



Universidad de Valladolid

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Grado en Estudios Ingleses

Witches and *brujas*: A comparison of *The Witch* (2015) and *Akelarre* (2020)

Ana Serrano Esteban

Tutora: Marta María Gutiérrez Rodríguez

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

Curso: 2022-2023

ABSTRACT

The early modern period experienced a more well-rounded creation of one of the most popular scapegoats at the time: the witch. As a result, thousands of women and men (to a lesser extent) were victims of the witch hunts in Europe, which also translated to New England. The following dissertation aims to discover and compare in which ways the stereotype of the early modern period is represented in the films *The Witch* and *Akelarre*. Following a thorough analysis of the characteristics of the witches in both films, light will be shed on how accurate the stereotype of the witch is represented in these, as well as how culture represents traditional imagery of witchcraft in contemporary society.

Keywords: Stereotype, Witch hunts, Early modern period, Witch, *The Witch*, *Akelarre*.

RESUMEN

La edad moderna fue testigo de la creación de una visión más compleja de uno de los chivos expiatorios más comunes de la época: la bruja. Como resultado, miles de mujeres y hombres (en menor medida) fueron víctimas de las cazas de brujas europeas, las cuales también se trasladaron a Nueva Inglaterra. El siguiente Trabajo de Fin de Grado tiene como objetivo descubrir y comparar de qué forma se representa el estereotipo de la bruja de este periodo en las películas *La bruja* y *Akelarre*. Tras un análisis completo de las características de las brujas en ambas películas, podremos concluir la fidelidad con que se representa el estereotipo de la bruja, además de cómo la cultura representa imágenes tradicionales como la brujería en la sociedad de hoy en día.

Palabras clave: Estereotipo, Caza de brujas, Edad moderna, Bruja, *The Witch*, *Akelarre*.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	3
1. Witches and Witch Hunts	3
1.1 The European Witch Hunt.....	3
1.2 Witchery in New England: A Puritan background.....	4
1.3 Witchery in Spain and the Basque Country	5
1.4 The Stereotype of the witch.....	7
1.4.1. Sex.....	7
1.4.2. Age	8
1.4.3. Behaviour and personality.....	8
1.4.4. Marital status	9
1.4.5. Social and economic status.....	9
1.4.6. Physical appearance	10
1.4.7. Habitat and means of living.....	11
1.5. Representation of witches in films	11
1.5.1. <i>The Witch</i> (2015).....	11
1.5.2. <i>Akelarre</i> (2020)	12
2. The Stereotype of witches in films: <i>The Witch & Akelarre</i>	13
2.1. Sex.....	13
2.2. Age	15
2.3. Behaviour and personality.....	18
2.4. Marital status	22
2.5. Social and economic status.....	23
2.6. Physical appearance	25
2.7. Habitat and means of living.....	27
3. Conclusions	29
4. Bibliography	31

INTRODUCTION

Many cultures dating as far back as Greek and Roman times have shared the belief in evil spirits and supernatural powers capable of harming humans and their environment (Hutton 83-109). This persistent feature across cultures allowed for the progressive creation of creatures who embodied the reason behind a community's mishaps, providing the background for the appearance of scapegoats. Unfortunately, the witch was one of them.

Barstow shares that 80% of the accusations of witchcraft were aimed at women, and 85% of the deaths resulting of this were also those of women (9). Kelkar and Nathan quote Christina Lerner when introducing a controversial idea deriving from these figures: was witch-hunting women-hunting? (128). There is still some ambivalence towards this interpretation, since the remaining 20% of male victims should be accounted for through factual means. Nevertheless, it would not be correct to ignore the importance of gender issues aimed at women either, since figures show that there was a clear tendency to accuse women more than men.

The numerous treