prophetic visions, ritual, herbalism, and possession by the *loa*. These elements help the novel's protagonist become a figure of strength through her growing awareness and acceptance of the intricate blending dance

of her Afro-Caribbean roots and culture with the Canadian world in which she lives.

The novel is set in Canada and makes heavy use of Caribbean folklore and myth; Sarah Wood argues that the Caribbean maintains a “striking but ethereal presence” (217) in the novel. She asserts that the novel is both the “speculative fiction” that Hopkinson calls it and a kind of “syncretic fiction” that rewrites genres and “challenges our assumptions” about the structure of science fiction and fantasy, as well as our assumptions about boundaries of nation and postcolonial narratives (225). This syncretic fiction is Magical Feminism, challenging the borders of genre at the same time it models shifting boundaries of class, race, and gender. Even with its setting in the soon-to-be-accomplished future, or even a modern-day Toronto, the practice of Voudun in the novel retains a strong element of real tradition one would recognize as Voudun immediately— from the presence of the *loa* in everyday lives and their influence on important real events, to the specific rituals we see Ti-Jeanne practice.

How or why does this Canadian-written, Afro-Caribbean text participate in a dissertation on Magical Feminism? John Lowe, in “Calypso Magnolia, the Caribbean Side of the South” argues for a re-definition of the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico as having the influence on the Americas that the Mediterranean has on Europe and the Middle East. Lowe points out the way that Caribbean cultures were spread throughout the Americas, from South to North America and the United States in between. He argues that by defining American Literature only in terms of the artificial borders of the

modern United States, we miss out on important historical, cultural, and literary influences in our postmodern, global culture. The influence of the *entire* Americas, all of the land surrounding “our Mediterranean” should, he claims, create a more complete understanding of cultural change and growth.

The claim that New Orleans is the center of our American Mediterranean, and reminder that the Louisiana Purchase stretched from New Orleans far north to the Canadian border “insists on a criollo cultural model of coastal rims, ideally thought of as a cradle of myth and legend” (Lowe 55). Lowe reminds us of the *Odyssey*’s opening lines “Many pains he suffered, heartsick on the open sea” and draws a parallel with the pains of the Middle Passage suffered by many who became the residents of the Caribbean. I would add that it is important to consider the migration of a large group of Canadian French to Louisiana, those who became Cajuns/Acadians came south to the lands just south of New Orleans and have had great influence on the cradle of “Our Mediterranean,” as well. Finally, the connection, via the Mississippi River, between New Orleans as the U.S. home to Hoodoo and parts north also reflects the transmission of slavery’s influence North, to freedom and Canada. A virtual route of transmission can be traced over the entire breadth of North America.

Sarah Wood points out that Canada has officially recognized itself, in 1971, as multicultural (318). Thus, exploring a Canadian Afro-Caribbean text as part of an exploration of multi-cultural Magical Feminism seems not only okay but essential to an

understanding of how an image– the woman magic user– shapes us, and how that image models empowerment across genre boundaries of all kinds. Thus, the Afro-Caribbean Canadian *Brown Girl in The Ring* represents Voudun as a manner of preserving a community and resisting the larger power structures of so-called modern, or rational society. Using Voudun, Hopkinson’s novel further explores cultural trends towards a changing urban future, and her work allows us to examine a new awareness of multicultural influences in a way that illuminates feminism.

Gordon Collier argues that the novel’s title “bears on the nature of the narrative” and that by understanding the Caribbean song “Brown Girl in the Ring” we understand something of the Toronto-Caribbean protagonist’s necessary “survival skills and inventiveness” (445). He explains that the ring-game song involves a little girl who stands at the center of the ring, and must “invent a dance move, chosen by the brown girl in the center, which other girls must copy” (445). The best imitator of the dance move replaces her predecessor as master of the dance. However, I argue that in Hopkinson’s novel of this title, the imitation each girl must master in the dance is also related to possession by the *loa*. When a person is possessed by the *loa*, they perform intricate moves depending upon which *loa* is riding them, moves which are recognizable to any initiate as belonging to each particular spirit. When the “brown girl” in the center of the narrative, Ti-Jeanne, masters the ability to dance the traditional moves that define each *loa* and his/her power, she also begins to master her own dance

of balancing her cultural “moves” and power to survive. She becomes the center of her circle, leading those on the edges as she learns to teach Voudun and becomes a healer and community leader. Thus, possession is revealed as a way of modeling an intricate dance of power and cultural balance, and cultural re-centering.

In this novel, Voudun’s magic, including possession, becomes a way of refiguring the “triple threat” of “race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression” (Collins 221); imagining Voudun as an equalizer illustrates how one element can change interlocking traits of influence into benefits instead of problems. By using Voudun⁵³ to define the futuristic setting of the narrative, Hopkinson participates in a project that, by “viewing the world through a both/and conceptual lens of the simultaneity of race, class, and gender oppression and of the need for a humanist vision of community, creates new possibilities for an empowering Afrocentric feminist knowledge” (Collins 221). Hopkinson, writing in a genre which still does not include very many women writers (let alone of African or Caribbean descent,) features her character’s culture instead of blurring it, and thus, illuminates a new view of the people living within those urban centers that are often the setting of futuristic science-fiction. Hopkinson’s use of Afro-Caribbean Voudun denies the Hollywood image of Voudun, illustrating the changing beliefs and personal growth of the novel’s protagonist. The reader finds a greater understanding of Voudun as a real religion as we follow the protagonist through her experiences of possession into a life where she

has control over her own destiny in a very pro-feminist manner. Most importantly, through Voudun, Ti Jeanne's race, class, and gender actually become three prongs of her strength instead of a means of oppression; once she finds a connection, through magic, to her own powers, she then finds a career intertwined with those powers, a career that actually rises out of her race, class, and gender instead of battling with it.

The novel centers on Voudun, and especially possession by the *loa*, as one source to power and self-determination. The novel sketches the adventures of a young Afro-Caribbean woman and her Voudun priestess grandmother in a near-future but post-apocalyptic Toronto. Following a series of chaotic Riots, the government and anyone who could afford to leave the dangers of urban-blight and the city has fled to the safety of the suburbs. Anyone left in the nearly destroyed inner city, "The Burn," must negotiate new power structures largely run by gangs of Afro-Caribbean drug-dealers. Ti-Jeanne, a newly single mother whose ex-boyfriend (Tony) is a recovering drug-addict, turns to her grandmother for help. When the premier of Ontario needs a heart transplant, Ti-Jeanne and her grandmother are caught up in the life-and-death power-struggles with the ganglord, Rudy, and can no longer live in the safety the grandmother's position as community healer provides them. Mami Gros Jeanne is killed by Tony because her heart is a match for the premier's, and her heart is sold on the black market to the premier's associates. Ti-Jeanne then turns to her grandmother's

religion, including magic rituals, powers, and the *loa*, for help, and uses her new understanding of Voudun to empower herself to save her own life and the life of her child. The novel's protagonist transforms herself through her growing knowledge of her history, both familial and cultural, her growing self-confidence as a mother and person, and her connection with magic through a Caribbean Voudun tradition, which she learns through necessity and tries, at first, to reject. The reader follows her education about the tradition, and her eventual acceptance of her place within the community, seeing her grow in strength and learn to value her community as a healer/priestess. Her growing knowledge of magic, here represented by Voudun, allows her empowerment through her profession, and a choice in what to do with her life, one of the most important elements of feminist freedom.

As the novel opens, detailed descriptive passages not only sketch the scenery but characterize the power-relationship that the community has with its resident witches/Voudun priestesses. In an early sequence, Ti-Jeanne hurries home approached on the street by men "offering presents in return for 'a little time' with her" (31). Instead of seeming threatening, or even like a type of objectification, turning Ti-Jeanne into something that can be exchanged for these "presents," this scene actually illustrates Ti-Jeanne's strong position within her community. Because of their offers, we see her connection to the powerful Mami Gros-Jeanne, her grandmother, the community's healer and a powerful priestess. Instead of showing a young woman as needing to

attach herself to a male to achieve a position of authority or power or safety, this novel show the opposite as true.⁵⁴

Ti-Jeanne's power, in this relation to a powerful female community leader, arises not from fear but from respect and authority. This is a positive kind of influence and position for Ti-Jeanne, not mere *protection* but *potential*. It is also a position that Ti-Jeanne can work hard to earn for herself through education, not her body or beauty. After Mami-Gros-Jeanne is gone, Ti-Jeanne can choose her own place as the community's healer. There is a healthy respect for her status and the men do not try anything too aggressive, because, as Ti Jeanne thinks "she was Mami Gros-Jeanne's granddaughter, and nobody wanted Mami mad at them" (31). Still, it is not just fear that motivates the men to leave her alone, but respect, and Mami's professional authority as a healer and magic-woman (as well as her position in the center of the community). The men cannot risk Mami's help not being there in the future; she has power more because of her choices as a healer who gives to her community than as one who might harm them: "They needed Mami when winter coughs were racking their lungs or their women were giving birth" (31).

It is economic authority, the status of her grandmother as a medical professional, and her role as a Voudun priestess which initially grants Ti-Jeanne the safety to walk alone through the streets where even the male taxi driver hurries away in fear "mov[ing] off quickly, not even looking around for more customers" (10). The

men who approach her are not too aggressive in their sexual pursuit of Ti-Jeanne because they need her grandmother's continued help and goodwill. These scenes demonstrate the strength in what patriarchy has denigrated as a weak, female kind of job—nursing. The strength of influence shown here, center a commonly maligned role of Voudun priestess instead as respected community leader.

For Ti-Jeanne's strength to become her own, rather than borrowed from her association with her grandmother, she has to grow and accept what she has previously denied. We learn that Ti-Jeanne, as a seer who can tell the future, can “see with more than sight. Sometimes she could see how people were going to die” but she rejects the power because she considers it a part of obeah or black magic. At first she thinks that she “hate[s] the visions” (9) but they become a source of strength and power for her by the novel's end. Her ability to see visions makes her more open to the first appearances of the *loa* in her life than she might have been and make her even more respected when she finally does become a part of the community she at first shuns. Even though she doesn't initially know it, Ti-Jeanne's foreknowledge of the future is considered one of the most powerful types of Voudun. Métreux explains: “the gift most prized in a priest is second sight” (63). He also asserts that “a good *hungan* is at one and the same time priest, healer, soothsayer, exorciser, organizer of public entertainments and choirmaster [. . .] influential political guide [. . . and] accepted counselor of the community” (64). Ti-Jeanne's lack of knowledge about what one culture claims is

superstition and another seems as strength signifies a disconnect that the ritual of possession eventually helps correct.

Ti-Jeanne's patron *loa*, Papa Legba, a trickster and gateway/borderlands figure, fulfills, in part, the cultural misunderstanding Ti-Jeanne first has that her Grandmother's religion is evil. When she first meets Legba, Ti-Jeanne sees him as a devil figure, even calling him a "Jab-Jab" from the French for "*Diable*" or devil. But like Legba, Ti-Jeanne transforms, as she eventually learns to use trickery and balance to ride the crossroads between her own modern Toronto and the Toronto of her grandmother's spiritual past. She gains power when her *loa* trusts her to right the balance of magic Rudy has disrupted when Rudy uses obeah-driven black magic, to force the spirits to work for him. Legba follows her throughout the novel, first appearing as the Jab-Jab (devil) in her visions, and then later revealing himself to her in his form as her patron *loa*. As the Jab-Jab, he encourages her to stop giving her "will over into other people hands" and makes her realize she must "decide what [she] want to do for myself" (220). Eventually, Ti-Jeanne calls upon this *loa* for help when she is immobilized by the poison/drug Buff⁵⁵ and she is then possessed by eight of the *loa*, who grant her the powers of elemental magic and the radical change that they carry. They bring lightning, a flood, and inflict a wasting disease on one of Rudy's thugs. We see Ti-Jeanne changing from her initial fear of the visions of the Jab-Jab to becoming like him when she feels "a silent *kya-kya*, a jokey Jab-Jab laugh" as she figures out

“like the spirit tree that the centre pole symbolized, the CN Tower dug roots deep into the ground where the dead lived and pushed high into the heavens where the oldest ancestors lived. The tower was their ladder into this world.” She thinks it is “A Jab-Jab type of joke, oui” (221).

Ti-Jeanne finds enlightenment through her intuitive vision of the tall building at the same time as she identifies with the laughter of the trickster figure. “With a flash of instinct” she realizes that the modern Toronto symbol of power where she is trapped can also be a hybrid crossroads for traditional power, and the insight opens her further to the *loa*’s possession. Shango and Oya arrive first, and then come Oshun and Emanjah, “water goddesses both” (222). None of them leave her body, before Shakapana, “lord of disease” (222) shows up. The poisons brought by Shakapana are eased when Osain “the healer” arrives, and then further taken away by Ogun “who-wields-the-knife” (222). Finally, Papa Legbara/Legba, Prince of Cemetery arrives. Each of the *loa* trust Ti-Jeanne because she, like her grandmother, serves the spirits instead of demanding they serve her. Ti-Jeanne dances the *loa*’s personas and through their powers, turns her weakened position— immobilized by the drug— into a strong one where she defeats her physically stronger enemies. In turn, the *loa* are able to defeat Rudy and solve a problem that had put their own powers out of balance.

The complex nature of power as both tool and threat is also shown here because while the *loa* give her power, they also put her life in danger. After Ti-Jeanne is

possessed by all eight *loa* and therefore is able to defeat the more experienced magician, Rudy, Papa Legba admires Ti-Jeanne's strength in channeling the power of others, of being a "vessel," but warns: "you do a thing I never see nobody do before. For a few minutes there, you hold eight of the Oldest Ones in your head one time. [. . .] Do not try it again, eh? It could burn your brain out" (229). Ti-Jeanne's service to her community guarantees that when she needs power, the *loa* grant her their strongest magic through their possession of her, at the same time warning her of the danger of too much power.

The gaining of this power shows Ti-Jeanne's strength as well. Guided by the literal spirit of Mami Gros-Jeanne, as well as the teachings of her strong grandmother, Ti-Jeanne shows a natural ability for magic that few others can handle. This, as the most obviously magic scene in the novel, brings the reader the climax of the story and illustrates the authority and power of a woman who serves the community. This moment illustrates basic principles of the magic of Voudun through possession by ancestral spirits and service to those spirits. It also shows that power is not simply a one-way exchange, that there are dangers associated with it as well and, in so doing, the novel demonstrates a feminist but alternative path to empowerment: acknowledgment and understanding of one's culture, tradition, and history.

Finally, at novel's end, Ti-Jeanne has temporarily taken over Mami's role as spiritual leader and teacher, gaining her own position of authority by becoming a

central authority and healer in her community. Because of her healing practice and role as herbalist and Voudun priestess, Mami's influence on the community reaches even past her death, and we see this influence extend to Ti-Jeanne. In a final moment of the novel, Ti-Jeanne sees her old goat, Harold, suddenly look up at her and sneeze "Eshu!" Then, she "briefly could see his bones through his flesh. Another vision, a joke from her spirit father" (244). Ti-Jeanne answers the trickster's reminder of mortality: "Well, Papa, look my answer here. I go do this for a little while, but I ain't Mami. I ain't know what I want to do with myself yet, but I can't be she" (244). We see, then, that while Ti-Jeanne has not yet decided where she will go, and what she will do for a living, she will not be bullied into someone else's life, even by her patron *loa*. The potential we see in her at novel's beginning is still being realized, but it is potential that she is choosing to control.

The novel shows a powerful woman using her interlocking cultural traits as strengths, and in so-doing, demonstrates a feminism at its core that models (among other things) self-agency, self-sufficiency, and cultural self-love. Ti-Jeanne's economic empowerment as a healer who can make a living as the community's doctor is hand in hand with the personal power that illustrated by her forgiveness of her boyfriend, Tony. Tony says "I don't know how a person learns to be so strong" (246). She has the strength to realize his weakness and forgive him, even while she will not forget. Ti-Jeanne now feels in control of her own life, and that control is something gained

through her experiences of Voudun possession. Experiencing the strength of the gods helps her realize her own strengths. By coming to terms with and then using her Afro-Caribbean magic, rather than using the energy of that community in a self-serving way, Ti-Jeanne comes to terms with her own sense of power and maturity.

“Cash is Cold”: *Loa* as The Riders in Sean Stewart’s *Mockingbird*

In Sean Stewart’s *Mockingbird* (2000) we find a form of Voudun created by the protagonist’s mother, whose *loa*— The Riders— change the protagonist’s life, empowering her to self-reliance and strength that places the novel into the Magical Feminist canon. The novel received a number of critical accolades, including being nominated for the World Fantasy Award, being named *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year, *Speculations* Readers’ Poll Best Book of the Year, and being picked as one of the top novels of 1998 by *Locus*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror* (seanstewart.org). This critical acclaim illustrates how appealing the idea of a strong woman character who experiences a kind of magical power as growth can be as the novel explores new interpretations of women’s power.

This women’s power arrives in the form of a folk-magic and system of *loa* which is not a recognizably traditional Voudun, but one that shares enough of the characteristics of the religion— including (and especially) possession by the gods— to be *Southern Living Magazine* meets Voudun— New Orleans interpreted by Houston. Like *Brown Girl in the Ring*, it is a “hybrid” novel which combines two cultures— the

Houston world of a middle class white family plus the world of Voudun. Also like *Brown Girl in the Ring*, it marks a threshold of multicultural magic that redefines American Literature as a literature of possibilities across the entire Americas. I include it here to illustrate that Magical Feminism challenges and crosses borders in addition to those of science-fiction and fantasy; Magical Feminism also is written by authors across genders. You do not have to be female to be a feminist, and Stewart's novel demonstrates this. The novel redraws generic borders when it shows how Voudun's influence has expanded throughout multiple cultures, including many layers of class and place. Across those cultural boundaries, the novel explores the nature of magic and our own personal gods, thus, the things that haunt the idea of American identity and especially women's power. The novel is very much about finding one's own identity amidst the things that struggle to "possess" us, and as the protagonist and her sister deal with their mother's strong identity, we find an exploration of roots, magic, and family.

If the novel is about empowerment, but does not explicitly call itself feminist, then can it actually be a feminist text? Stewart, as a male writer creating strong female characters, has been hailed as "one of those daring male writers who can write from a female point of view and make it work" (*Analog* review, qtd. seanstewart.org). Stewart comments "It's sort of a depressing indictment of how far behind the feminist curve we still seem to be that this alone is enough to get me singled out in the *Times* as a writer of women" (Antell para 12). In this he seems to resist being labeled a feminist writer.⁵⁶

But it is not simply writing from a female point of view but writing from an empowered female point of view, and not alienating, romanticizing, or objectifying women he creates that puts him ahead of the feminist curve as a writer for women. His voice appeals to women readers, as he recounts in the same interview that he “once got stopped by a clerk in the bookstore who whispered to me that there were things in the dreaded Chapter 8 of *Mockingbird*⁶⁷ that ‘I’ve never even told my best girlfriends’”

(Antell para 15). Stewart says on his website notes about *Mockingbird*’s writing that

It’s an odd novel. A lot like a “woman’s book” (you know what I mean, Doris Lessing and Margaret Atwood, Anne Tyler *und so weiter*) only, um, sunnier. And with more Zombie Frogs. It could have been a much, much darker book: the plot elements could almost make *Bastard out of Carolina* or *Beloved*; one of those absolutely wrenchingly painful women’s novels. I didn’t do that. Part of me felt it would be inappropriate, somehow; or perhaps I just lacked the guts or imaginative empathy. I hope that wasn’t it. (“Praying For Lightning” np)

Gerald Jonas of *The New York Times Book Review* opines: “What distinguishes Sean Stewart’s *Mockingbird* is that Antoinette Beauchamp, the likable and believable first-person narrator, does not have to beat men at their own game to make a mark in her world” (“Science Fiction” 1). Rather than “beating men at their own game,” Toni recenters the game to take a place in *her* court— that of a woman blessed (or cursed) with magical abilities.

Infusing these enthusiastic reviews and Stewart's own debate about being a male writer writing "a woman's book" is the idea that by writing strong female characters, Stewart should be classed with other writers who write about strong women characters from a perspective that has been labeled "feminist." Stewart even places himself in the pantheon of important, politically minded writers like Margaret Atwood (who also resists the feminist writer label), Doris Lessing, Dorothy Allison, and even Toni Morrison, even if he doesn't label himself that way. Perhaps it is a sign of being a bit "behind the feminist" curve that merely having a strong female character gets one classed as part of a political movement, as Stewart worries, but both the critical acclaim plus the popular appeal signified at being "singled out" by women who feel he gets it right make this a popular women's novel with strongly feminist moments. The novel delves into topics such as a woman's feelings about impending motherhood, post-partum depression and infanticide, child abuse, fertility technologies, alcoholism, a woman's position relating to pornography, as well as a woman's place in a male-dominated profession. Those topics alone make it worthy of exploration from a feminist lens, and probably worthy of the label a feminist novel. Combine these feminist topics with its unconventional depiction of Voudun and we see a kind of novel that illuminates how class, race, and gender have evolved in post twentieth century literary texts. If a white, male, southern writer can convincingly write a novel of a white women's exploration of a religion more commonly associated with Haitian black

culture, then we can see the way political changes have come a long way from assuming a male writer cannot accurately portray feminism in a text about women. *Mockingbird's* version of Voudun illuminates other more traditional depictions of religious issues in the South⁵⁸ and shows a complex negotiation of race, class, gender, location and other factors on modern identity.

The novel tells the story of a magical matrilineage, including Toni Beauchamp—“pronounced BEECH-um” (4)—and her family, immediately following the death of her mother, Elena Beauchamp, who created gods—the Riders—based on “something she had seen in New Orleans when she was younger” (3).⁵⁹ This creation of a religion by that “middle class white family” could seem like the worst sort of cultural appropriation, but because Toni and the family take the Riders as seriously as they do, instead of assimilation and appropriation, the creation of the Riders seems more like reverence and a kind of cultural hybridization. Though she did create her gods, because the magic Elena performs has real results, there is nothing of fakery or deception to the feelings around the Riders; there is a strong sense of respect for them, even if the respect is sometimes tinged with fear and dislike. When collector/academic Dr. Manzetti wants to buy the fetishes of her mother’s Riders, Toni complains of losing her identity to the *loa*: “If you wouldn’t trade a god for thirty pieces of silver, then you’re a damn fool [. . .] I’d just like to see how much you’d like it” (137). This complaint reflects fear and strong resentment, but not disbelief or trickery. Along with

this dislike, there is always the strong sense that the family feels the Riders are real. Although the novel never explicitly says this, there is the strong implication that Elena named the gods and created symbolic fetishes for them because they existed for her already, and she needed labels for them. Toni tells us right away that “it is embarrassing to admit that your mother can see the future, read minds, perform miracles, and raise the dead” (1). Following her death, Elena tricks Toni into inheriting the Riders, “small gods” who possess first her and then Toni. Toni only begins to understand herself once she learns to understand the Riders, and through them her mother; it is through the depiction of these Gods as *real*, and this unconventional Voudun, that the protagonist comes to terms with her identity as a woman and learns to be economically and emotionally empowered in her own life.

Toni says that “this is the story of how I became a mother” as one of the first lines, and throughout the novel, we learn of her struggles with her image of her own mother versus the kind of mother she wants to be. She loses her job as an actuary following her mother’s funeral and needs to find a source of income, which is where the gods come in. The gods prod her along her path to finding balance and her own identity, as well as to help her find a source of income and therefore financial independence. Her sister, who shares her mother’s ability to see the future (but only happy things), eventually gets married during a hurricane to Carlos Gonzales, a shaman/car detailer who drives a “spirit car” decked out in portraits of his deceased

ancestors, called the Muertomobile. Magic runs in the entire family, and remains a strong part of what makes them who they are. Both Houston sisters also meet the non-magical sister their mother left behind years ago while in Canada, to whom Elena guiltily leaves her monetary estate. At first, the gods possess her and wreak havoc on Toni's life, to various effect, but finally, Toni gains self-possession within the situation. The novel ends just as Toni's contractions become serious, with Toni speculating on what characteristics of her mother's gods and strengths she will pass on to the soon-to-arrive daughter.

Aside from these interesting plot elements, it is in the novel's representation of the Riders, the novel's *loa*, that shows how the characters change and grow most throughout the novel, and how Toni finds, especially through Voudun-inspired possession, personal power to control her own identity and destiny. The Riders are described with intricate detail, and each one represents an important skill for a person to have. The name Riders comes from how Voudun *loa* are said to "ride" the "horse" (the possessed) through the act of possession, during ritual and in everyday surroundings. Lisa Wenger⁶⁰ argues that the Riders "mirror needs and desires of modern humanity: reflection, morality, sexuality, laughter, direction, money/material, and locating [one's] place within society" (155). At the same as the Riders mirror human needs, they also, like traditional Voudun *loa*, have their own needs, which they fulfill while they possess first Elena and then Toni.

Elena's, and then Toni's relationship with personal Voudun gods may seem like an odd thing for a middle-class white woman⁶¹ to be involved with, but it is not unusual for a practitioner of Voudun to find individualized, personal *loa* that might not be named yet in another location. According to Métreux, "the Voodoo pantheon is always enriching itself with new 'mysteries.' [. . .] many *loa* of equally humble beginnings have been promoted from family level to regional level— and even to national level" (83-4). Métreux also explains that he does "not think there exist any two catalogues of *loa* exactly the same. It is true that most of the 'great *loa*' have secure and unquestioned positions, but others and, not necessarily the least important, are placed sometimes in one category and sometimes in another" (86). As a religion that is hybridized, and based on many different influences on many different practitioners, and one without any real doctrinal head, it is not unusual to imagine that there are various different members of the Voudun pantheon. Basically, the practice of creating a new set of *loa* is completely within the framework of Voudun as a religion, and while Elena, and then Toni, are not dealing with traditional *loa* of Voudun, the small gods represented by the Riders⁶² are intended to be a representation of a practical, home-made Voudun, and they do bear many similarities to recognized Voudun *loa*.

While they are similar to Voudun *loa*, the Riders are also a woman's home-made gods, created out of craft materials and dolls, that symbolize each god's powers. They are created by this woman as a way of controlling and understanding her magical

abilities, and coming to terms with her own powers. There is a strong domestic nature in the dolls' creation; each one is painstakingly crafted and its features and offerings are symbolic of its functions. There are six of them, "plus the Little Lost Girl" (11).⁶³ The descriptions of the Riders make them fascinating examples of women's understandings of what makes a religion, or a god: in other words, power.

The home-made/domestic elements that make up each Rider are reflective of their power. Sugar's fetish is described as "a regular doll, only she had pointed cat's ears and eyes made from green marbles. She wore a short dress made of black lace and red patent leather shoes, and she smelled of peaches" (13). Sugar's power, then, is sex, beauty, and abundance. The Preacher is made from "a cross made from two lengths of sawn broom handle lashed together, a white dog's skull on top, a child's black Sunday coat hanging from the cross brace like a scarecrow's jacket. On top of the skull sat an old collection plate at the Baptist church turned down and worn like a hat" (12). His power is religion and austerity. Pierrot is "the only store-bought doll [. . .] found in the French Quarter" (13), and his power lies in humor, both sacred and profane. There is also the Widow, "whose body was a long stoppered test tube filled with dried-up spiders. Her head was a red pincushion, her eyes were glossy black buttons, and her hair was made of needles and pins. The Widow smelled of scorched cloth and silver polish; a dry, burnt, dizzy smell" (14). Her power is family, tradition, and as the domestic elements of her creation and suggestion of the black widow spider suggest,

the judgement of Fate in its crone aspect. It is tempting to examine each one for its similarities (or lack of similarities) to traditional Voudun *loa*, but instead, we will deal with the two Riders who offer the most power to Elena, and thus, to Toni.

One of these two most powerful Riders described is the Mockingbird, “represented by a hand puppet, a long leather glove with the skins of two mockingbirds sewn to it” (11). The Mockingbird’s talent and power is that of mimicry, singing other people’s songs. We see this in the use of a mockingbird puppet; built only to mimic another, it is empty unless someone else fills it. There is no direct parallel to the Mockingbird in the Voudun pantheon of *loa*, but the Mockingbird best represents the ability to be possessed. In ritual possession, the Voudun practitioner mirrors the traits and appearances of the *loa* in question. The “horse” becomes the *loa* in question, while the one being possessed has his/her personality wiped out. Métreux describes: “from now on it is the god’s personality and not his own which is expressed in his bearing and words (120). Someone who is possessed by Papa Legba looks like “a small crooked lovable old man who uses a small pipe with little tobacco” and “limbs twisted and horrible to see” (Corbett 1). If someone is mounted by Ghede, they will be “dressed in a black coat, top hat, and sunglasses, [while] Ghede performs the banda dance” (Corbett 1). People possessed by Damballah become snakes, slithering on the ground and seemingly boneless. In the novel, the Rider Mockingbird mirrors, or becomes “possessed” by another person. Toni says “when the Mockingbird was riding Momma,

she became many people, changing her song every few minutes” (11). This ability to be “filled” as a puppet for the Riders is why it is important that Toni drink the Mockingbird Cordial, a potion created by Elena. The Mockingbird Cordial allows Toni to begin being possessed by Elena’s Riders; it opens a gateway to possession for the daughter who had, before then, never shown any tendencies to be possessed. In so doing, the Mockingbird opens Toni up to new experiences and strength through her relationship with the Riders’ magics. Thus the Mockingbird’s importance is that of facilitator to Toni’s possession, and her eventual path to self-sufficiency and control over the Riders as well as her own life.

From a feminist power standpoint, the other of these two most important Riders is Mr. Copper. Based on his description in the novel and his actions within the stories Elena tells the girls, Mr. Copper is most likely a cross between Damballah and Guede in the traditional Voudun pantheon. Mr. Copper is the final Rider to be described, and the most important in helping Toni establish her future. Wenger calls him “somewhat of a decadent capitalist” (154). Toni says “momma carved him from hickory wood and polished him until he gleamed. His body was narrow and tremendously thin, like a primitive African statue” (14). His cloak is made of snakeskin and he holds a spear with a head made of a rattlesnake’s rattle. When he possesses Toni, she feels snakes slither up her legs and he comes “with a smell of dust and gasoline” (14). Toni says “Mr. Copper was a user, a creature of pure power” (14) and tells us that and “he was

very good with money”(14). In his name, Mr. Copper, we find allusion to the both the mineral, copper, and the snake, a Copperhead. Damballah is a snake-figure and Mr. Copper shows up with the slither and coldness of snakes. Damballah is the creator of the universe, and as such, he is also associated with the Earth, including precious metals, i.e, copper. Like other gods of the underworld (like the Greek Hades), possession of the underworld also means possession of great wealth. His power lies in his possession of material awareness, and this shows up in Mr. Copper’s skill with money.

But Mr. Copper is not just a personification of Damballah. He also contains elements of the profane Guede, including gambling and sexual crudeness. Guede rules over games of chance, especially dice. In Mr. Copper’s cubby, Elena keeps “a pack of cards, a pair of bone dice, and a set of ivory dominos in a snakeskin case” (15). Thus, Mr. Copper influences Toni’s life through the “chance-ruled” stock market. Mr. Copper also tries to convince Sugar and the Little Lost Girl to get into his car in one of Toni’s folk stories and there is the implication that the reason is for a sexual liaison. His last power, then, seems to be influence over female sexuality. The Preacher tries to compel women to admit to getting in Mr. Copper’s car as a manner of confessing their sexual sins. Mr. Copper’s snake-related image as Damballah also takes on Eurocentric snake-imagery in its relationship with the Preacher. The snake is a Western archetype associated with women’s sin, and especially sin with relation to sexuality. When the

women confess to getting into Mr. Copper's car, the Preacher brands them with a snake on the forehead; afterwards, the women are allowed to "repent" and receive food, clothing, and comfort. So this Rider is an amalgamation of a two of Voudun's most powerful *loa*, as well as a Christian woman's interpretation of those symbols. His powers over sex, chance, and money make him a good God to be in favor with.

The most important moment in the novel for possession as a path to learn to be financially empowered appears when Mr. Copper possesses Toni and initiates her futures trading. Toni, who has lost her job, has been watching CSPAN and making imaginary trades which have been making imaginary money. But she feels too afraid to actually make any real trades, although she needs money and has been doing her homework on trading. Mr. Copper possesses Toni as she obsesses over her pregnancy, post-partum depression, and worrying over the future: "A stink of gasoline and hot dust came through the balcony door [. . .] a long, brindled snake slid across the floor toward me [. . .] something dry and smooth and terribly cold slid around my foot. It coiled around my ankle; paused; and then inched up my calf" (203). Toni wakes up five hours later and finds she has made four lucrative trades on the S&P. Toni examines the trades she made while possessed by Mr. Copper and finds that "The Rider who told Momma once that all cash was cold" makes her a profit of \$19,000. Toni thinks

I had found a way to make a living. I had found a way to combine my head for numbers with Momma's gift for prophecy. What more perfect job could there

be for a woman one-half accountant and one-half fortuneteller? [. . .] I could twist a living from my own precious art, my own secret magic. For the first time, the Riders had done me a favor in exchange for mounting me (209)

When Mr. Copper possesses Toni and forces her to commit to the trading she has been obsessing over, he pushes her into a path towards self-reliance and real power she is best suited to pursue.

The most important thing that happens as a result of Mr. Copper's possession of her is that Toni gains the confidence to create her own small business with her long-lost half sister as a futures Trader. Mr. Copper's intercession leads directly to Toni finding a way to make a living with the skills that she has acquired as an actuary "half accountant" and the skills her mother has given her "half fortuneteller." Toni capitalizes on her natural inclinations combined with her education as an actuary. If Mr. Copper hadn't possessed her, she would have sat and worried herself sick about the future and the dangers ahead of her as a new mother and would not have taken a decisive step in making things happen. As a representation of chance, the crossroads, and change, Mr. Copper influences Toni into a new direction in her life.

Instead of being a deal with the devil at that crossroads, though, Toni's new path is to possibility and power, using the magic of her version of Voudun *loa* for real, positive change in her life. Through his possession of her, this Rider gives Toni the strength of character to cross over from *thinking about* change to *making* change

happen. He takes the first leap for her, freeing her from the responsibility of possible failure. The Rider, then, removes Toni's fear and she gains the power and self-confidence to do it again, to allow her skills and education to work for her. Through the creative trope of Voudun-inspired possession, the novel illustrates the way we learn to take risks, and a woman's "leap" towards self-sufficiency.

Stewart's depiction of home-made Southern *loa* illustrates a woman's growth from reflecting her mother's issues, the things that "ride" and possess every daughter, to a full-fledged person able to contemplate life out of her mother's shadows by novel's end. The novel shows a woman coming to terms with the skills that she can use to gain financial freedom and self-sufficiency and models a coming-to-terms with the multiple selves that every woman is "possessed" by. Toni speculates

I used to think that there was only one true person living in a body, one truth surrounded by a pack of lies. Now I know I was wrong. We are all of us a hundred different selves, mother and daughters, busy professionals and lazy housekeepers, zealous reformers and incumbents on the take. And each of these women is true in her turn. Each of us is a mockingbird (278).

Ending with this note on the multiple roles a woman plays in being "true person," Stewart's novel speculates on the multiple nature of competing selves, and thus, contemplates the multiple influences on each woman's life. By modeling the way literal magic possession helps a woman gain control over her life, the novel models all

of our paths to power, and in so-doing, provides Magical Feminist inspiration.

Stewart's *Mockingbird* and Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* both demonstrate women coming to terms with their own identity as fully-grown humans partially as a result of their experiences being possessed by Voudun-inspired *loa*. The novels both use the magic of Voudun to demonstrate that leap one must make in order to grow, and it is in this use of a witchy-sort of empowerment that is the two novels feminist strength. Voudun as a religion of resistance makes a wonderful connection to feminism; its fundamental belief in magic as a force for change makes it challenge boundaries of the real. Magical Feminism is not just a product of the Third Wave Feminist movement, which has drawn criticism for being largely white and middle class (just as its predecessors in other feminist "waves"). Magical Feminist witch narratives can be, though, products of a multicultural power-seeking, post modern populace, connected to each other in ways that boundaries of genre and locale do not always recognize. The largely Eurocentric attitude toward witches as evil has extended in the U.S., at least, to cultures where magic users and healers have not necessarily participated in the same dualisms around good and evil magic. However, at the same time, the influences of a Eurocentric view towards witches has also affected depictions of cultural traditions so that they, too, have been tarred and feathered as black magic in contemporary depictions, lumping all "witches" together as bad witches.

CHAPTER V

THE “GIRL POWER BIT”: *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*’S WITCHES

CHANGE THE WORLD

“I’ve had a lot of people lining up to tell me how unimportant I am. And I’ve finally figured out why. Power. I have it. They don’t.” Buffy– “Checkpoint” (5:12)

In a moment of poking fun at its own mission statement of female-empowerment, in “Something Blue,” (4:9)⁶⁴ an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* from its fourth season, vampire bad-boy Spike quips, after Buffy’s expressions of independence, “Oh, not with the girl power bit!” But the series is very much about “the girl power bit” and most strongly so when it deals with characters who are witches. In this chapter, I will discuss major and minor characters on the series who practice witchcraft or are magically empowered, recognizing the series as a venue for a Third Wave feminist message that subtly teaches as it reaches its audience, providing a model of female agency and identity for its viewers. It therefore provides performative subject positions that inspire new evaluations of the old stereotypes of witches, as it challenges expectations of both genre and gender. It is a magical feminist text that will continue to grow in popularity even now that it no longer runs live on television, a leader in a growing canon of intelligent magic using texts.

“It’s the Mission that Matters:” The Whedonverse as Feminist Vehicle

Joss Whedon, the series creator and principle writer/director, is an avowed

feminist,⁶⁵ and his apocryphal mission statement for the show, which one can find on the DVD extras on season one, involves creating a horror text that bent the conventions of the typical female in a horror show. In *Buffy*⁶⁶, Whedon convincingly and repeatedly rewrites the figure horror's "final girl" who, as Carol Clover has argued:

often shows more courage and level-headedness than her crying male counterpart ... [but] (her gender) is compromised by her masculine interests, her inevitable sexual reluctance, her apartness from other girls, sometimes her name. . . her unfemininity is signaled clearly by her exercise of the "active, investigating gaze" normally reserved for males and hideously punished in females. (83)

As Irena Karras argues, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* defies that conventional prime-time depiction of the woman in horror, turning the conventional role of "final girl" into female hero, thwarting the expectation of female as passive, consistently showing Buffy as the moving actor rather than the passive acted upon. Buffy is rarely, if ever, the victim. Karras argues that

the most passive female character of all – and a staple of the action-adventure genre– was the victim. [. . .] often there weren't even any other female characters in the movie or show, and although the victim was part of the story, the story was never about her but about the hero. (para 10)

In contrast, Karras believes that "Buffy would be the stereotypical last girl except that

her friends are always left standing as well, and she saves not only herself at the end of each show, but all of humanity” (para 15). The series final episode shows Buffy gazing confidently back at the viewer and her future, looking back not with fear but confidence and agency, surrounded by friends and family, having “changed the world” and ready to figure out “what’s next.” So Buffy is neither victim, nor “final girl” but something else— a real female hero of her own story, and something completely new in the horror genre. This last image of Buffy gazing at the viewer predicts women as agents, active in their own future.

Whedon invented the series out of an impulse to redefine that ultimate female victim in horror, the blond girl who usually is killed (or if she’s lucky, rescued) within the genre. Whedon used the series as a way to answer the simple question: “Where are the girls? Girls who can fight, who can stand up for themselves, who have opinions and fears and cute outfits? Buffy was designed to fill that void in movies— and then, ultimately, TV” (*Fray*, “Foreward” 7). In addition to this question, there is also an oft-quoted story, included in the extras on the DVD version of the series first season, where Whedon explains how he deliberately engineered a show where the typical “blond girl who would always get herself killed” in horror movies instead is the hero who goes out and kicks ass, explaining “it’s time she got a chance to, you know, take back the night” and “I’d love to see a movie where (she) kills the monster” (qtd in Hibbs 53). Whedon further explains: “If I can make teenage boys comfortable with a

girl who takes charge of a situation without their knowing that's what's happening, it's better than sitting down and selling them on feminism" (qtd in Miller 35). This idea of subtly "selling" feminism and thereby performing an explicitly feminist ideology throughout the show is furthered when Whedon affirms "the very first mission of the show, which was the joy of female power: having it, using it, sharing it" (qtd Miller 35).

The show is not just about showing girls with power, but also showing joyfulness in that power. Here there are none of the usual gloomy, trapped post-backlash feminists that the popular media has inundated us with in shows like *Ally McBeal*, women who want a career plus marriage but are not sure how to get either. In the final season, Whedon's feminist mission statement goes even further. Whedon creates the "big bad"⁶⁷ of season seven— the First Evil, teamed up with a preacher who wears traditional Roman collar and black suit— explicitly because of a desire to "come down against the patriarchy" (Miller 4).⁶⁸ Whedon's main purpose has always been to fundamentally redefine what is "feminine" and in so doing, to teach a new way of being feminist— power, but with a girly, feminine element of difference that is celebrated as strength to be shared.

She Defied Patriarchy, A Lot: Academia and the Slayer

Critical attention to the television series ranges widely, as one would expect of a series that lasted seven years and ranges from teen horror drama to ground-breaking

genre bender, a series which inspired one writer who attended the first academic conference devoted to Buffy studies to comment about the very thin gap separating fan from academic critic:

Sure, there are plenty of “serious” academics who would accuse the “Buffy” fans of being too pop. But it’s got to be sour grapes. In the world of academic research, Jacques Lacan or Jacques Derrida may have more clout than “Buffy.” But no one wants to go to *their* pajama parties. (Zacharek 3)

The show is grouped by a fan with such heavyweights as Lacan and Derrida, but Buffy’s academic clout is specifically labeled as more fun than those big guns of the Ivory Tower theory-wars; her “pop” status is exactly what makes her appealing to the academics who consider themselves both fan and critic. The series attracts a wide fan base, including enough academic types to guarantee an academic journal devoted solely to Buffy studies, an annual academic conference⁶⁹, and a firmly growing place in a new canon of what Lorna Jowett⁷⁰, in her book *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer For the Buffy Fan* (2005) explains as “quality television.” Now that the entire seven seasons are available on DVD, critics can look at the entire Whedonverse as a complete text and analyze the full range of issues it addressed without having to speculate on “what-ifs,” a problem that plagued much criticism during the first-run of the shows.

The most common positive slant on Buffy is that she, and the show, represent a Third Wave feminism that helps redefine the Campbellian heroic ideal, and both the

series and Buffy the character fit neatly into that redefinition. Rachel Fudge speculates that Buffy is *the* third wave icon, arguing:

Buffy has the sort of social conscience that appeals to the daughters of feminism's second wave. For many of us born in the post-*Roe* era, a certain awareness of gender and power is ingrained and inextricably linked to our sense of identity and self-esteem—call it feminism's legacy. The impulse that propels Buffy out on patrols, night after night, forgoing any semblance of “normal” teenage life, is identical to the one that compels us third-wavers to spend endless hours discussing the feminist potentials and pitfalls of prime-time television. Armed with the knowledge that the world is ours to make— and that no one else will make it for us— we can't simply sit back and watch the show: We have to try to change the ending. Buffy, for her part, is resolute in her conviction that the world can be a better place, and that she can help forge it. (4)

Even when noting the complexities of an “icon” that appears on television, selling the product of girl power to a teen audience, Fudge notes the way the show appeals to the Third Wave, defined here as the Second Wave of feminism's “daughters.” Ultimately, the show does more than appeal to “feminism's daughters,” though; it exploits the feminist-inspired new awareness of the arbitrary nature of labels like “power,” “girly,” and “weak.” The show challenges gender and genre in episodes dealing with feminist issues and perpetually subverting and challenging the gender-bound conventions of a

genre that has been typically “for the boys”: fantasy/horror. As Patricia Pender convincingly argues, the show “paints a compelling picture of the promises and predicaments that attend third wave feminism as it negotiates both its second wave antecedents and its traditional patriarchal nemeses” (1). In “painting” this “compelling picture,” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* defines a difference between postfeminism as over and third-wave feminism. Like the vampires Buffy slays, patriarchy keeps getting back up, sometimes stronger, and with karate-inspired moves.

Stereotypical understandings of feminism as a monolithic one-note entity would have us believing we should be dismayed by Buffy’s cute, well-polished appearance and her youthful assertiveness and the way she seems clueless about the world before her. A third wave critic’s approach to the show must recognize that what people think is feminist may need to be rethought. This need to rethink feminism is best seen in the episode titled “Prophesy Girl” (1:9), when the Master (an ageless powerful vampire), surprised to see Buffy after leaving her for dead says: “You were destined to die! It was written!” to which Buffy replies: “What can I say? I flunked the written.” In this way, Buffy herself challenges that which was written before she showed up, and so therefore, *logos*. She, and the series about her, questions myth and tradition defined by others. If you “flunked the written” history, perhaps you are not bound by it. Like Buffy, the third wave has been accused of being ignorant about the history of feminism (Baumgardner and Richards 2000). Perhaps, though, both Buffy’s and the third wave’s

disregard for the rules of other people's definitions of the past are not merely ahistorical ignorance but a desire to challenge the "mastery" of that past for the immediate changes and challenges of the present. If postfeminism has declared feminism dead and outdated, again, Buffy (having died twice herself) knows that dead doesn't mean over.

The ambiguity and slipperiness of Whedon's feminist mission statement appears in the very first moments of the series. When the series opens, the teaser shows a cute young blonde dressed in Catholic school girl clothes, nervously looking around as she and a date sneak into the school to get up to some teen shenanigans. As the blonde girl looks around and asks if there's anything to be afraid of, anyone else there, the boy cockily reassures the blonde that no one is around. In conventional horror, this would be where that cute blonde girl, the one who appears to be quite bound up in a patriarchal context (that Catholic schoolgirl uniform, the rebellious young girl trapped in the patriarchal rules) would find herself in trouble, victim of the boy or something worse hiding in the dark. But this is when this blonde reveals her "vamp face" and attacks the boy.

Immediately we learn that on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, our expectations may be wrong; not only is the blond girl rewritten as the potential hero, the chosen one, she is also possibly the monster, the ultimate bad girl. She is the bearer of the gaze as it is reversed upon the male in the scene; he does not look at her as victim or object but she

definitely looks at him that way. Therefore, from the start, the horror genre's expected erotic potential of seeing the girl punished for her sexuality and transgression of patriarchy (represented in that uniform as well as her active gaze) is instead joyfully rewritten as she sinks her teeth into her would-be partner, becoming his punishment, not his victim. As Jowett points out, this appearance of Darla, our first vampire in the show, in the first few minutes of the pilot, "adds another spin to Whedon's oft-quoted comment" on the blonde girl in the alley (72). We are clued in right away that our expectations of horror might be used against us, that the "final girl" also might be super-strong at the same time that she is girly, dressed in pleated skirts and sweaters, and using expectations based on her appearance to her advantage. For Darla the vampire, the "girl as victim" bit is a power play designed to lure her victim to his death.⁷¹ For Buffy, the girly appearance is a tool to attract and slay the vampire who believes she is weak.⁷² For Willow, who will become Buffy's best friend and one of the most important characters on the show, the girly appearance masks a real power that grows over the seasons. Here, immediately, we see that there are no simple shades of black and white where it comes to image representation and performance of norms on this show.

But perhaps Darla's "girly" appearance (along with those of other *femme* characters on the show) perpetuates harmful stereotypes. It can be argued that this imagery fulfils a common fantasy to be passionately overwhelmed by the cute Catholic

schoolgirl. Does not the feminized, young-girl appearance of major characters represent “the tabooed symbols of women’s feminine enculturation”? (Baumgardner and Richards 136). Some might argue that Darla, along with other female villains on the show, is just another stereotypical bad girl, the same femme fatale we have seen that has been one of the only positions offered women forever and expect her to eventually be punished for her bad girl ways. There might seem to be nothing new about this character. The answer to what is new here remains complicated, as a third wave, deliberately gender-challenging show must be. The series takes seven years to explore new and always evolving portrayals of gender, both male and female, and in so doing, it always challenges its viewer to question appearances and defy stereotypes, challenging what we expect to come next. It takes looking at the entire series to understand how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* negotiates feminism because, as Whedon states “I mean, yes, I have a feminist agenda, but it’s not like I made a chart” (Udovitch 66).

Muddying the waters of feminism and representation of girls/women on TV, much of the discussion around Buffy centers on whether she as a character upholds feminist ideals as a role model or whether she might possibly undermine feminism because of her Barbie doll appearance and skimpy clothes. Some critics, and even fans, seem to conflate the character Buffy with the actress who plays her.⁷³ The ultimate impulse to damn Buffy as non-feminist for her appearance is as bad as saying she can’t

be strong because she is female, or even that a male must be aggressive and violent. Surely, third wave feminists assert, feminism has pursued and answered those arguments already and it is much more complex than simple oppression of women by men. By continuing to define anything feminine as non-feminist, we allow a male-dominated, male-valued system to continue defining femininity as bad.

In a third wave way, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* forces us to look at these portrayals as revising our expectations about appearance, including all that is “girly” and feminine about Buffy and the gang. For example, in “End of Days” (7:21), when Buffy meets the priestess of the Guardians, a secret order who created a special weapon for the Slayer, the older woman, after commenting on “how young” Buffy is, and on hearing her name says, disbelieving, “No, really.” Even though she should know the nature of the Slayer who is always young, she seems surprised by Buffy’s youth and can’t believe her diminutive, girly, perky name. Buffy “merely shrugs” and ignores the insult implied of assuming her name can’t be real; she knows who she is and is not distracted by superficial expectations. In this way, her look says “let’s get past this and move on to real power.” Just so third wavers want to get past what is divisive about feminism and focus on moving on with advancing real power.

As a venue featuring a third wave icon, and therefore one that would appeal to young women, the show is frequently declared as empowering for how it takes on the feminist task of reconfiguring that traditionally male myth of the hero in a strongly

female, especially feminine way. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and its ensemble characters like Amy, Tara, and Willow, are liminally feminist figures, challenging definitions of feminist *or* hero, girly *or* power, weak *or* strong, bad *or* good, rewriting them as feminist *and* hero, girly *and* power, weak *and* strong bad *and* good.⁷⁴ It is infinitely more complicated than the simple question: is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* feminist *or* not? Buffy's witches are a lot of things, but most often, they are female power-incarnate, and therefore, infinitely feminist.

Referring to typical stock depictions of witches in fantasy/horror, Tanya Krzywinska, in "Hubble-Bubble, Herbs and Grimoires" states:

For centuries, the witches of myth, fairy tale, and literature have seduced men, disrupted patrilinear dynasties, caused storms, danced under the moonlight with the devil, captured and baked small children, and summoned the spirits of the dead to see the future. (186)

In other words, the mythology of the witch has always been disruptive, even in its most negative depiction. She goes on to argue that, "in a departure from the usual conflation made by horror film and fairy tale of witches as evil, *Buffy* opens up witchcraft to a wealth of meanings" (189). From that wealth of meanings, we can draw the inference that *Buffy*'s witches are more than those one-note fairy tale witches; they are complex, multi-nuanced characters. Krzywinska further points out that witches and "magic has a direct relationship with the acquisition of power and its ethics" (179). From the start of

the series, the witch is more complicated than simply being a bad character; reasons for using magic as a witch range from wanting to be popular to needing witchcraft to save the entire world— various levels of exploring multiple types of power and its influence on the characters' lives. Thus, the witch on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* should be examined carefully for what is a sometimes ambiguous performative example of feminist rhetoric, power, and ethics.

It is Buffy's witch-like characteristics, as well as those of the other witches within the show, that appeal most to many of the show's viewers, and her witchy characteristics are those which relate ultimately to Buffy's final challenges to patriarchy and her power throughout the show. Her darkness throughout the series is ultimately linked to demonically granted witch-like origins of that power. Ultimately, it is through witchcraft and a matriarchal priestess cult that Buffy and Willow empower generations of women, and through this mode that the show's creators best address their final "girl power" agenda. In the series, it is witchcraft that, (as Willow says in the series finale) "changes the world," allowing for potential to become realized and formerly patriarchally controlled, hierarchically led, singular succession to become chose, matrilineal sharing.⁷⁵ It is through an analysis of the witches in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that I will discuss how popular feminism, appearing here as part of the genre of Magical Feminism, has become a pop culture staple. On *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, when it is most about "the girl power bit" it is most often about witchcraft. It is

Buffy the Vampire Slayer's witches who most consistently disrupt patriarchal myths about women and power.

The Witches and Slayers

Buffy is not specifically labeled a witch except in one episode early in the series, but even Buffy's mother can easily make the leap from Slayer to witch, blaming the bad turn the town has taken on "witches and Slayers" as though the two things are exactly the same:

This isn't our town anymore. It belongs to the monsters and, and the witches and the Slayers.[. . .] I say it's time for the grownups to take Sunnydale back. I say we start by finding the people who did this and making them pay. Joyce
 "Gingerbread" (4:11)

In examining Buffy as a witch-like figure, we can see her character as a multi-dimensional, complex figure that offers many ways of viewing feminine identity, opening up new possibilities for imagining ourselves. To start with, in the graphic novel *Tales of the Slayers*, (2002)⁷⁶ much of which is written by Whedon and meant as a history or backstory behind the series, we find one historic Slayer who is actually accused and burned as a witch (Figure 5). She suffers the punishment of the stereotypical witch who, as an outsider from her community, takes the blame for their misfortunes. This Slayer tale, written by Whedon, further shows how the Slayer's position as a superstrong woman is one that historically arouses suspicion in



Figure 5 From *Tales of the Slayers*.

communities looking for someone to persecute, and invites comparison to witchcraft. One of the last panels in that tale shows the Slayer being burned on a large version of a stake that is very similar to the stake Buffy uses to slay vampires, and the same image is echoed in the television series episode “Gingerbread”(4:11). The girl in the comic picture shares Buffy’s blonde hair and slight figure, reminders of the Slayer’s inherent vulnerability. But she also shares her strength, and the comic mentions that she lasted a very long time during the burning. Her white dress suggests her innocence, and nun-like purity. Therefore, there is enough of a comparison between Buffy as Slayer and as a witch throughout the series to examine her as performing multiple acts of feminine

power-based witchcraft throughout the series.

In “Gingerbread,” a demon masquerading as two murdered children (a la Hansel and Gretel) incites the town, led by Buffy and Willow’s mothers, to round up the teens they deem responsible for the persistence of the occult in Sunnydale. The ultimate decision to burn the teens is the mothers’ twisted way of retaking control over the town. Buffy is lumped in with Willow, who has indeed been practicing witchcraft (and after this episode studies even more) and Amy, who was the first witch to appear in the series (and who will be discussed later in this chapter). Buffy, Willow and Amy are tied to a stake in the school’s magic center, the library, with the occult books deemed offensive by the parents piled around their feet as fodder for the fire (Figure 6). The parents, caught up in witch-hunt hysteria and fear of being out of control, are taking part in what they consider a grassroots political organization they name MOO— Mothers Opposed to the Occult. The name cleverly offers a play on witch-hunt hysteria as following the herd mindlessly, criticizing those who think they are doing good when they are actually acting with no logic but reacting with emotion and fear, like cows.

The MOOs, a massed mob of parents wielding torches against their own children, gathers to watch Buffy and the other girls be the first to burn. Amy escapes by reciting a spell to turn her assailants into rats, which backfires and turns her into a rat (which she remains for several seasons until Willow finally changes her back to a human). In this the fourth season, Buffy’s mother has finally learned of Buffy’s special

calling as Slayer, and is having a hard time reconciling with her daughter as a “Chosen One.” Willow’s mother appears as well⁷⁷ and the two mothers vow to let their daughters “go with love” and Joyce wonders “what kind of mother would I be” if she let Buffy continue to, as she sees it, “dabble in the occult.” The girls finally escape when the demon’s true form is revealed as a performance of childhood and the surrounding adults run off. Its innocence and cries for vengeance against “the bad girls” are, as Buffy says, “not as convincing in that outfit” as a spell reveals its illusion of small helpless children and shows it is a large warty demon with pointy husks for teeth.

This episode is clearly meant as a reference to witch hunts in general. The mass hysteria based herd-like behavior of parents, school officials, and other students makes a comment on the ignorance, fear, and normal lack of involvement of the town’s



Figure 6 From “Gingerbread.”

residents in fighting the town's occult activities. The ease with which even her mother labels Buffy as a dangerous witch reveals how easy it might be to see Buffy's supernatural strengths as Slayer as a witch, and the knee-jerk ease with which society might consider that witch power as an evil that needs to be punished for endangering society. In this way, the show continues to rewrite expectations about female power and heroism in general. If on the show we see a witchhunt wrongly punishing the actual hero, the person that as a viewer we know is the "good guy," then what does that point out about the process of scapegoating and the sort of mass-hysteria mentality that seeks to blame others for the problems we face?

Although the series does not explicitly call Buffy a witch in any other episode, her power is linked to supernatural dark magic, and becomes more and more ambiguously dark throughout the series.⁷⁸ Buffy's power, her physical strength, and ability to heal rapidly, are supernatural in origin, and the series increasingly hints that Slayer strength is demonic in origin, and possibly evil. Even before season six's dark storyline, in season five, when Buffy meets Dracula, he hints that her power as Slayer is akin to that of the vampire, saying "your power is rooted in darkness. You must feel it" ("Buffy vs Dracula" 5:1). In "Restless" (4:22) the First Slayer repeats "Death is your power," hinting that Buffy's strength is in her ability to kill and be killed. Later, we learn that the First Slayer is raped by a demon and so takes on that demon's strengths, becoming "less human." However, it is in relation to this origin myth that Buffy

begins to rewrite her own history of power and choose a new female-centered vision, which is all part of season seven's "girl power bit," and the strongest note of empowerment on the show.

The First Slayer originally appears on the show in season four, and her character is further developed in the graphic novel. Her connection with Buffy as Slayer, and the story we read in the graphic novel, is further referenced in season seven when Buffy goes through a magic portal to meet the men who create the First Slayer, when her



Figure 7 The First Slayer, from *Tales of the Slayers*.

origin myth is acted out on the show. From the first, she is referenced as both part of Buffy and very different from her. The same character appears in *Tales of the Slayers*, the graphic novel history of the vampire Slayer, and she establishes the link with witches or darkness when the First Slayer is asked to leave the village she protects because the people are afraid of her power as “part demon.” She is given food, but quietly informed by a young village woman that since she is part demon, she must leave (Figure 7). She is also informed of the future line of Slayers that will follow her, but this is information that is hearsay, not given to her by her shamanic creators, the Shadowmen.

The shamans, rather than helping prefer to keep control over the situation themselves, keeping the Slayer in the dark about what she is and will become. The First Slayer’s demonic backstory exists in subtext within the series from early on, as the Slayer is always somewhat afraid of her powers, and always somewhat in love with darkness, even falling in love with Angel, the hundreds-of-years old vampire with brooding Romantic looks, and Spike, the vampire bad-boy turned savior. But these witchy or demonic origins are not crystal clear until the final season. Like the Slayer burned at the stake as a witch in the same graphic novel, this First Slayer is not welcome in the community that she protects; they fear her strength and power and will go to extremes to get rid of her. So Buffy’s role as hero is altered and made even more transgressive of the typical girl in horror by the nature of her power as from witch-like

origins. At the same time, we cannot see her as just a female version of the archetype of the male-hero, either, since her path does not follow those mythic quest patterns.

Witches, according to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, get their power from the devil (see Chapter I of this dissertation) or demons, and society's witch-hunters would consider that demonic power a bad thing. Using demonic power as the origin of Buffy's power as Slayer, the series alludes to Buffy as a witch but she ultimately rejects further demonization in favor of a very third-wave rewriting of the rules. In "Get it Done," (7:15) through an "origin myth re-enactment" magical exchange we learn that the source of the Slayer's, and thus Buffy's supernatural strength, speed, and rapid healing powers, (all crucial to her role as The Chosen One/The Slayer) is a supernatural rape by a demon. When Buffy chooses to resist becoming an object of demonic rape, insisting on fighting and not repeating this history, she begins the path in the final episodes towards reconfiguring her own origins, not as alone but as joined, and empowering all the Potential Slayers. The final episode's empowering sequence of "girl power" was generally hailed by critics of the series as one of the ultimate expression of strength and potential.

The image of Buffy as a witch, as the ultimate demonically dark outsider with magical strengths, changes in season seven to an image of collective, shared power. This is the strongest image of the series' final moments, depicted as a wave of sweeping power, power Buffy decides to share with all the girls who are potentially

Slayers. In changing the rules made up by a group of long-dead men, Buffy literally uses the rhetoric of freedom and choice to change the world:

So here's the part where you make a choice. What if you could have that power... now? In every generation one Slayer is born because a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up that rule. They were powerful men. (She points at Willow, who smiles nervously.) [. . .] This woman is more powerful than all of them combined. So I say we change the rule. I say my power should be *our* power. "Chosen" (7:22)

Here, Buffy, unlike the people who created the First Slayer, gives each girl gathered as a Potential the "choice" to have power together, rather than one-by-one when each girl dies to make room for a chosen "one." Buffy aligns that choice each girl makes as opposite to the way "a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago," placing the decision to become a group of power-sharing Slayers into the hands of the gathered young women.

In that Buffy-led final montage of the girls receiving their blast of Slayer power, we find an ultra girl-power moment, showing girls from multiple ethnicities and classes, ages, and body types. We see a close-up of a young girl about to hit a ball in a little league game, a heavyset young woman in a lower socio-economic class trailer park setting fighting back from a male attacker, a middle class Asian girl falling to the floor with the surge of power. The montage ends with a close-up on the little leaguer's

home-run bat, her empowerment suggested by the gleam in her eye as she knows she will hit the ball out of the fence. Here is a final image of a girl on the brink of change, meant to suggest power and potential in all, chosen one or no. Participating in a “boy’s” game, but about to whack it out of the park as even few boys could do, the girl represents Whedon’s final message that girls can and should do the things boys do.

Years ago, I saw a pink handled tool kit, in a pink box, designed for women to keep in their cars for road emergencies. The tools were cheaply made and inferior, but were coded “feminine” by their pink color and were supposed to offer women the kind of independence and self-reliance of the male-coded tool kit. In coloring the tools pink, the makers appeared to be offering a good feminine option for women of being feminine but still having what our culture defines as male “tools.” If we tried to see Buffy as a feminine version of the typical male hero with a thousand faces, who does the exact same things as that male hero, we simply have that pink tool kit that is only superficially different from the tools of the patriarchy. Buffy never actually personifies the male hero-myth with a coat of pain. But in examining Buffy as witch, we add another female-coded layer to her multi-dimensional identity. The creators didn’t just slap pink, girly color on a male icon but found ways of rewriting the feminine possibilities for identification within a heroic portrayal. In so doing, we find that Buffy as a character is definitely more than the “Barbie with a kung fu grip” that Joss Whedon imagined her to be. Barbie equals ultra feminine, pink, and girly. Kung-fu

grip equals male, G.I. Joe warrior strengths. Add “witch” to the equation and you also get more than just a coat of pink paint, you get darkness, outspoken defiance of norms, and challenge to the patriarchy. The final images of Buffy as witch, as ultimate dark-tinged outsider with magical strengths, therefore remains a third wave one of collective, multi-ethnic, shared power, and a strong ending for the series as a sweeping wave of shared, collective, girl-power.

Amy: My Mother, My (Bad) Self

We meet our first “real” witch on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in the third episode, and it is important to note that this is the first episode to deal with a supernatural threat other than vampires. This early featuring of witches in the series demonstrates the importance of the idea of exploring power through this pathway to the series overall explorations of power. In “Witch,” (1:3) Buffy has decided to try out for cheerleaders, ignoring her Watcher, Giles⁷⁹ protests, as usual. At the tryouts, we meet Amy, a friend of Willow’s, who anxiously tries out as well. We know that there will be trouble because in the introductory teaser we have seen a dark room with a boiling green cauldron, a mysteriously cloaked figure tossing in herbs and chanting, and Barbie dolls impaled and hanging from the ceiling (Figure 8). In a shorthand of a fundamentally feminist message, using Barbies for the spellcasting as makeshift voodoo dolls introduces the concept of the dangers of an unrealistic “Barbie” body image. In this funny, ironic use of the dolls we see how Whedon builds his feminist message

throughout the series; it comes when you least expect it, using humor, but portraying a serious issue at the same time. Barbies are everything the young witch that uses them as voodoo dolls is not. Where Barbie stands-in for popularity, beauty, clothes, shopping, and parties, the teen girl who uses these Barbies as voodoo dolls is in the dark, on the outside, striving for the coveted popularity she cannot get in any way other than hidden, occult magic. As the girls, especially Amy, try to conform to this Barbie-inspired “cult” of thin, beautiful cheerleader-hood, they will use all of their magic power in any way possible, and this willingness to kill the competition in order to get



Figure 8 Amy’s Barbies.

the coveted position is coded as an evil act. Thus, an icon of teen cute girlishness is re-coded as dark, menacing, and practical, rewriting our expectations of icons of power and culture from almost day one.

This symbolism indicates that there is a witch in town and that she is up to no good. During the tryouts, the first girl, who is so good she is rumored to have “turned down” the Laker Girls, performs her routine while the onlookers gawk at her skill. Obviously, she’ll make the squad. After a few minutes, we begin to see wisps of smoke coming from her pom poms, and Willow yells “That girl is on fire!” It is not, as Cordelia scoffs, hyperbole; the skilled candidate’s hands literally catch fire. When other girls who have tried out and made the squad begin to have supernatural problems, such as Cordelia going blind, and another unnamed girl having her mouth literally disappear, the Scooby gang⁸⁰ suspects a witch is casting curses to get rid of the competition for cheerleader. The feminist symbolism in these supernatural problems should be clear. To strive only for empty popularity is to risk a loss of clear vision, and a loss of one’s own voice. But the show mixes this message of feminist rhetoric with more irony: mixed in with the fear of these frightening acts of objectification is a sense of power. It is a female, cheerleading type who undoes this deadly act, not the male hero to the rescue, again.

The newly forming “Scooby gang” suspect Amy because she is so desperate, and because Willow remembers Amy’s mom as a control freak, quipping “Heil” and

remembering how Amy's mom would "freak out" if she gained any weight. Again, we see a feminist body image reflected in the show's attitude that this desire to be thin at all cost is akin to Nazi-ism and is cast as a true evil. Once they confirm that Amy is indeed a witch, they seek ways to stop her from killing Buffy, who is the next to be cursed. In the process of finding out who the real witch is, they explore the attic of Amy's house, finding the still-bubbling cauldron and the creepy Barbies hanging from the ceiling. They are attacked by a black cat who is protecting her Book of Shadows, which Giles plans to use to reverse the spells. If there was any doubt in the viewer's mind that this is a bad witch, the creepy attic room, with its bricked up window, spooky aura, and black cat familiar confirms the danger of this unruly witch who needs to be confronted and corrected. Other details that this episode reveals that might have come right out of the *Malleus Maleficarum* of how to deal with a witch include "cutting off her head" and destroying her Book of Shadows.⁸¹

By introducing these stereotypical trappings of witchcraft, the show acknowledges their force as cultural symbols, as a shorthand for bad behavior in women and the typical horror elements viewers expect to see. But then, the series as a whole challenges those expected results. When the audience sees them, we think we know what will happen next, just as we thought we knew what would happen to the blonde girl in the alley from the show's pilot. In the typical horror flick, this bad transgressive behavior would be sure to get any witch practicing it killed. But the

series rewrites our expectations in its series-long depiction of Amy. Rewriting what happens to the one normally punished for the use of such power-symbols, the show questions the narrative of what we expect from our horror show and our culturally loaded symbols.

As we learned in the very first episode when the “final girl” became the threat, on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, things are not always what they appear. The gang discovers that it is actually not really Amy who is the witch but her mother, who has stolen Amy’s body via a spell, swapping souls and trying to regain “her glory years” by getting on the cheerleading squad. Krzywinska argues that Amy’s mom is “a classic bad witch, using magic to serve her own narcissistic desires” (187). They cast a spell to switch the souls back into the proper bodies, and mom/Amy helps. This is Amy the witch’s first exposure to witchcraft on her own; you could say that Giles becomes her first teacher as they chant and create a potion. This is not the last we see of Amy, however. Amy’s mom ends up trapped in the cheerleading trophy in the hall trophy case, bounced by a mirror Buffy holds in front of her as Amy’s mom tries to trap Buffy in the trophy. While it could be argued that this punishment of Amy’s mom for transgressing social boundaries and using magic is the typical punishment of death for witches, the show’s development of Amy throughout the series arc finally challenges this early punishment of her mother. Unlike her mother, Amy, who does even more bad things, faces no real consequences for her bad actions. Throughout the series, Amy

represents the bad witch choices that a witch could make, and the path that follows from using magic selfishly.

Amy's actions, over and over, contrast with those of Willow and Buffy. For example, Amy shows up again, wreaking havoc first in "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered" (2:16) where Xander gets her to put a disastrous love spell on Cordelia for him, and then in "Gingerbread" as one of the teens who have, with Willow, been dabbling in witchcraft, and one of the teens (including Buffy) the town's assembled mob of grownups seeks to burn at the stake in the library.⁸² Her selfish use of a spell to save only herself and not Willow and Buffy results in her becoming a rat; use magic for your own purposes, and don't help out your friends, and you literally become your actions. In later episodes, she does not have a problem casting spells that are either for her own selfish use in season six where she and Willow cast spells at the Bronze ("Smashed" 6:9), a violation of the general tenets of good witchcraft, or that are definitely malicious, as in the episode where she turns Willow into the misogynistic Warren in season seven ("The Killer in Me" 7:13). Amy enables Willow's growing addiction to magic in season six; it is Amy who introduces Willow to the magic "pusher" Rack ("Wrecked" 6:10). Finally, in season seven we see Amy with the UC Sunnydale group practicing real magic and quoting rehab-inspired rhetoric of being "messed up" but "better now." In all of these episodes, Amy shows the difficulties for young women with no role models for negotiating power. With the choice to do

anything at all, you might choose to do some not-so-nice things. Power corrupts. But her selfish power only continues to grow and Amy, in spite of being a bad witch, does not come to the bad end the typical depiction of witches might anticipate. This remains one way the show rewrites our expectations for and about female power.

At series end, Amy has become quite a powerful witch who can cast sophisticated spells and who ultimately rewrites our expectations for what happens to that “bad witch.” For example, she allows Willow’s hex in “The Killer in Me” (7:13) to choose its own form, saying “The hex I cast lets the victim’s subconscious pick the form of their punishment. It’s always better than anything I can come up with. Elegant, you know?” She also blasts Kennedy (one of the Potential Slayers and Willow’s new girlfriend) across the room with a gesture from her hand, and teleports Kennedy without even a word, no clumsy Latin spells like those Willow uses. Thus, the powerful, unrepentant Amy is an example of one possible path of performing femininity: becoming your own bad mother but remaining unpunished for that path in the end. As Lorna Jowett points out, Amy’s mother’s use of Amy’s body “allegorizes the very real steps some parents will take to realize ambitions on behalf of their children” (69) but there is much more going on here than merely a stage-mom gone bad.

But bad role model, bad witch or no, ultimately, Amy is not exactly her mother, nor is she exactly bad, or unlikeable. Amy remains an ambiguous character in terms of

typical depictions of the “bad girl” in horror, thus demonstrating how Whedon’s series challenges typical depictions and reconfigures women with power. In spite of obvious negative experiences and struggles with the darker aspects of power throughout the series, Amy meets no real negative consequences in the end. Because she is introduced as Willow’s friend, Amy is coded as one of the alternatives for girl-hood in the show. She represents an alternative subjectivity that viewers can try on and not see destroyed, not punished for her transgressive ways. In the end Amy is a possible good girl turned into a bad witch, and we ultimately do not know what happens to her (presumably she evacuates Sunnydale with all the other residents in “Empty Places” 7:19). We do know that she does not help for the good, as do Spike, Anya, and Andrew, former “bads” who turn good at the end. But ultimately, when we do not see her punished for transgression of the norms, for her wicked witchy ways, this is a source of pleasure. This lack of punishment for Amy as “bad girl” further rewrites the performance of bad witch. Amy’s dark witchcraft, of which she never repents, shows us one of those moments that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* gives us of “ands.” She is a bad witch *and* yet a good girl, she transgresses rules *and* survives. She is not the hero, nor the hero’s friend, nor really a villain, but she perseveres and thus redefines the genre of horror. We can’t help but still like her as her “elegant” spell manages to make bad Willow, finally, punish (and subsequently forgive) herself far better than any outside influence.

Amy as a minor character parallels Willow’s example, as both explore

witchcraft and experiment with dark magic. Amy ends up using magic only for selfish purposes, and does not, as far as we know, come out in the end “forgiven” as Willow does (even though Willow wreaks far more havoc in the long run.) But she is still a source of pleasure for viewers in that she suggests yet another possibility for performance of the feminine, for another option for performing an identity. She is a “normal” girl who learns to use a type of power to achieve things that she wants to achieve. She could be read as a warning of bad things: you too could *become your mother!* But she is also an example of what Willow could be, with power and none of the hangups and constraints about social responsibility that Willow and Buffy, as good girls, have to work with.

Jowett further argues: “that the bad girls are not always punished for their behavior and that their stories often lack closure demonstrates how the show authorizes viewers’ pleasure in these characters” (71). Lacking any bad end for Amy, we see one witch who explores multiple paths towards power, challenges the patriarchal ideal of “good girl” versus “bad girl” when she is both good girl *and* bad girl, and, in putting Willow down the path that ultimately shapes her character development, is a part of the eventual empowerment of the entire generation of Slayers in the series final episode. Her moral reading of her hex on Willow as “just a little fun” places her more within a context of morals where bad and good are represented as dual aspects of the same thing, rather than a strict black and white evil vs. good. Amy is always a bad witch

who gets away with it. And we end up glad to see her unpunished yet unaccounted for, ambiguous in her bad witch-ness and revenge.

Wanna-Blessed-Be's: The UC Sunnydale Wiccan Group

In “Hush,” (4:10) Willow, in her quest for more knowledge about witchcraft, meets the UC Sunnydale Wicca group. Later, when describing the meeting to Buffy, in a play on the Wiccan blessing to the goddess Willow mockingly calls them a “bunch of wanna blessed be’s.” She says “you know nowadays every girl with a henna tattoo and a spice rack thinks she’s a sister to the dark ones.” They are far from sisters to the dark ones, though, because they have never even thought about witchcraft’s real power. Willow mocks them as wanna-be’s who don’t really explore the full power of witchcraft, and who simply try on the symbolism of Wicca as temporary fashion (a henna tattoo) or dabbling (the spice rack).

You get the idea from this meeting that the Wiccans have never even tried to perform magic, and that the only thing they are doing is paying lip service to the religious aspects of a proto-feminist mother-goddess system of worship. From this implication that the UC Wiccans are only fashionably witches, it is clear that they are not initially meant to be taken seriously. They are mocked as an empty club rather than figures of any real power; they are representatives of the “girl power” commercialized form of Wicca that surged in popularity during the 1990s, partly as a result of shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. These Wiccans throw around words like empowerment

but turn into mean schoolgirls who belittle Willow when she offers a new suggestion and make Tara uncomfortable by singling her out. Not only haven't they tried any "real power" in magic, they are not really even very good at being nurturing and kind, supporting of other real women within the room. They do not seem too smart about the tenets of Wicca, whose basic rule is "An harm ye none," a restatement of the Golden Rule, which they break here by ridiculing and ostracizing Willow, stating "some people can suck the energy out of a circle" and generally being exclusionary. But to laugh at someone's honest attempts to fit into a new group certainly wouldn't be very empowering, and this is the message that Willow's comment means to convey. She has felt excluded and mocked, and therefore, asserts that surely the coven can't be after real power, especially not the potentially dark power Willow has already been exploring. At this point, we are supposed to think the coven at UC Sunnydale is witchcraft as a mere fashion statement.

In this episode these women, arguably a coven, gather in a public area like just any other club or hobby group to discuss their plans and do little more than "toss around all the buzz words associated with the contemporary feminist spirituality movement" (Winsdale). After what sounds like a promising introductory incantation wherein they call themselves "sisters to the moon," invoke "the darkness/ the wolf at our side through the waterfall of power to the blackest heart of eternity," they argue about "bake sales" and the Gaia newsletter, mention an "empowering lemon bundt,"

and the leader asks “who left their scented candles dripping all over my woman power shrine?” They are the epitome of mundane silliness, arguing and gossiping. Willow asks them if they’d like to try things other than bake sales and dance recitals like “the wacky notion of spells, you know conjuring, transmutation.” The gathered group laughs at Willow, mocking her and saying “Oh yeah, then we could all get on our broomsticks and fly around on our broomsticks” dismissing her with “You know certain stereotypes are not very empowering.” They spend their time just talking about women’s empowerment but not doing anything— just another club for young women in college exploring radical ideas to shock their parents.

At first, the UC Sunnydale Wiccans are there as a contrast to Willow, and later Amy. They are the regular people who have no inherent magic power, and who are strangely clueless about Sunnydale’s magic origins and happenings. J. Lawton Winslade’s article “Teen Witches, Wiccans, and Wanna Blessed-Be’s: Pop Culture Magic in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” traces the burgeoning popularity of groups like this one as part of an overly commercialized Wicca that has a thin connection to the real practice of Wicca as a religion. It could be argued that as a teen product for sale, these books and spell-kits package Wicca as a non-threatening alternative to getting into punk bands, or soccer. In this way, it empties the religious practice of any real political or ethical meaning. Jes Battis suggests that Willow has “no particular desire for feminine empowerment through Wicca” (24) but Jowett counters by arguing that

when she seeks out the Wiccans, “the show refeminizes Willow by the shift to witchcraft, a traditionally female power” and “positions Willow, like Buffy, in a female line” (39). But these witches at this point are hardly a real lineage of power, and not very good Wiccans either. They will, however, change. Eventually, the Sunnydale Wiccans will represent residents of the town attempting to control their own lives, coming to terms with the odd place they live by exploring power through magic. In this, they are one of the very few groups of Sunnydale “regular people” who try to combat the evil that the Hellmouth generates.

In this light, the idea of an underground movement of religion that is especially geared towards women, rather than blaming women for all the world’s evils, is very attractive, and probably a great argument for the appeal of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s use of Wicca as the system of witchcraft that Willow is pursuing. The references to Diana or Hecete in spellwork, as well as invoking the goddess, further reinforces the idea that the show is attempting to ground magic in the burgeoning goddess worship movement that is intimately bound with feminist principles. They might get it pretty wrong from a Wicca standpoint most of the time, but they *are* trying, after all, to invoke a feminist ideology of Wicca on the show. And in trying to invoke a feminist witchcraft, they do more good than harm when viewers, identifying with the subject position of looking for real power through a matriarchal worship system, explore something like Wicca and women’s power for themselves.



Figure 9 UC Sunnydale’s Wicca group.

But still, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is not trying to represent “real” Wicca.

Online fans have commented about the incorrect representations:

The show’s (somewhat necessary) lack of separation between Wicca the religion and Wicca the magickal practice. In a show that deals with supernatural forces and demonology, relatively little mention is made of divine forces or the worship of them. [. . .]What Willow practices is magick, maybe more in the style of the Renaissance magicians or necromancers . . . with their Latin invocations and fancy ingredients. I think this is put in a Wiccan context on the show for reasons of fashion, that it’s a hip thing for teenagers to do magick and connect it with a popular spiritual movement (“All Things Philosophical”).

Whedon’s witches, even these minor ones, are complex figures, influenced by complex

factors, seeking power to control their lives but not always good or bad. Initially, Willow mocks them as silly, pretend “sister to the dark ones” who do not understand the nature of the search for power. As Rachel Moseley argues, in “Glamorous Witchcraft: Gender and Magic in Teen Film and Television,” these teen witches are seen to be “engaging with a postfeminist concept of girl power which celebrates the conjunction of female power with conventional modes of femininity” (419).

Ultimately, the portrayal of the UC Sunnydale group is not just about showing Wiccans as the new empty, fashion trend in town. These Wiccans as a group are supposed to contrast with Willow’s largely solitary power explorations. However, while the Sunnydale coven of Wiccans never really comes across as very strong, magically, we do find that there is a message of real empowerment within the subtext of the final episodes in which we see them.

The next time we see the UC Wiccans is in season seven, “The Killer in Me,” (7:13) when Willow looks for help with the spell that turns her into Warren. We find that the Wiccans have graduated from just talking about lemon bundts and bake sales. No longer meeting out in the open, they are tucked away in an empty room, forming a real circle of power, chanting and causing their crystals to glow an unearthly pink light (Figure 9). They have recognized their role as Wiccans as one with a actual magical ends. Willow as Warren comments: “Wow, look at you guys. Campus Wiccans. Guess you got past the whole bake sale phase” to which the coven’s leader replies, with a wry

smile: “Uh, no, we still do that too. Second Tuesday of every month.” To see the show’s subtext of empowerment, here, though, we should examine the ideals behind the invocation that Willow/Warren hears as she/he walks into the room: “Instill us, oh, great one, with peace, with strength, with compassion, with hope. The path we seek is yours. Keep us on that path.” They may still bake brownies, but they also step out of the mundane, real world into the magical one.

In the corrupt, dangerous, currently apocalyptic town of Sunnydale, there is potentially real power in an invocation to look for “peace,” “strength,” “compassion,” and “hope,” and to seek a path towards that is to be at least attempting to remain a force for good in a corrupt world. Also, the group focuses on “about healing spirits and nurturing our life force,” as Amy explains. In a town like Sunnydale, where (among many other negative things) people regularly go missing and/or turn into vampires, and where it is a rather unremarkable plot-element for the Mayor to plan during season three to turn into a giant snake-demon and then eat the entire graduating senior class, and where metaphor regularly turns real, healing spirits and nurturing life force might actually be a real weapon against evil. In this way, the UC Sunnydale coven are starting to live up to the witch as a “metaphor for female resistance, witches as representatives of women who lead unconventional lives– outside that which are patriarchally deemed acceptable” (Moseley 410). So, in the “real world” where the show’s audience lives, unlike Willow or Amy’s powerful spell casting, the work the

Wiccans are doing is more than glamour, commercial “girl power,” more than special effects. They possibly do the real miracle of helping someone else, a great lesson for the audience looking to try on a performance of accessible femininity and power, and practice a feminism that is about more than just “wearing the t-shirt” of fashionable witchcraft and burning the woman power candles, but also about helping others. Their prayer to work for peace, strength, compassion and hope places them working against a dominant patriarchal paradigm of war and violence, and shows them as quietly resistant to the wrongs happening in Sunnydale, that microcosm of the U.S.

Of course, back in the main narrative lines, there is still the fact that Amy has the group fooled into thinking that she is a “rehabbed” witch, working on being good. They appear to be fooled into harboring a bad witch who is only pretending to be trying to be better. The UC Sunnydale group seems completely clueless about Amy’s continuing bad-witch behavior, making them questionable as forces for good and therefore ambiguous within the series terms of good vs evil. Also, they do not ever show up as an aid in Buffy’s fight against the First Evil, in spite of the fact that as people who are actually beginning to practice magic, they must realize that something is going on in Sunnydale. So finally, the UC Sunnydale witches represent those who know that the fight for women’s equality is still taking place, and who know the terms of that fight, but who fail to finally do anything about it. In this way, Whedon shows us another complicated layer of third wave feminist rhetoric: just because you try does not

mean you succeed. This depiction of feminism as complicated matters, because when the world calls feminism “over” because there may not be a march on Washington happening this week, in reality, there are millions of small groups of women gathering to explore paths of compassion, peace, and hope. And when they gather in these small groups, they may actually do some good for each other. Third wave feminism may be about complex negotiation of conflicting goals, and it may not always succeed, but it means that feminism itself is still a growing movement.

Another Mother: Tara Defies the Law of Her Father

When we meet Tara, who the official Buffy website labels “the Sorceress,” best known as Willow’s lesbian lover, we meet yet another example of feminine performance. Her role has been seen as ambiguously feminist because of the ultimate “consequences” of her unruliness: her death in season six. However, it is partly this negative event which leads to the positive ends of season seven’s matriarchal empowerment. Her story, along with matriarchal mythology surrounding Willow’s attempts to destroy the world in vengeance for Tara’s death resonates with mythology of women’s loss, grief, rage, and death which, when understood, place both characters in a matriarchal context that deserves to be read against the grain as not just another “bad lesbian gone crazy” story but as a rewriting of the script of what happens to women in the horror genre, as well as women in society. Tara and Willow’s storyline resounds with strong archetypes of women’s power and it is in those archetypes that the

series introduces powerful mythological figures that have become synonymous with women's transgressive power, and especially power that transgresses definitions of the traditionally "feminine."

There are several ways that Tara offers various alternatives of feminine subjectivity on the show. As a motherly, quiet, and shy type, Tara's character contrasts with the other more outgoing females on the series, and as "an actor with a larger frame than the petite and slim"(Jowett 50) actors who play Buffy and Willow, she also offers something other than the "Barbie" model of feminine appearance. Jowett argues that Tara is coded strongly feminine because she is "visualized by a wardrobe of skirts and dresses" (50) and because she is a "'naturally' emotional or communicative female with the skills to manage relationships" (49). She is also, unlike Amy, a "good girl" (Jowett 49), and unlike Willow, she knows more about Wicca's principles of using magic without using it for personal gain. Tara "upholds moral values without judging individuals and supports others in their choices" (52). Jowett argues, though, that Tara's feminist influence is "normalized through her typical nurturing role and eventually somewhat marginalized by being relegated to the domestic" (54) as her "good influence is turned to bad as Willow goes dark and hunts for revenge" (54). Tara, as the "Sorceress," is Willow's mentor, and allows Willow the space she needs to access her own latent natural powers. Domestic or no, Tara knows more about witchcraft's practice, and initiates Willow into a more active phase of magic study.

And, as discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, where witchcraft is concerned, domestic does not equal un-feminist. As the “Sorceress,” and a witch on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Tara’s character offers yet another performance of fully-rounded feminine power, that of support and caring.

Tara is therefore cast primarily as a support figure, and as the major support figure for Willow, she helps introduce the matriarchal archetypes of power that are commonly read as feminist that come later in season six. But first, Tara is a witch whose witchy traits redefine horror’s expectations of representation. Like Amy, Tara encounters the dangers of “becoming your mother” and the possibilities for this self-loss as a pathway of performing femininity. Within an early episode when her good or bad nature remains unclear, Tara fears the family legend that says her mother was a demon, and the episode where we meet her family (5:6),⁸³ ultimately codes her as a challenge to patriarchal structures and tradition. Jowett argues that the episode “offers a ‘feminist’ explanation of how potentially powerful females are subordinated and ‘bad’ women demonized” (51). The “old family legend” that Spike observes “used a bit of spin to keep the ladies in line,” which claims that the women in her family all have a bit of demon in them, is revealed as false. At episode’s end, the Scooby gang gathers around Tara, vowing to protect her from her “real” family and accepting this new member into the extended group for the first time. Tara’s father says “You can’t control what’s going to happen. You have evil inside of you and it will come out.”

This scene is a reference to the unruly female who is out of control, and traditionally, should be controlled by a male— father or brother, as in this episode. However, as each member of Buffy’s group asserts that if Tara does not wish to go with her family they will fight to let her stay, Tara literally defies the patriarch (her father) and, through the same support network Buffy relies upon, resists the logos— the law of that particular father that says a powerful female must be evil and therefore constrained. Thus, if Tara has no demon in her and is not evil, Tara’s mother also has no demon, and the revelation that Tara’s matriarchal inheritance of magic power and talent illustrates her as not automatically evil and not needing to be contained. Tara, unlike Amy, has inherited good qualities from her mother, in a direct challenge to what the law of her father has said would happen.

Tara does transgress what “good girls” do, as well, and therefore exists as an ultimately ambiguous figure. She uses magic selfishly, casting a spell to hide demons from the Scooby gang, trying to hide what she thinks of as her inner demon nature, and almost costs the gang their lives when unseen demons show up. In spite of scolding Willow for overuse of magic for selfish reasons here, Tara uses magic for personal gain here and faces the consequences. Though she eventually reverses the spell, and though as the character most educated about Wicca on the show she should know the consequences of such an act, and shows some sense of regret at its use, she does not initially hesitate to use her power this way. She is not, therefore, always good. She too

occupies a subject position accessible to the audience— too human, with a desire to fit in and find a peer group that shares her special skills. Tara is a nuanced, roundly developed character who demonstrates again that power on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has many forms, and such power resides in negotiation of positions, rather than an always already accomplished fact.

If we look at a typical reaction to her by many disappointed fans, as a whole, Tara's character offers a problematic feminism because she faces punishment for her relationship as a strong woman. Tara's death was a source of much unhappiness for many fans who felt that Whedon's killing off one half of one of the most touted lesbian relationships on television was anti-gay, and many critics feel her death shows the dangerous side of challenging patriarchy. Tara is killed by the misogynistic Warren, while he tries to kill Buffy. Some have argued the negative results of killing off the lesbian lover after what Tara refers to as a sexual night "with plenty of magic," when Willow and Tara waking up under passionate red sheets and clearly having made love. Judith Tabron describes the feeling of the arguments that appeared in various online communities:

It might not be homophobia to kill a lesbian character off [. . .] but to depict a lesbian's death by violence as taking place in the bedroom where she had just been making love to her lover – in, incidentally, the first lesbian love scene permitted by the network – ain't cricket. This *image* [. . .] can be homophobic,

even if the storyline, or even the intent, is not. Tara lying dead, and Willow thus being inspired to run amok and try to destroy the world, are images that reinforce rather than subvert or escape the dead evil lesbian clichés that have run rampant throughout popular media. (para 11)

But on a show where death surfaces literally every night, even the pilot establishes the precedent of killing of a major or lead character when a character viewed in the show's permanent opening sequence, and so assumed to be permanent. This precedent is further confirmed by Joyce Summers' death in Season Five ("The Body" 5:16). Thus, Tara's death cannot just be read as killing off the lesbian bit character as part of TV's general homophobia. One must also see the multiplicities of showing Willow's ultimate growth with and without Tara. Just as Buffy grew up (and experienced real pain and darkness) because her mother died, so Willow must go through *real* grief before maturing to the place she is by Season Seven.

Therefore, I argue for another reading that does not focus on just the sexuality of Tara's supportive relationship. As a romantic soul-mate/lover and Willow's partner, in ultimately pushing Willow to explore even dark aspects of magic, Tara's influence strengthens Willow further, allowing her to be the "most powerful woman" that she is by season seven's finale. Because of Tara, Willow becomes a fully-powered witch who can use the strongest magic available to her to participate in the empowerment of an entire generation of Slayers. In making Tara's death a mundane one, by a senseless act

of non-magical violence by a human bent on petty revenge, the writers emphasize the senseless nature of the act, and therefore, make Willow's descent into darkness, exploration of powerful magic, and then return from nearly destroying the world, all the more powerful. Thus, the mild-mannered "sorceress" and lover inspires growth, while still offering viewers several seasons as a fully-rounded character that does not fit within the heteronormative standards of most prime-time television. She remains a support figure, but one crucial to the show's exploration of women's power. Her death, by pushing Willow into darkness back to full power and through descent into darkness, allows Willow to change, grow, and become even more powerful.

Tara and Willow's intense love relationship, and the grief and loss and rage that Willow experiences because of her death, place the two within a context of female mythology that explores power and ultimately settles into a matriarchal power narrative. A feminist narrative does not always have to be about good, happy endings; that idea is as much a limiting trap as any other. It is okay to have a tragedy that is also, ultimately, about women's explorations of power, and therefore, feminist. Tara offers another character role model for viewers to explore, one that is not uniformly cute-girly-feminine and which ends in a display of loss of epic proportion, one that fits the lesbian-love storyline into a love-story within an all-women's archetypal and mythological context. Rather than a sub-plot, or as "alluded to but never realized" fodder for Slash writers, the Tara/Willow storyline generates a feminist heroic mythos:

it introduces the Persephone/Demeter cycle of the Greek pantheon, and a wealth of women-centered symbolic history of power and relationships between women. By generating this heroic mythos within a lesbian love-story, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* does not demonstrate homophobia but rather a love of strong females of all types.

Willow as Third Wave Witch Archetype

Willow is the one major reoccurring character on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* who self-identifies as a witch. She becomes more and more self-confident over the series because of her ability in and experimentation with magic, and she is the most powerful character on the series. In this way, the show ties experimentation with magic/witchcraft to experimentation with female power and feminism. Thus, Willow's story is that of the ultimate Magical Feminist as she challenges patriarchal depictions of the witch as evil and then punished. Her power finally changes the law of the Slayer being the hierarchically called, singular Chosen One, rewriting that logoi to empower an entire generation of young women in the series finale of season seven.

Understanding Willow's progression throughout the series shows us a young woman learning to be powerful over time, experimenting with her position in society. Willow's character development shows how potential strength— for good and for bad— can be realized if the right combination of circumstances comes into play. Willow progresses during her portrayal of a witch through multiple identities which include “dark” ones, androgynous ones, and ultra-feminine cute ones. Through this progression

her character offers a choice for viewers that changes significantly over time and that deconstructs a number of norms, finally granting pleasure in viewing a normal everyday girl character who is more accessible than the superhero Buffy as Chosen One. Willow's multiple identities include: supergeek to supervillain as the "Big Bad" of season six; the girl who "dates a guy in the band," a lesbian role-model; ready-made-victim, "bad girl" Vamp and Dark Willow. Her explorations of power, especially through her use and exploration of witchcraft, allow viewers to try on multiple identities while keeping in the safer position of Willow as a "good" girl, a girl who is not the superhero Slayer who is chosen but the one who chooses to fight to change things. As she explains to Buffy:

I mean, you've been fighting evil here for about three years, and I've been helping out some, and now we're supposed to be deciding what we wanna do with our lives and I realized that's what I want to do. Fight evil. Help people. I think it's worth doing, and I do not think you do it 'cause you have to. It's a good fight, Buffy, and I want in. ("Graduation Day Part 2" 3:22)

Unlike Buffy, as the Chosen One, Willow chooses her own path and explores an identity which ultimately seeks to make things better. Thus she becomes a symbol of what one can do when one strives to make a difference when one could instead simply work for oneself.

The full-development of Willow's character appears within her transformation

as goddess worshipping Wiccan, and in season seven's final moments, when her spell allows all potential Slayers to actually be full-fledged Slayers, Willow's hair, which is normally red and goes black when she's "Dark Willow" magically grows long, feminine, and white as she says "Oh Goddess," feeling the full strength of matriarchal power and weeping with the forgiveness she feels. This whiteness is coded as purity, and forgiveness for her past dark magic because she has helped to empower a generation of Slayers. Her power is shown as the most necessary to everyone's overall success. Jowett calls her here "Willow the White,"⁸⁴ and argues

her fleeting transformation into "Willow the White" during the season [seven] finale validates this [redemption]. Buffy's assertion that "this woman" is more powerful than the men who created the first Slayer reinforces Willow's position as the *most* powerful female character on Buffy. This also maintains the tension between young female power and old patriarchal structures designed to keep women under control. Operating outside such structures, Willow creates multiple Slayers from the female line of Potentials using magic handed down by a group of women (the Guardians). Her power and its use are refigured as emphatically female. (41-2, emphasis in original)

In this moment, Willow's portrayal redefines what happens to a witch who goes bad. She playfully rolls on the floor and says "That was nifty." Formerly Dark Willow reaches the peak of her White magic power at the same time she is coded as touched by

a goddess, but only because she has explored all sides of her power, including the “bad witch” sides.

Nifty or not, there is even more there than just a feminist witch figure in Willow’s exploration of multiple identities and subjectivities. Willow’s narrative ultimately reflects yet another powerful archetype of women’s strength in its featuring of the Demeter/Persephone mythology attached to Willow’s use of dark witchcraft. These archetypes place the series into a tradition of classic hero mythology. But it rewrites the mythology with a difference. Again, we do not simply have the same old archetype with pink paint, but the archetype changed to reflect modern feminist readings of such mythology. Beneath the surface, surrounding the Willow/Tara relationship and Tara’s death, lies a deeply female-centered mythology of Demeter/Kore. This mythological metanarrative refigures Willow’s dark witchcraft within the context of dark, unruly goddess icons and has pre-patriarchal roots that can be read in a feminist context as telling women’s stories in a new way that features women’s power and ultimately shows redemption, strength, and change. The reading of these allusions is more than just pointing out some cool imagery used in the show; it is a way of seeing the show as part of a woman’s genre of power and strength, of giving women the same equal time within mythic quest narratives of power.

Annis Pratt defines several important archetypes for women’s stories, including “three particularly important archetypal systems– the Demeter/Kore and Ishtar/Tammus

rebirth myths, Arthurian Grail narratives, and the Craft of the Wise, or witchcraft” (170). Within these women’s archetypes, which Pratt defines as one method for preserving women’s narrative within male-valuing traditional canons, the Demeter/Kore cycle “expresses women’s generative and regenerative power” (173-4). Persephone is also defined as “the terrible Queen of the dead, whose name was not safe to speak aloud, who was named simply Kore, or ‘The Maiden’” (Baring and Cashford 366). According to some scholars, the story of Persephone’s abduction by Hades—leading to Demeter’s grief and the beginning of the seasons as she allows the world to go cold and plants die, and Persephone’s yearly return to Hades as his queen—probably has earlier roots in Neolithic or Minoan goddess-worship. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, in *The Myth of the Goddess, Evolution of an Image* (1991), argue that imagery that surrounds the goddess in the Greek tradition put her “much closer in feeling to the Neolithic agriculturalists” (367), and therefore, she is pre-patriarchal. The Greek myth is ultimately rooted in a matriarchal tradition and it expresses the love between two women, and the overwhelming grief and terrible vengeance within Demeter’s loss and pain. Demeter lets the world begin to die— and if she had never gotten her daughter back, one could argue that she would have, like Willow, destroyed the world. Baring and Cashford point out that “her grief and rage are such that [. . .] the famine on earth is annihilating the race of humans” (367). This myth is about a goddess who is not about being too nice— and therefore, her place in the show is

another way of allowing for a full range of emotional experience for female representation and agency.

In matriarchal religious studies, the Goddess, (of which Persephone/Demeter is an example) is a mixture of darkness *and* power, light *and* strength. The Goddess's nature contains multiplicities within one figure. This challenges the binaries that place these traits as opposites: darkness *or* light, strength *or* passivity, showing a figure that contains darkness *and* light, good *and* evil. Seeing the Goddess within Willow and Tara's storyline challenges the construction of Willow as good or bad and therefore, the series allows viewers a chance to view this revision of the naturalness of these binaries: Willow is both good *and* bad.

Like Dark Willow and regular Willow, Demeter and Persephone are most likely two faces or aspects of the same figure, "inspired the Elusian mysteries" and "celebrated for some 2000 years in Greece" (Carter 326). Demeter and Persephone are "the one great goddess in her dual form as mother and maiden" (Baring and Cashford 368).⁸⁵ So while one can be the innocent, abducted Persephone at one moment, one can also be the fierce, world-destroying, grieving Demeter in another. This rapid, violent change parallels strongly with Willow. She turns from innocent maiden who cries because she breaks a yellow crayon on the first day of school (what Xander calls "crayon-breaky Willow") to a destroyer goddess figure (what Xander calls "scary veiny Willow"). No longer a maiden, she wants to destroy the world in her rage and grief

over her partner, Tara's, death.

Imagery that places Willow and Tara's relationship appears within the archetype of Persephone and Demeter throughout Season Six's finale. After Tara's death and Willow's madness, in "Grave" (6:22) Dark Willow— bent on revenge and having sucked the power of Giles' magic books through her fingertips, as well as sucked the power out of Giles like a junkie needing a fix— decides to destroy the world in order to end its suffering. It is in the imagery of this episode that we see the strongest female goddess iconography being used in relation to Willow's dark witchcraft. Tying dark magic and these goddess figures to Willow's surge of power further emphasizes how witchcraft as a path to empowerment is part of a multi-faceted female lineage, paralleling and eventually enabling Buffy's Slayer history.

The use of symbolism that appears within the context of Dark Willow's use of a "satanic temple" to perform her act of vengeance in Season Six reconfigures the story within a feminine mythological tradition that, read outside of its surrounding the male-centered framework that casts her as a crazed lesbian destroying the world, is empowering and strongly pro-female. The episode's writer claims to have created the mythology himself on the episode's DVD commentary, but even if that is true, the similarities to the Kore/Demeter mythos, along with the development of Willow's grief, rage, and revenge woven into season six's storyline of birth and rebirth, darkness and redemption, are too close to be mere coincidence. While there is not a historic

specific connection between witchcraft and the myth of Demeter, by placing the metanarrative into this mythological construct, the show connects Willow's dark witchcraft to this myth. Therefore, this introduces several powerful feminist images into the series at the same time that it reconfigures the myth.

The temple that Willow uses to try to destroy the world in the season six finale is supposed to have been created by followers of a "she-demon" they call Proserpexa (Figure 10). The episode's writer claims to have "invented" the demoness, but Proserpexa is way too close to be accidental, and must be a respelling of Demeter, also known as Persephone, (Proserpina, Persephassa) the Greek goddess of the underworld. The archetype has traditionally been used to signify overwhelming female grief, the



Figure 10 Proserpexa, from "Grave."

temporary/seasonal death of the world, and the consequences of loss. Tied to the storyline of Tara's death, as well as the episode "Grave" (6:22) where Buffy emerges into new spring flowering trees, at the end, from a graveyard hole in the ground where she has fought earth demons, the show's background mythologies cannot, as this episode's writer would have us do, be simply seen as invented just this second.



Figure 11 John Collier's "Lilith."

The temple of Proserpexa is decorated by snarling gargoyles, and an inverted pentagram topped off by a trident. But most importantly she needs the effigy of what is actually a statue combining iconography of several female goddess figures. It is this “effigy” of Proserpexa that is a most powerful image of unruly goddesses and female rage and power, but it also combines several other feminist icons, including Lilith, known as Adam’s first wife, and a symbol of female disobedience and rebellion (Figure 11). In its appearance, the effigy of Proserpexa is a cross between Medusa and Lilith, naked, white, snarling with a pointy tongue protruding and a snake wrapped around her. The visuals of the statue are almost identical to a painting by John Collier of Lilith, which similarly shows the white naked body of the woman encircled by the dark snake (Figure 14). Aside from being interesting allusions comparing Persephone/Demeter, the show points us to a mythology that is matriarchal, and places Tara/Willow’s story into another context than that of the crazed, destructive lesbian. It further portrays Willow as part of a feminist power iconography, and allows pleasure for viewers for whom these images resonate. It rewrites the archetype of the dark destructive witch to a more ambiguous mythos that can also be seen as a source of multiple co-existing types of power, not just evil or good, but formidable and complex combination of both. In opening up these alternatives, the show allows for a complex representation of female power.

In spite of dismissive comments on the DVD that the Proserpexa statue is not so

impressive looking, “a big pink demon Barbie doll” (DVD commentary), this effigy is packed with even more powerful female symbolism. In the DVD commentary this episode’s author calls her a Medusa, but she does not have snakes in her messy hair, allowing us find the other figures within the depiction and thus see multiple archetypes. As a Medusa figure, the statue represents a femme fatale that can turn men into stone with her gaze. In this way, the episode inverts the male gaze’s power to objectify females and instead shows us a female perspective that can literally objectify others. Willow harnesses a Medusa-like power with the force of her own gaze– she does not speak as she blasts green bursts of light from her hands. When Xander tries to stop Willow from destroying the world using this effigy, he steps in front of her blasts of green magical energy.

Instead of Medusa-snakes in her hair we see a snake wrapped suggestively around the effigy’s naked body, bringing in allusions not only to Medusa but also to Lilith, aligning Proserpexa with these other icons of female power, unruliness, and sexuality. As Lilith, the statue represents female sexuality tied to unruly, powerful female speech. While her sexuality might be contained, as her nakedness is wrapped, constrained by the phallic snake, her tongue still juts pointily out, committing unheard speech acts that allow Willow to channel this energy to try to destroy the world. Her unrestrained, rebellious, verbal expression, represented by this pointy tongue, reminds us of Lilith’s powerful speech in escaping the Garden of Eden. In speaking God’s true

name to escape the Garden of Eden and Adam, Lilith's unruly, disobedient speech resonates as an icon of powerful female speech. However, for Proserpexa and Willow, the speech act is unspoken, "the word" unheard but only seen in the tongue's protrusion. This representation of wild, powerful language that is not delicate and feminine places this as unruly female speech rather than male logos. Instead of a male God speaking the world into being with a single phrase, this female figure of power will allow her disciple Willow, who has absorbed through her hands "the words" of dozens of magic books (leaving white, blank pages) to scorch the earth, destroying the world without a single word ever being spoken.

Lilith is known as a perpetually disobedient female figure. As Adam's first wife, "refusing to assume a subservient role to Adam during sexual intercourse and so deserting him," (Wikipedia) she has become associated with feminism. She is seen as demanding equality in being created at the same moment in the J1 strand of Genesis (Baring Cashford 510). Baring and Cashford claim that "what 'went wrong' with the first [marriage] was obviously Lilith's equality and independence" (511). Baring and Cashford argue that Lilith, "in Hebrew myth, gathered around her all the associations of night and death without repose" (520). Lilith is also Biblically credited as being the mother of demons and succubi, so her appearance in a narrative about vampires is a no-brainer. With her name having been translated as lamia or "a witch who steals children" there is also very much a historical precedent for associating Lilith with

witches, as Baring and Cashford explain: “In the same imagery as was employed for Lilith, thousands were accused of copulating with demons, killing infants and seducing men— of being, in a word, witches” (512). Lilith shows up so much in positive and negative representations of female sexuality, rebellion, and power because her refusal to submit to Adam and even to a patriarchal God casts her as a figure that is much more feminist than the more submissive Eve. In searching for female figures that do not cast women as weak and submissive, artists are drawn to Lilith again and again as an expression of female power and resistance to patriarchy.

This statue, smack dab in the middle of Willow’s most powerful moment to date in the series, and its symbolic associations with Lilith, Medusa and Persephone/Demeter places Willow within a context of powerful but ambiguous females within mythological tradition, and allows for a multiplicity of subject positions within her exploration of dark magic. But even beyond the points we get for noticing the show’s clever incorporation of mythology, we find in the differences between how the show develops the characters and their “Classical” originals an important “save” for the show’s lesbian-friendly vibe, and a reaffirmation of the show as a powerful female valuing space. Demeter is of course Persephone’s mother. Her grief and willingness to destroy the whole world has been sanctioned as acceptable, because that’s what mothers do when they lose their children. With Tara and Willow cast into the Demeter/Persephone mythos as lovers, rather than mother/daughter, the show

reinforces powerful imagery about how much value should be placed on Willow and Tara's relationship. Drawn in context with world-destroying, apocalyptic yet understandable pain, the Willow/Tara storyline becomes significant in lover-history archetype. The relationship is not just a fling, an experimentation during college after Oz, the werewolf boyfriend, leaves. Willow's lesbian identity grows because she feels her loss of Tara to be literally Earth-shattering, more destructive than the couple of episodes of tears we got when Oz left. The lesbian love-story redefines who Willow is as a person, and as she becomes, finally, a stronger and better person because of her lesbian persona, we should forgive the writers killing off Tara. Their love becomes mythic, archetypal—Romeo and Juliet-like.

These witch and goddess icons are all symbols of explicitly female, implicitly unruly, power. They resonate with female sexuality, female play, a female gaze that can turn the tables on the objectifying male gaze. The figures of Persephone/Demeter, Lilith, and Medusa blur boundaries between explicitly female power/powerlessness, as well as good/evil. All are ambiguous figures—neither evil, nor good, but a liminal mixture of both. As such, they can provide much viewing pleasure for an audience tired of simplistic portrayals of good girls vs. bad girls. This portrayal of powerful female icons in the storyline of Willow as both good *and* bad, and a major character on the series denies the primacy of “archetypes such as the warrior hero and genres like horror, action, and science fiction” which are “gendered masculine because they are the

products of patriarchal culture designed to valorize ‘masculine’ qualities and/or they are seen as largely produced and consumed by males” (Jowett 20). That Amy, Buffy, Willow and the UC Sunnydale coven are not ultimately punished for their “bad” behavior, and survive to “change the world,” further resonates with “feminism’s daughters,” a third wave audience looking for more complicated portrayals of women than just victim, passive, powerless. Even Tara, in her death, provides for the growth and change of the image of women and witches on the show, and her story more than just one of punishment for being an “unruly female.” These witches are never simplistic, flat, bit characters, and are always complex ways of negotiating the idea of female power.

Witches populate *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* from the series’ earliest days, and are not ever solely associated with evil and darkness, nor solely “good witches.” The role of the witch on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is always “about power” and while it is an explicitly female power, it is not about an explicitly bad power which ends up destroyed and punished in the end. Whedon’s liminal witches advance his feminist mission because they help challenge the idea of females as passive, weak good girls who end up the blond victim in the alley. Whedon’s witches, whether major characters like Buffy or minor ones like Amy, always provide the viewer with subject positions of power, agency, and action. They are not always the object of the male gaze but active do-ers who change the world. They are not victims punished for their transgression of

norms. Thus, they are an important part of the third wave, popular culture grounded feminism, as including “feminine” traits with the quest for equality. They teach feminism through a depiction of magic which includes traditionally feminine skills, mythos, and imagery of women’s power and strong, emulate-able feminist figures.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: CANON-MAKING SENSE OF MAGICAL FEMINIST WITCHES

In the feminist foundational text *A Room of One's Own* (1928), wherein she imagines how women can exist in the world as writers, Virginia Woolf wrote:

When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet [. . .] any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. (25)

It is not surprising that Woolf spoke of witches in her text about women writers, which has become a staple of the feminist canon. Witches and women as independent entities have been conflated as long as the legal definition of witches has existed (Llewelyn-Barstow 41). Women who are outspoken, unruly, rebellious, or defiant have often been considered dangerously evil threats to society's patriarchal order. So have witches. In "Witchcraft as Empowerment" her introduction to *Witches Brew*, an anthology that collects witch stories from such diverse writers and times as Shakespeare and Dean Koontz, editor Yvonne Jocks argues of the witch: "she is, frankly, the personification of feminine power, unshackled by patriarchal control. There have always been powerful women who threaten the status quo and are thus accused of witchcraft, from

Joan of

Arc to Susan B. Anthony” (2).

As the inclusion of Joan of Arc acknowledges, to have been called a witch at some times in history was to have been placed at great mortal risk; at others, it was merely an embarrassing slur like “bitch” or “homewrecker”– a less than desirable label, but not one likely to get you killed. But still the witch has always been about power which is inherently feminine. Now, just as the word “queer” has been rescued from being only a negative, hurtful phrase for homosexuals, and various minority groups reclaim the slurs that have in the past been used against them as words of identity and power, the word witch can be reclaimed as a positive word for a strongly powerful, feminist woman.

In this dissertation, I have argued that the conflation of witches and feminists can be found in an empowering genre of texts that model a positive feminine agency for popular audiences. This empowerment is not exclusively a part of the Third Wave of feminism, but a Third Wave reading of the texts illuminates the way feminine skills and tasks (such as domesticity) associated with the witch and previously seen as negative and limiting traps of patriarchal oppression can instead be seen as markers of and paths to new strength for women.

By way of finally summing up what a Magical Feminist witch is, I will briefly explicate a text that might appear to fit the genre, in that it highlights feminism and

witches, but ultimately is not Magical Feminist because it actually undermines feminism with its negative view of women as witches, and thus, demonstrates that not all interesting witches are feminists. Because it reifies the negatives about womanhood and power, because it does not transform what “bad witches” are, John Updike’s *Witches of Eastwick* is a text about witches and feminism that is the opposite of a Magical Feminist text. One only has to look at a text that uses the typical old “evil” image of the witch to attack feminism to see how different the Magical Feminist texts actually are.

Bad Witches, Bad Feminists?

Margaret Atwood correctly argues of Updike’s characters that: “These are *bad* witches, and Power-within, as far as they are concerned, is no good at all unless you can zap somebody with it” (Atwood, review, 1). Through the process of association, feminism, then, is a type of power-within that can be an excuse to “zap” someone. Through his portrayal of a three-witch coven influenced by competition for the affections of the devil, Updike’s novel argues that even (and perhaps especially) enlightened, self-avowed feminists would use power selfishly— to get a man, to crush the competition, and to make *themselves alone* (rather than the larger group of women less powerful than themselves) better off in the world. In his portrayal of three modern witches who mouth feminist rhetoric, and his setting of the novel retroactively during the “birth” of second wave feminism, he critiques women and the feminist movement

quite deliberately as the same old power struggle painted with the false brush of pop-sisterhood.

Atwood asserts: “These are not 1980s Womanpower witches” and she is correct. Updike’s witches seem to come right out of the pages of the *Malleus Malificarum*. They glorify in living up to every bad old stereotype of witches that you can find. They vie for the attentions of the devil, having sex with him even though apparently not even enjoying it all that much. They are not baby killers, but they are not very interested in their own children, leaving notes scribbled on refrigerators about food left, or putting the oldest daughter in charge. They occasionally surface guiltily in their children’s lives after long hours of sex at DVH’s mansion, but they are clearly quite absent in their children’s lives. In addition to the typical dislike of children, bad witches they are, they cast offhand curses that range from the somewhat benign breaking of the necklace of an old woman in order to avoid a boring social engagement to killing the neighbor’s crying puppy just to shut it up. Finally, they offhandedly curse the younger competition (DVH’s new wife) with a wax voodoo poppet and she dies of cancer. They are the *femme fatale* kind of witch— beautiful, selfish, and deadly.

Thus, *The Witches of Eastwick* illustrates a negative, at times very misogynistic, view of women’s power— the type of belief that many held during the early women’s movement that all the fuss was not about any kind of political empowerment, but really about cranky women who couldn’t get men. As Margaret Atwood’s book review states:

Updike takes “sisterhood is powerful” at its word and imagines it literally.

What if sisterhood really is powerful? What will the sisters use their “powers” for? And what—given human nature—of which Mr. Updike takes not too bright a view—what then? Luckily these witches are only interested in the “personal,” rather than the “political”; otherwise they might have done something unfrivolous, like inventing the hydrogen bomb. (4)

This belief that women would use power at worst destructively (killing off the competition) and at best selfishly, is reinforced by the novel’s conclusion when the women all use (and then abandon) their powers to create the “ideal” man, after having dealt rather nastily with the young-woman competition who snags the husband they all wanted (Darryl Van Horne). With this novel, Updike’s aim is to discredit women’s “noble goals,” to show that what liberated women really want is a good lay and a good man/husband, and that they will use any power they gain (whether through politics or magic) merely for the same old things they have always used it (competition between women for men).

Setting his novel during the second wave of feminism, Updike’s witches seem deliberately created to try to discredit the women’s movement. Written in 1984, the novel’s setting is quite obviously retroactive, some time in the early 70’s/late 60’s; evidence for this is the frequent references to youthful “Revolution” and the Vietnam War and a comment at the very end of the text, placing the witches’ time in Eastwick as

sometime in the distant past, long before “the great February blizzard of ‘78” (307).

Atwood says the setting is “cunningly set at a precise moment in America’s recent history” taking “‘sisterhood is powerful’ at its word and imagin[ing] it literally.”

Updike deliberately invokes the period of second wave feminism’s women’s movement throughout the novel, but only to discredit the aims of women’s empowerment– he wants to show women’s rights as selfish, vain, and ultimately destructive.

The novel trivializes the women’s movement as fashion, as a fad, not politics designed to change the world by advocating equality: “female yearning was in all the papers and magazines now; the sexual equation had become reversed as girls of good family flung themselves toward brutish rock stars, [. . .] somehow granted indecent power, dark suns turning these children of sheltered upbringing into suicidal orgiasts” (11). In a weird defense of Updike, Atwood observes: “Hackles will rise, the word ‘backlash’ will be spoken” (para 14). In so bringing up the idea of backlash, Atwood looks to defuse what is indeed a legitimate critique of the novel: Updike’s witches are indeed a representation of the 1980s backlash against the women’s movement. It doesn’t really matter that Updike’s men are being bad too, as Atwood points out they are “offstage blowing up Vietnam.” The title characters are the witches, not the men, of Eastwick.

In the novel, early women’s movement rhetoric about fashion, male chauvinism, and men’s power abound– illustrating a belief that what women really talk

about, even in consciousness raising groups that claim to be about women's issues alone, is men. To the query "doesn't *anybody* want to hear about this new man?" Alexandra replies "Not especially, [. . .] men are not the answer, isn't that what we've decided?" To which Jane answers "They're not the answer [. . .] but maybe they're the question" (Updike 32). At the end of the novel the answer does turn out to be men— the men the witches use their powers to create.

Updike's witch story is a very old story: all women really need to be happy is the right man, so use your new women's power to literally conjure one up. Alexandra uses her "art" of sculpture to conjure her sculptor husband, Jim, who eventually takes "her and his stepchildren back west, where the air was ecstatically thin and all the witchcraft belonged to the Hopi and Navajo shamans" (304). She abandons her own career, and most likely her witchcraft, seeing it as essentially something that was there as a stopgap till she found the right man to replace the husband she got rid of. The novel sketches the moment as a mundane one: "On her way back to the kitchen from the gardening-tool shed she passed through her workroom and saw her stalled armature at last for what it was: a husband" (302) which she continues to create by adding some of the dust of her first husband, "sprink[ling] a little on the knotty piece of pine two-by-four that did for the armature's shoulders" (302), creating the hands in clay, and buying a "modest-sized pumpkin" for the head" and adding some "western soil, a handful of dry, sage-supporting earth" (303). She says to Sukie "you must imagine your life[. . .]

and then it happens” (304). However, it is not her life she imagines, but *his*. Alexa imagines her life not as empowered for herself but as a wife. And it’s not the kind of wife who is also a person in herself but one who gives up her own work for her husband. Similarly, Jane uses her musical arts, takes pieces of her destroyed cello, “some crumbs of the dried herb Sam Smart had become,” money, a tuxedo, and creates “a perfectly suitable little man in a tuxedo and patent-leather pumps”(304). Sukie, staring into a mirror at herself, conjures up “a jaunty sandy-haired man from Connecticut” (306) who is “like” all the sad men Sukie had affairs with and also “like Sukie.” Sukie’s “ideal” husband is basically (literally if you read the mirror spell right) a “mirror” of herself. All the men are creations conjured up for the women to dominate, “new men” ruined by feminism but not especially interesting, and end up also being Updike’s critique of feminism’s effect on men.

Finally, then, if it isn’t in this novel about women who seek and find a source of strong power in witchcraft, then what is the Magical Feminist witch? Unlike Updike’s witches, the Magical Feminist witch is uncontained. Where Updike’s witches are definitely at an end, (finding their husbands and abandoning their witchcraft as easily as they abandon the sisterhood between the three women) the Magical Feminist witch remains in flux. In the Magical Feminist narrative, we do not know what will happen; therefore, anything at all can still happen. But as an important part of that “anything,” the Magical Feminist witch is rarely punished for transgression of norms. At the same

time, there is a sense that all is not yet said in her story, that things are yet unwritten. In addition, the Magical Feminist witch is disruptive of old stereotypes. She challenges new and old stereotypes about women's appearance, about what is "good" and "bad" for women, what is "natural" about the "feminine" and "feminist." By being playful and transformative with stereotypes, she shows those images for what they are: old lies about what makes a woman. Whereas Updike's witches confirm those stereotypes—having sex with the devil, using power selfishly to harm others—the Magical Feminist witch shows us those stereotypes and consciously rewrites them. Instead of either/or, the magical feminist witch is always and/and, always drawing our attention to the artificiality of so called truths about stereotypes (i.e., if she's a bad witch she's ugly and old, a good witch she's beautiful and young).

The Magical Feminist witch text rewrites our ideas about beauty, power for women, showing so called "natural" feminine and feminist traits as artificially constructed. The Magical Feminist witch transforms ideas about female power, allowing popular audiences to learn new ways of knowing what it means to be female, what it means to be empowered, what it means to live in a world where the imbalance can be corrected by force of will. The Magical Feminist witch takes "truths" about what is feminine and feminist and re-envision them. For example, perhaps even the domestic can be a form of power instead of a confining trap of drudgery and boredom. Feminine markers of appearance, those trappings of patriarchal oppression, can also be

used to advance women's collective societal power rather than to advance individual women for selfish reasons. Perhaps the feminine "trappings" can actually be used to disarm and distract, as a way of subverting rigid power definitions. What is seen as a weakness can instead be a strength— instead of being "others" who are abandoned by society, those "minority" cultures instead are the majority, using discredited symbolism and worship-structures to change their worlds.

What then does it mean to be a witch? It is not always about being nice, but about being all the kinds of things women can be. Just as men are allowed by cultural depictions to be wholly good and wholly bad, so should women be. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio points out that "in third wave feminist discourse, slurs like 'witch,' 'bitch,' and 'slut' are being reclaimed as terms of empowerment [. . .] delineat[ing] a type of female personality who is aware of the female side of the sacred, is not prepared to be always 'nice,' and is in control of her sexual energies and erotic desires" (47). The project of this dissertation has been exploring the Magical Feminist witch from a third wave feminist perspective in order to illuminate how power is being negotiated within new forms of teaching feminism and empowerment. I have examined popular texts in particular because they illustrate empowered women as a normal, everyday thing and they are meant to entertain (and not preach to) a wide, popular audience. I have examined texts that include diverse authors and characters, assuming that as a third wave narrative, multi-ethnic, and multi-classed characters and audiences must be

included— as they are in the canon, listed below. I have not attempted to draw universal conclusions from these texts but have stressed how these texts transform some of what popular culture reifies as universal principles of feminism, sometimes reclaiming the negative sometimes rewriting the positive. The texts in this dissertation reveal how complicated it is to claim the title “feminist” these days: it has never been about an easily identifiable set of characteristics but rather always about a continuing struggle for self-identification and equality, complex negotiations that reveal how many layers of influence power really includes. Feminism addresses issues beyond sex-discrimination: from class, to race, to nationality, to age. The Magical Feminist witch is a re-reading of an old icon that has been used to control women for centuries. This dissertation has explored an image that has been seen as fairly uniformly negative, evil, and in need of control and has argued that Magical Feminist texts reclaim that symbol as instead a form of feminine and feminist power.

It is important to recognize this phenomenon of “reclaiming” the witch as a symbol of strong women who are complex mixtures of good, bad, and everything in between. Teaching curriculum that include the texts on this list can add a level of discourse about feminist politics, gender construction, the concept of the gaze in cinema and television, the idea of colonizing narratives of race, age and class. In this dissertation I have argued that Magical Feminism is a genre, similar in kind to Magical Realism, and that identifying it as a genre is helpful in exploring the themes of books

often not associated with each other and lost to the literary ghetto of “mere” women’s popular fiction, science fiction, and fantasy novels. The texts discussed in the preceding chapters— four novels, one film, one TV series— are representative of the types of texts that make up the genre, but they do not by any means make up the whole canon. More study needs to be done for this canon to be wholly explored.

Therefore, the rest of this conclusion is a partial bibliography of other Magical Feminist texts. Not all of them are unproblematically feminist, nor are all of them about easily identifiable witches, but all reveal the complexities of a contemporary feminism that recognizes the challenges for women in negotiating complex power structures and representations. Most of them appeared after the second wave women’s movement, and the genre continues to grow today. Many of these texts are serials that are classified as romance, and are generally accorded pulp novel status. Not all of the texts here represent unproblematic feminism— for example, the tv series *Charmed* is often criticized for whitewashing both Wicca and feminism, and of objectifying women through skimpy costumes and simplistic feel-good action. But for much of the show’s audience, the series feels empowering, and allows them to imagine themselves as women in control of their own lives. Therefore, the Magical Feminist text complicates easy definitions and is both a post-feminist *and* a feminist text. Like the witch the text represents, the text itself might be difficult to see as “good,” but might be a complex mixture of complex issues. Jean Tepperman’s second wave 1969 poem “Witch”

compares the rebellion of the women's movement to a coven of witches meeting at midnight, a way of resisting what "they" were "telling her" what it meant to be a woman. Her poem should make third wavers realize that their issues have always been issues within feminism, perhaps as a way of honoring the second wave while moving forward as "sisters" in the future. She writes at the end of the poem, which is a litany of the traits "they" told her were not attractive in her, that she wants to claim a rebellious power to resist being a nice "lady" in "lace," quietly separated and contained, to claim all of those appearance markers as rebellion and sisterhood:

I have been invisible,
 weird and supernatural.
 I want my black dress.
 I want my hair
 curling wild around me.
 I want my broomstick
 from the closet where I hid it.
 Tonight I meet my sisters
 in the graveyard.
 Around midnight
 if you stop at a red light
 in the wet city traffic,
 watch for us against the moon.
 We are screaming,
 we are flying,
 laughing, and won't stop. (Qtd in *Aint I a Woman*)

This poem is like an anthem for witches as feminists—banding together to speak out and refusing to stop, asserting visibility and reclaiming various markers that had been labeled bad as instead part of a woman's right to exist, however she wishes to exist. It

is part of a movement to claim all identities of a woman's life as valid and valuable, from frizzy hair to big smile to "square face." The inclusion of witches as part of her rebellion against constrained, quiet, demure, femininity again illustrates how the witch has been used as a marker of female rebellion and feminism outside of the control of a patriarchal society that valued certain types of females over others. The witch appears again and again in literary texts that seek to represent and understand women's power, and thus remains a formidable icon of gynocritical feminist work, and a major part of the genre of Magical Feminism.

A Short Canon of Magical Feminism

TV & Movies

Bewitched. Dir. Nora Ephron. Perf. Nicole Kidman, Will Ferrell, Shirley MacLaine.

Columbia Pictures, 2005.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Dir. Joss Whedon. Perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar, Nicholas Brendon, Alyson Hannigan, Anthony Head. 20th Century Fox, 1997-2003.

Charmed. Dir. Janice Cooke-Leonard. Perf. Shannen Doherty, Holly Marie Combs,

Alyssa Milano, Rose McGowan. Paramount, 1998-2006.

Chocolat. Dir. Lasse Hallström Written by: Joanne Harris and Robert Nelson Jacobs.

Perf. Judi Dench, Johnny Depp, Juliette Binoche. Mirimax, 2000.

Eve's Bayou. Dir. Kasi Lemmons. Perf. Samuel L. Jackson, Diahann Carroll. Lion's Gate, 1997.

The Gift. Dir. Sam Raimi. Perf. Cate Blanchett, Keanu Reeves, Hilary Swank.

Lakeshore Entertainment, 2000.

Practical Magic. Dir. Griffin Dunne. Perf. Sandra Bullock, Nicole Kidman, Stockard

Channing, Dianne Wiest. Warner Brothers, 1998.

Simply Irresistible. Dir. Mark Tarlov. Perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar, Sean Patrick

Flanery. New Regency Pictures, 1999.

Books

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ENDNOTES

1. From the essay “A Room of One’s Own,” this is Virginia Woolf’s fictional creation who, as talented and driven as her famous brother, has become a symbol of women’s creative spirit, as well as an icon of the anonymous, silenced woman writer.
2. This dissertation is also informed by theories that define multiple axes of oppression for women among race, class, religion, and other social categories. While I do address texts featuring characters from non-European traditions, and authors from those same traditions, I do not explicitly address race in this work. I believe the exploration of how race changes the depiction of the witch would prove a very useful and provocative discussion, but it remains beyond the scope of this text. I do, however, wish to claim that as a third wave reading of these contemporary texts, many of the issues raised in past discussions are still present in an underlying form, if not in the explication of these texts, then in the choosing of them.
3. For an example of this clash between an image of the good witch versus the bad witch, see Gregory Maguire’s *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1996). This novel explores a classic icon of “bad witch”—the Wicked Witch of the West from Oz. In the novel, though, we see the story from the perspective of Elphaba, who is cast as a freedom fighter for minority rights within a kingdom ruled by a despotic tyrant (Oz). Challenges to the idea of good equals beautiful and evil equals ugly are exactly the types of questions that feminists still need to ask.
4. My use of the word witch has nothing at all to do with describing *real* women who identify as practicing witches, but rather, with the overall impression most people have of the fictional witch. Later, I will discuss the negative stereotypes that serve to both reinforce the danger of these fictional “unnatural” women which make it difficult for women who might challenge patriarchy to want to do so.
5. In addition to the ones discussed later in this paragraph, feminist theorists who have examined myth’s place in transformation include Marina Warner in her text *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1996), Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger in *Blood Read: The Vampire As Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* (1997).
6. Donna Haraway’s 1984 creation: part-organic, part-technological female of post-modern construction.

7. See the discussion of John Updike's *Witches of Eastwick* in the conclusion for an example of a text that is not feminist but illuminates how the witch and feminism are stuck with each other, for better, and, as in Updike's novel, for worse.

8. Compare these modern witches with their pre- or contemporaneous with-Second Wave counterparts, like Samantha of *Bewitched* (1964-1972) or Jeannie of *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-1970). Those pre-feminist witches were encouraged to stifle their powers in favor of a "normal" life of being housewife and mother, *sans* magic. In spite of their incredible powers, they focused their attentions on stifling themselves, on pleasing and serving a traditional male-dominated home, and in true Foucauldian Panopticonic (*Discipline and Punish* 1975) manner, they wanted to impose these restrictions on themselves and lamented when they failed to contain their unruly magical powers.

9. Since this dissertation was begun, there have been a few others who have begun to argue for the existence of a genre called Magical Feminism. Specifically looking at theater, Ricci-Jane Adams defines Magical Feminism as "a hybrid of magical realism and feminism, [which] operates as a language within a larger form that is feminism. Magical feminism is not a curative or a placebo to smooth over pain and tie it up nicely with some fanciful theatrical techniques. Here, you will find no 'take once a day' magical pill to solve all problems. Instead, magical feminism draws our gaze closer to the inconsistencies, the ugliness, the deformities and the pain, and encourages us to get right in and take a good look" (Adams para 4). The emergence of more criticism of this group of writings shows how important it is to define it as a companion canon to feminism.

10. For a more detailed discussion of the history and evolution of the critical school and texts of Magical Realism, see Lois Parkinson-Zamora and Wendy B. Faris' *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*.10.10.

11. For an example of this kind of idealism, consider such utopian ideals as Mary Daly's in *GynEcology* (1978), where we might get the idea on reading her analysis of male versus female religious systems that matriarchal religion would *always* be more moral and right than its patriarchal counterparts.

12. While men certainly might share many of these concerns, popular depictions of them generally do not exploit the image of the man who has waited too late to marry, or has his biological clock ticking, or the old woman alone without any help. The old man who lives alone is just a crazy old man; the old woman is a witch who deserves to be punished because to be alone and female equals evil.

13. In using this loaded term, coined by anti-feminist forces and generally substituted for feminist as though they mean the same thing, I wish to point out the popular denigration of feminism as a fascist, oppressive political one-note entity.

14. Those in the Second Wave who have weighed in on popular genre fiction and its false consciousness and tendency to be a patriarchy-enforcing drug for unenlightened women include: Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970); Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969); Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970); Marcia K. Lieberman's "Some Day My Prince Will Come" (1974); Andrea Dworkin's *Woman Hating* (1974); Bridget Fowler's *The Alienated Reader: Women and Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century* (1991); Daphne Watson's *Their Own Worst Enemies: Women Writers of Romance Fiction* (1995). But the Third Wave has "claimed" popular culture (including genre fiction, both print and visual) as "both their terrain and weapon of choice" (Karras 10). Third Wavers, as Karras argues, believe that "by participating to a greater degree in creating and supporting positive images for themselves, they will finally infiltrate the last vestiges of patriarchy" (10).

15. There are some texts that actually use this grandmotherly image to show a bad witch; for example, consider *Shrek 2* (2004) where the fairy godmother positively reeks of (and uses to her advantage) nice, grandmotherly imagery. Her hair is in a silver-blue bun, and she wears a gray-blue dress trimmed in lace, with a fairy-skirt that looks very much like an apron. She has rosy cheeks and half-glasses and waves a star-tipped magic wand. As the *Shrek 2* website explains "she appears to be everything you ever dreamed of in a fairy godmother." The *Shrek* creators are playing with the Hollywood image of the always good fairy-godmother in Disney-type films, perhaps begun with the fairy godmother of *Cinderella's* (1950) "Bippity Boppity Boo," that arrives to hand the heroine everything she ever dreamed of, and guide her on her quest to get her handsome prince charming. But the *Shrek* godmother has other plans—getting her son, Prince Charming, the job as King. By self-consciously satirizing the Fairy Godmother archetype as instead a selfish, bad-witch, who is very aware of her own image in a very Hollywood-savvy manner, the *Shrek 2* creators participate in a currently ongoing rewriting of our expectations of good and evil. Such depictions force us to re-examine the fairy tale images upon which we base our own expectations. If the pretty Fairy Godmother is bad and the ugly green ogre is good, then perhaps all our definitions must be challenged. Such images also will do a lot to influence children who will grow up on these texts instead of the Disney texts. Perhaps the image of the witch is changing.

16. Or *Witches Hammer*. The text created by Kramer and Sprenger in 1484, which helped create our modern definitions of what makes up a witch, and which no witchhunter worth his salt would have been without. As Ehrenreich and English argue in *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses* (1973) “To Catholics and Protestant witch hunters alike, [this was] the unquestioned authority on how to conduct a witch hunt. . . for three centuries this sadistic book lay on the bench of every judge, every witch hunter” and the authors were considered the “‘beloved sons’ of Pope Innocent VIII” (9). Even though the *Malleus Maleficarum* is largely unknown today, its definitions of witches remain with us. The online transcribers of the text call it “the most blood-soaked in history” for good reason (*Malleus Maleficarum* online). Unless otherwise noted, I am quoting the print version of the text.

17. A caul, sometimes called a veil, is a thin membrane of amniotic sac still attached to a child’s face at birth. Because of this occurrence, these children are thought to have special gifts, especially those of “second sight”— meaning they can see into the spiritual realm. In this dissertation’s Magical Feminist texts, Lilo is born with a caul. It would be particularly important to a study of the impact of race on different depictions of the witch to include an analysis of W.E.B. DuBois’ discussion of double-consciousness as a “caul” or “living veil” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).

18. This assertion sounds an awful lot like that famous quotation from Pat Robertson which links witches and feminists:

feminism is the socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians (*Washington Post*)

Power for women, then, is associated with the witches’ desire to destroy the family, and especially, children. In a sense, this is right— a big part of the women’s movement’s drive for women to have control and power over their own lives revolves around the ability to control one’s reproduction. But for women to wish to do so has been demonized and labeled evil and part of the destruction of society, and the only choice is assumed to be killing children, as though being pro-choice feminist means wanting *all* babies aborted.

19. Of course, it is merely a man in a devil costume on Halloween, illustrating that witches are pretty stupid in these popular depictions, not even knowing the difference between a costumed mortal and the devil.

20. That the ducking stool was also often a punishment for outspoken “nags,” women who failed to keep their tongues, (or be silent when a man told her to be) shows that a “witch” could be made of anyone, especially if a woman did not have a male to keep

her in her place. In 2002, on a visit to Oxford, England, my tour guide cheerfully pointed out a still-in-place ducking stool hanging out over the river. He laughed and warned the women in the group to watch ourselves. His joke was not meant to be threatening, but if you consider a similar thing—pointing out a hanging tree in the old South, say, to a group that included black men, and warning them to not step out of line—you can see how inappropriately trivialized the torture device is.

21. For more on Ally McBeal as a representative of the failure of feminism and/or post-feminism, see Rachel Mosely and Jacinda Read's "'Having it Ally': Popular Television (Post-) Feminism."

22. And, interestingly enough, Calista Flockheart, the real actress who plays the fictional Ally, considers herself a feminist and was shocked to be represented in this way as the spokeswoman for the death of feminism (Baumgardner and Richards 92).

23. Very popular writers who are often trotted out to represent "modern" feminism but who fit instead into the antifeminist camp, who most feminists would recognize as not representative of the larger body of vibrant feminist work, include: Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfield, Naomi Wolf, Camile Paglia, and Christina Hoff Sommers, all of whom regularly attack "Feminism" as though it were a monolithic movement, rather than opening a dialog within feminism which would be part of the ongoing redefinition of goals that is inevitable over time.

24. Which includes conservative pundits like Rush Limbaugh (propagator of the label *feminazi*) but also popular movies and TV shows, which one could argue is where most people get their education on what a feminist is since there is very little organized teaching of feminism in schools *before college*.

25. For more on this imagery of the "waves" of feminism, see Orr's article "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave" in *Hypatia's* special issue on the Third Wave.

26. Kimberly Springer's article "Third Wave Black Feminism" argues that "the wave model perpetuates the exclusion of women of color from women's movement history and feminist theorizing" (1063). She argues that generational models of First, Second, and third wave ignore the work done before and concurrently to each "wave" by black women activists fighting among movements not explicitly feminist—such as abolition and Civil Rights—from which Feminist Waves sprang. However, I believe that third wave needs to be seen as less generationally rigid and more of a concentric wave upon wave. Third wave feminism does arise out of the critiques in the early 1980s of

mainstream Feminism, and includes multiple matrices of influence. In fact, most of the writers of the 1990s who specifically defined what has become known as third wave feminism were black or multi-racial, and believed their race-theory as an implicit part of their discussion (including Rebecca Walker, credited with starting the Third Wave Foundation). For more of the second wave feminists who might actually be considered the foundation for third wave feminism, because of their demands to expand feminism's consideration of race, class, and sexualities, see endnote 28.

27. These other more recent Third Wave texts include Kathleen Rowe Karlan's 2003 reading of the *Scream* movie franchise. Karlan's reading articulates Third Wave feminism as a method of understanding of the popular media's reinscription, reinterpretation, and reintegration of feminist and political arguments of the personal as political when she quotes *Scream 3* (2000) character Gale Weathers' savvy claim that "Popular culture is the politics of the 21st Century." Other more recent Third Wave texts include Charlotte Brundson's 2005 look toward a new feminist domestic semiotic present within modern interpretations of Martha Stewart and Nigella Lawson. Brundson sees the domestic divas as examples of third wave return to the denial of the "other" type of woman, the lack of "sisterhood" and urge to dis-identify with feminism; the argument Brundson makes demonstrates the way the "master's house" is being rebuilt by women who benefit from Second Wave feminism's tools, but as more than backlash sensibility. These texts are part of the growing attempt to analyze popular culture through a feminist lens as part of a Third Wave feminist rhetoric, but there needs to be more.

28. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston, 1984); *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York, 1983); *Borderlands/ La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (San Francisco, 1987); *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990). Some might argue that these theorists are the true beginning of the third wave— as they participated in critiquing from within feminism's structures and hierarchies during the late 1970s. Defining third wave feminism as a movement that participates in a dialog with second wave, rather than seeks to destroy and replace it, remains a crucial step for younger scholars who may not be aware of the history of feminism beyond what the popular media teaches. The above theorists, while not addressing the domestic plot directly, have written these foundational texts that have shaped the way all feminist theorists since them read and analyze texts.

29. In Maglin, "Full of Memories": Teaching Matrilineage"; Donovan and Walsh, "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens We Found Our Own"; Washington "Teaching Black-Eyed Susans: An Approach to the Study of Black Women Writers."

30. Other methods of exploring the “gaps” in women’s silences have included Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Yale: 1979); Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s *The Madwoman Can’t Speak: Or Why Insanity Is Not Subversive* (Cornell 1998).

31. Barbara Welter defines the Cult of True Womanhood as a philosophy that permeated American society, wherein “women were expected to adhere to the four cardinal virtues of True Womanhood: purity, piety, domesticity, and submission” (qtd in Saulsbury para 1). Rebecca Saulsbury argues that Welter’s work influenced later feminists such as Nancy Cott, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Ann Douglas, Gerda Lerner, and Nina Baym. Saulsbury also points out that the Cult of True Womanhood has been further explored by such scholars as Linda Kerber, Joan Scott, Susan K. Harris, Lora Romero, Joanne Dobson, Hazel Carby, and Nancy Isenberg, as well as a special issue of the journal *American Literature* in 1998 and the anthology edited by Monika M. Elbert *Separate Spheres No More*.

32. A feminist theoretical view of women’s writing which privileges the feminine plot’s non-linear styles, typically involving women’s concerns like cooking, gardening, and child-rearing over the linear heroic masculine mythic quest narrative is Ursula K. LeGuin’s essay “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*.

33. In spite of the fact that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), one of the earliest political protest novels is, in fact, also a sentimental domestic novel and was far from “just entertainment” in form and result. I am not the first to make this argument, but it does seem to be one that many people overlook. See the next footnote for a discussion of post-nineteenth century works on domestic literature.

34. See Charlotte Brundson’s article “Feminism, Postfeminism, Martha, Martha, and Nigella” for a discussion of the 1975 feminist avant-garde film *The Semiotics of the Kitchen* by Martha Rosler, in which Rosler portrays the angry woman in the kitchen, surrounded by the “signs” of her oppression. Brundson analyzes Rosler, Martha Stewart, and the third-wave (in generation, at least) Nigella Lawson from a domestic feminist perspective that also illuminates the rejection of Second Wave feminism for domesticity.

35. I wish to stress the early writings of second wavers, in spite of much theory that has come since which has added to their thinking surrounding feminism and gender roles, for two important reasons. First, in discussing popular texts, it is crucial to consider the *popular* impression of feminism, especially that which is reflected in the

popular, not scholarly, press. Even though feminists have been working very hard in the intervening years to clarify feminist positions, including nuances of race, class, age, geographies and other variables to the second wave's so-called blanket concept of feminism's opposition to women's oppression, the media and thus the popular conception of feminism has not moved on substantially since these early ideas were established, and the stereotypes around what a feminist is (which includes rejecting housework and the domestic as not a feminist activity) have not changed significantly since that foundational moment when second wave feminism first defined itself. See the next footnote for a list of popular texts that perpetuate that stereotype. Secondly, most significant feminist scholarly or critical work being done since the 1970s on domesticity features either nineteenth century or sociological studies, and does not look at contemporary fictional depictions of the third wave feminist division of household labor. There are book length feminist works on the home, domesticity and sentimentality, such as Lora Romero's *Home Fronts* (1997), or *Domestic Individualism* (1992) by Gillian Brown, but they focus on the nineteenth century, and thus, are not very useful for a discussion about twentieth and twenty-first century post-feminist domesticity. As Andrea Veltman argues in "The Sisyphean Torture of Housework: Simone de Beauvoir and Inequitable Divisions of Domestic Work in Marriage" *Hypatia*: 19:3 (2004). 121-43 "The fact that wives remain largely responsible for everyday domestic work has fallen out of fashion as a subject of feminist philosophy even as empirically oriented literature on gendered divisions of domestic work continues to confirm and to attempt to explain this fact. Despite the persistence of gendered inequities in divisions of housework, feminist philosophers have not paid significant attention to household labor since the heyday of Marxist feminism in the 1970s" (121). This is why it is an important third wave project to look at the domestic fiction which seems to be coming in under the radar of feminist critics of contemporary depictions of domesticity. As men and women continue to struggle with balancing everyday tasks equitably, it is important to ask how fiction deals with the domestic. I will analyze whether there is still a power-imbalance in depictions of domestic labor which might or might not reflect an imbalance in society at large.

36. In addition to this popular media dismissal of domesticity as antithetical to feminism, academic studies of housework generally confirm domesticity as drudgery and low status work that most people would prefer to avoid. The assumption is that if most people would prefer to avoid it, those who continue to value the domestic must be apolitical, participating in a backlash against feminism. Nancy Rollins Ahlander and Kathleen S. Bahr (1995) argue that housework is generally assumed by those who study it as "low status" work (58) which is "menial, tedious, boring, and to be avoided if possible" (59). While Ahlander and Bahr's article is critiqued as being "backlash" academics by Riley and Kiger, (1999) their critique does not deny Ahlander and Bahr's

general argument that the domestic is generally regarded as a “low status” occupation with very little prestige (544). With no prestige or status, why would anyone seeking empowerment want to perform the tasks generally assigned women? Further tying the idea of housework to early attempts to establish women’s equality, Riley and Kiger ask “why did Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963) and her discussion of ‘the problem with no name’ strike such a chord?”(544). Then, Riley and Kiger confirm a fundamental feminist critique of housework that evolved within the early days of the second wave women’s movement. They refer to Phyllis Chesler’s 1972 book *Women and Madness* which “critiques the functionalist approach to gender, work, and family” (544) After pointing out that Chesler “describes the sterile, oppressive households in which women toiled in the 1950s and 1960s” they ask the question “if the housewives sought medical-psychiatric assistance, they were often prescribed drugs for their condition. This medical-psychiatric intervention returned women to their housewife roles, but were the roles worth returning to?” (544). Third wave discussions of the domestic, which evolved out of early second waver’s critiques of what was seen as a monolithic ideology, seek to reinvent conceptualizations of power within these oft dismissed routes, as part of a continuation of feminism’s exploration of all aspects of women’s lives.

37. For a short list of popular television and movies, over many years, that reinforce the stereotype that to be a strong, independent, assertive woman, even if not identified explicitly as a feminist, means to be at least incompetently domestic (especially regarding cooking), or at most anti-domestic, see: *Christmas in Connecticut* (1945); *Three’s Company* (1977-1984); *Baby Boom* (1987); *The Stepford Wives* (1975 & 2004); *Roseanne* (1988-1997); *Always* (1989); *She-Devil* (1989); *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991); *The Abyss* (1989); *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998); *Mad About You* (1992-1999); *Passion Fish* (1992); *Clueless* (1995); *Kate & Leopold* (2001); *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (2001); *Sex and the City* (1998-2004); *Will and Grace* (1998-2006). Even *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, discussed later in this dissertation, portrays the otherwise competently feminist Buffy as clumsy in the kitchen, especially in “Pangs” (4:8). Often, the shows depict the men in these women’s lives as being the better cook, and the women bumbling along with no skills. This list does not include the numerous movies or television shows that show women with servants who do the work for them.

38. The novel and film are very different texts, but for the sake of this dissertation, I will focus on the places where they overlap, conflating the Magical Feminist elements that appear in both texts and drawing attention to the difference between the two only when that difference changes the Magical Feminist focus.

39. Moseley is the only critical journal article published as of 2006 on *Practical Magic*. There is, at the time of this writing, also one dissertation on the novels of Alice Hoffman. Peggy Sahaida's "Practical Magic: Alice Hoffman's Suburban Magic Realism" focuses on the way several of Hoffman's novels portray of magic in the suburbs as a way of rewriting the typical male-authored "suburban" novel's focus of "discontent." Sahaida argues that Hoffman's "investment in the *fin de siècle* popular culture phenomenon of a renewed interest in the magical as a way to promote healing in a New Age" augments the novel's rewriting of the suburban to include the alien, the other, all as a way of promoting "magical healing" and "community building" (2). Sahaida uses the phrase "female-centered magic realism" but stops short of recognizing a genre of Magical Feminism. Since her text largely focuses on the novel's suburban setting, relegating mention of witches as a literary trope to a footnote, it does not figure strongly in my own research.

40. Moseley uses the term "postfeminist" to mean young women who reject many of the ideas of second wave feminism, but I believe the examples she uses as postfeminist are instead better viewed as a renegotiation of the terms of power, which I define as the third wave.

41. As of 2007, the novel has become a film, which is not yet available in wide release.

42. At this writing, Riemenschneider's article is the only critical article that directly discusses Divakaruni's text. While there are some discussions of Indian writing and cooking, *Mistress of Spices* has largely been ignored by the academic community, perhaps because it is fantasy/magical narrative and focuses on the inner world of its domestic focus. Most studies of Indian narratives and cooking are ethnographic accounts of various mythologies as opposed to direct literary criticism.

43. For a good general understanding of the considerable body of work there is on all things once called "marginality" as being, instead, a center, see: George Yúdice "Marginality and the Ethics of Survival" which does a reading of several pivotal theorists' work on centering and de-centering, re-centering, and questioning populations on the basis of their positionality in terms of canons of the West and post-modernity. Considerable work has been done on this topic from theorists such as Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to name only a very few.

44. I will spell the word "Voudun" throughout this chapter; when a quotation uses a different spelling, I will keep that spelling intact. Bob Corbett argues that scholars sometimes use different spellings, based on approximating the way it is pronounced in

French Creole, such as “Vodun, Vodou, Vodoun, Vaudou, Vaudoux. Each of these is an attempt to spell the word in a way which represents how it is pronounced in Haiti. Actually the word is seldom even used by Haitians. They do not refer to the religion by the name Voodoo, but speak of people ‘following the loa,’ or ‘serving the loa’” (website). In *Brown Girl in the Ring* Mami calls what she practices “Shango or Santeria or Voudun or what, we all doing the same thing. Serving the spirits” (126). I will spell it the way Mami does. I will use the spelling that is used by Hopkinson for any other Voudun-related word. Similarly, in *Mockingbird*, the religious system created by the protagonists’ mother is not called by a name, but the Riders is capitalized, and each of the Riders’ names is capitalized. But since it *Mockingbird*’s spirits are very like Voudun’s *loa*, I will call the system there a type of Voudun.

45. Also known as Lucumi, Santeria is often paired with Voudun in popular misconceptions of both Afro-Caribbean religions, and Santeria is probably just as misunderstood. It is defined as a derivation of Yoruban religions beliefs brought to the Caribbean, and especially Cuba, by slaves and influenced by Spanish Catholicism. It is legally recognized in the U.S. as a religion (De la Torre 840). Adherents of Santeria consult *orishas*, and participate in ritualistic ceremonies often misunderstood by U.S. culture as black magic. This is the religion supposedly represented by the 1987 movie *The Believers* where the plot also involved child sacrifice, a charge often leveled upon both Vodou and Santeria.

46. A discussion of the implications of racialized words like “black” and “white” to describe bad and good magic would be ultimately important in further study of these issues, but is beyond the scope of this particular discussion.

47. As in one of the worst examples: the 1993 movie *Weekend at Bernie’s II* where the two befuddled main characters revive the ridiculously still-convincing corpse of their dead host, Bernie, using pigeon blood (because the live chickens ran off) and a few ill-formed, mispronounced words of a Voudun spell, without any acknowledgment or understanding of Voudun as a complex religion. One of my students once used this cheap-tricks comic-effect scene as an oral-aid/example to define Voudun in a class presentation, much to my horror, but this demonstrates the ingrained nature of the stereotype. Another example of Hollywood-ized misrepresentation of Voudun is the 1996 version of *The Crucible*, where Tituba starts the Salem girls down their path to witchcraft with voodoo dolls and naked romps around a fire in the woods. In another popular film, Anne Rice’s *Interview With A Vampire* (1994), slaves dressed in traditional white Voudun ceremonial clothing kill a chicken and dance around a bonfire to try to chase off the vampire Lestat and their newly-vamped master Louis. The depiction recognizes that Voudun would be part of a New Orleans slave society’s

way of dealing with the fears but still portrays it simplistically. We also see this kind of representation in the 1962 film, *Burn Witch Burn*, where the witchcraft the pretty professor's wife practices was learned in Haiti and very clearly is meant to look like Voudun, absent any acknowledgment of the gods and traditions, and so is portrayed as only black magic, necromancy, and cheap spells. One notably more nuanced portrayal of Voudun in literature is Maryse Conde's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, (1992) which shows Voudun's political protest spirit in addition to its magical nature, and acknowledges the history and gods that are a vital part of the religion.

48. The Twins are figures of an almost equal footing with Legba as first of the *loa* in ritual, often invoked as part of the opening ceremonies as a way of asking for intercession (Métreaux 146). The Marassa are defined as the divine twins, the first man and woman, the first ancestors. They embody archetypal, polar forces akin to yin and yang.

49. See Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred* (1979) for a modern-day science-fiction exploration of the way slavery could wear down resistance of even an independent person born into freedom.

50. Charles Chesnutt portrays a complex example of Voudun as a means of gaining power for disenfranchised slaves and former slaves in "The Goophered Grapevine" (1899) where the former slave Julius tells a story about a grapevine being "conjured" and causing bad luck as a way to retain his personal use of and control over the valuable asset. Julius, all the while playing a "fool" and pretending to disbelieve the story himself, tells complicated tales of cause and effect, related to "Conjure" or Hoodoo (the American cousin to Voudun), to the white potential buyers of the property, attempting to influence them. The stories, and fear of a Hoodoo conjurer's alleged lingering curse and power, allow Julius, a man with little or no control over his own life, to influence others through his story-telling. So those with power— the wherewithal to buy the land and restrict Julius' use of the asset— consider their actions mitigated by Julius' stories, even if they do not truly believe him or the magic he describes. For another interesting portrayal of Hoodoo, read part two of Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935). Hurston explores Haitian Voodoo, as well, in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938).

51. Largely Haiti, other Carribean islands, and any community with large cohesive groups of these countries' population, like New Orleans, which once had such large portions of its slave population originating from Haiti that when Haiti revolted, New Orleans slave owners tightened security there, fearing similar revolts on the mainland. Sutton E. Griggs, in *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), addresses this revolutionary spirit

and includes Voudun as one element of the “hidden nation’s” plan to overthrow slavery.

52. Hopkinson is one of the more academically noticed of the Magical Feminist texts in this dissertation. Most of the work on her deals with various aspects of her portrayals of Afro-Caribbean cultures and seems to mention the element of magic almost as an afterthought, comparing her to Magic Realist authors but failing to see the political element to those comparisons. See Giselle Liza Anatol’s “A Feminist Reading of Soucouyants in Nalo Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Skin Folk* for a discussion of a succubus-like figure in Haitian mythology. Anatol’s reading of the Soucouyant argues that Hopkinson fails to rehabilitate the female figure of the Soucouyant in the way she does other marginally “bad” figures in the story. I believe that one cannot strive to make all figures “good” in a story that deals with complex representations. The succubus in this novel would be more aptly compared to a vampire than to a witch. Gordon Collier’s “Spaceship Creole: Nalo Hopkinson, Canadian-Caribbean Fabulist Fiction, and Linguistic/Cultural Syncretism” explores the density of Creole Caribbean influence and references in Hopkinson’s work, including *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Midnight Robber*, and argues that the syncretic mixture of Caribbean elements with science-fiction’s dystopic genre makes the novels a unique way of looking at a postcolonial multicultural society.

53. Instead of say, the Internet, which is another favorite of sci-fi writers as an alternate version of society.

54. In fact, it is her relationship with her boyfriend which is her greatest weakness and source of problems in the novel.

55. Buff is a fictional drug which, in the novel, is that which Haitian folk culture believes makes zombies. It is derived from the Bufo toad, and in the novel, it is used to paralyze Ti-Jeanne as Rudy’s magic ceremony works to get her to turn her will over to him. Hopkinson creates a drug-trafficking system akin to drugs that haunt other urban sci-fi but uniquely Haitian. In creating a drug which has its roots in Voudun mythology, Hopkinson skillfully blends Afro-Caribbean myth and folklore with modern urban science-fiction’s typical features. By deftly creating this Haitian drug, Hopkinson also subtly critiques the way drugs rob a user of his/her will, creating a literal zombi. See Collier, 446, for more discussion of the drug within the novel.

56. The fact that he never answered an email from me asking whether he considered himself a feminist probably also answers the question; he does not like being considered feminist *just* because he writes strong women. But I argue that his work

should be examined from a feminist perspective for precisely that reason. Nalo Hopkinson defends Stewart, writing that “Sean *is* a feminist! I don’t know whether he uses that specific word, but he certainly walks the walk, down to not being the kind of man who runs around telling people what a good feminist he is” (Hopkinson “E-mail”).

57. Which deals very explicitly with Candy’s revelation to Toni of her sometimes graphic pornography collection, and is an analysis of a woman’s sexuality via such pornography.

58. Consider the impact of pairing his novel, say, with Flannery O’Connor’s work.

59. We learn that the Voudun community in New Orleans knows about Elena’s *loa* when a professor from Tulane University who wants to buy the Riders’ fetishes tells the story of how he learned about them, saying he met “voudoun women [who] mentioned the Texas Girl” (140).

60. Although there is a little buzz on Stewart’s current role in online Role-playing games, there is, at the writing of this dissertation, only one academic article about Stewart’s novels, in spite of the critical acclaim he receives.

61. Lisa Wenger points out that the characters’ race is only there in the absence of racial markers in her article “The Evolution of White Voodoo in the Magical Realist Fiction of Alejo Carpentier, Lewis Nordan, and Sean Stewart.”

62. On his website, Stewart lists Maya Deren’s influential text *Divine Horsemen: the Living Gods of Haiti* (1953) as invaluable in the research phase of writing the novel and creating the Riders, calling it “good inspirational reading and provides an excellent description of what it’s like to have a god annihilate you and take over your body for a couple of hours before giving it back.”

63. Who is not a Rider but is one of the spirits who haunt Elena and then Toni, and is an important part of the oral stories Toni recounts throughout her discussion of the novel’s events.

64. As is becoming a trend in Buffy studies, I will indicate season and episode number in this fashion, with season first, and episode second. Thus, this parenthetical note indicates season four, episode nine.

65. Whedon, who “studied film and gender and feminist theory at Wesleyan University” (Early 12) can be convincingly argued to be a third-wave feminist, and his

position as director/writer comes from this place, allowing the show to challenge even notions of the male director's gaze. Placing the series firmly within classic feminist film rhetoric, Jim Thompson argues that the series deconstructs Laura Mulvey's male gaze partly because, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, "it is females, not males, who hold a position of power" and therefore that the text "works to deconstruct the powerful image of the feminine, subverting it through a return to the male gaze" ("Just a Girl"6). So, the question becomes what if the director is a feminist? How does this dynamic change the position of the oft-gendered male popular film?

66. Some critics refer to the series as simply Buffy. However, since that leads to confusion between the character Buffy and the series, I will only use Buffy when I am talking about the character Buffy, or when I am directly quoting someone else.

67. The "big bad" is a phrase used in the show as shorthand for the major threat that builds throughout each season's story arc. The "big bad" is usually defeated in the season finale, although he or she may be encountered in other episodes. There are many "little bads" that the characters encounter in each episode, but the "big bad" is the one serious threat, the one that often means apocalyptic danger. Thus, in season one, the "big bad" is the Master, an age-old vampire. While the group encounters many other threats through the season which are dispatched more easily than the "big bad," there is always a building storyline that anticipates the "big bad" and the group is always thinking of that threat. season two's "big bad" is the vampire boyfriend turned bad Angelus; season three's "big bad" is the Mayor of Sunnydale; season four's is cyborg/vampire Adam; season five is Hell-God Glory (and the first female "big bad"); season six is Dark Willow (although some have argued the real "big bad" of season six is life itself); season seven is The First Evil, teamed up with Caleb, a preacher/serial killer.

68. When Whedon uses the terminology of "coming down against patriarchy" he places his text into a context of feminist rhetoric that has fallen out of favor in contemporary scholarly research. Because Whedon's intent is to place his creation within this context, and in spite of the attitude reflected by McRobbie's 1994 comment that patriarchy "is a word rarely used these days" I will use this term that Joanne Hollows defines as "a system of male domination assumed to exist and used to identify and explain different instances of women's oppression [. . .] patriarchy may not be a perfect concept but it remains the best tool for understanding women's subordinate position" (Hollows 8). Like Lorna Jowett, I "acknowledge that 'patriarchy' is not an unchanging and inflexible system" (5) but a term that easily defines a mode of writing that has traditionally been canonized as universal and generally privileges male heroes, storylines, and writers.

69. The journal is *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*, found at (<http://slayageonline.com/>) which features, at this writing, 22 issues. The conference is the SC2: The Slayage Conference on the Whedonverses, which is in its second year in 2006. At this writing, a third conference is not yet announced on the website.

70. Jowett's book-length study of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a gender studies primer is the most significant discussion of gender roles on the series, both male and female, that has appeared thus far. In being published since the final season finale, it also manages to discuss the show from a complete perspective. As such, it is probably the most academic important gender-study of the show published thus far, and I will consequently quote it at some length.

71. For more on this idea, and a discussion of Darla, see Lorna Jowett's "Bad Girls" in *Sex and the Slayer*.

72. In fact, one could argue that the reason the First Slayer and subsequent generations of Slayers are young girls is exactly because her appearance made her the perfect bait to catch and kill vampires.

73. See Sherryl Vint's "'Killing us Softly'? A Feminist Search for the 'Real' Buffy."

74. Lorna Jowett argues that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* "makes much play with the binary oppositions invoked by the various generic conventions it uses. These include masculine/feminine, human/monster, active/passive, strong/weak, good/bad, teen/adult, and power/powerlessness. The show attempts to destabilize binaries through ambivalence and ambiguity and through the multiple intersections of its generic hybridity. In reversing, subverting, or blurring boundaries between these binaries, Buffy potentially opens up an arena for alternative representations of gender and sexuality" (12). Jowett further argues that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* "presents neither a 'subversive' nor a 'conservative' view of gender but, rather, a contradictory mixture of both" (1). In "Buffy the Feminist Slayer? Constructions of Femininity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," Gwyneth Bodger argues that "a defining feature of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is the liminal position it occupies, at once advocating and refuting positivist feminist readings" (para 1). Arwen Spicer proposes that the final season's metanarrative arc "undermines" the series' feminist message, even as she points out that "throughout its seven seasons, *Buffy* has made an astounding contribution to the dissemination of a sophisticated feminist ideology through a commitment to morally complicated, multivocal storytelling" (Spicer 10). More positively, Patricia Pender places *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a Third Wave text that "paints a compelling picture of the promises and predicaments that attend third wave feminism as it negotiates both

its second wave antecedents and its traditional patriarchal nemesis” (1). In her speech, “Whose Revolution Has Been Televised,” Pender agrees that the series “consistently challenged– and expanded– our ideas of acceptable femininity. Giving the cultural cliché of the cheerleader a, like, complete makeover, the series continues to model the transgressive performance of gender as a mode of oppositional politics and praxis” (3). As Jowett points out, these various critical interpretations of the series means that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a “polysemic” text– that is, a text open to many interpretations. It is exactly its polysemic nature– a horror series that is funny, a teen show that allows its characters to grow up and change, a dark romance where the hero does not get the girl (and the girl does not get nor even need but is, herself, the hero), a feminist show whose characters wear makeup and high-heeled shoes to fight the bad guys– that complicates the issues of gender, making *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* a fundamentally feminist text which challenges the patriarchal nodes of horror/fantasy story-telling. In depicting characters that defy gender stereotypes, as well as consistently playing with what a horror text is supposed to be, the show thwarts the definition of male/female, at the same time it challenges horror’s typical elements by challenging what we know about witches as a stock character in horror.

75. At this writing, Whedon plans a “Season Eight” of the show in comic book form, put out by Dark Horse comics, which will feature this new community of fully empowered Slayers. He says that the comic will continue the story as “canon.” He looks to do approximately “25 and 30 issues for this season, as it were. And that could run for a couple of years” (Rudolph para 19).

76. There is significant debate among fans about the canonicity of the graphic novels in the Buffyverse. However, it is generally accepted that anything peripheral to the series (such as a graphic novel) that was either written by or very closely supervised by Joss Whedon is canon. Therefore, *Tales of the Slayers*, wherein many of the stories were written by Whedon, and thus is considered canonical Buffyverse.

77. Notably, this is the only episode where she appears in person, and her lack of parental involvement is shown when she mistakes Willow’s best friends’ name as “Bunny Summers.”

78. This darkness is seen especially in the season six story arc after she comes back from the dead and pursues a sado-masochistic relationship with Spike, a vampire bad-boy and her former enemy.

79. Giles is the Watcher assigned to keep track of Buffy's actions as Slayer. He is supposed to guide her and be more than her mentor, but this second episode of the show establishes the relationship between Buffy and Giles even more fully than the first when Buffy directly disobeys Giles' orders. She defies her "father-figure" from day one.

80. The name "Scooby Gang" is what fans call Buffy and her friends, after the mystery-solving group of young people in the Scooby Doo cartoons of the 1980s.

81. In "The Pack" (1:6) Giles refers to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and it is a text in his library in Sunnydale, taken from the British Museum. The text is therefore defined as a foundational text for the Watchers Council's influence over the Slayer.

82. During "Gingerbread," Amy tries to turn her attackers into rats, and is herself turned into a rat. She stays this way, in a cage in Willow's room, for a couple of seasons until Willow changes her back into human form in "Something Blue" (4:9).

83. She is also one of the few exceptions to the middle-class white social group of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: in this episode, we see that Tara's family lives in a trailer, and has the extended family and southern accent, and they are coded as working or lower-class.

84. This refers obliquely to the convention in *Lord of the Rings* of the wizards going through a purification process to become more pure, higher ranked in the hierarchy of Wizards. Gandalf goes from the too-human, flawed Gandalf the grey to Gandalf the white, who can fight Sauron successfully but who is also more distracted, less-human. He is, though, a better wizard after his self-sacrificing death and subsequent descent and trip through the underworld. This death through sacrifice, descent into "Hell" and rebirth as more powerful is a typical pattern in Fantasy for the wizard to follow.

85. Even Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1922), while going to some length to separate the goddesses into two separate entities (Demeter as the Earth and Persephone as a personification of corn), admits they were called by "the official title of 'the Two Goddesses' [. . .] without any specification of their individual attributes and titles, as if their separate individualities had almost merged in a single divine substance" (Frazer Ch 44 para 10).

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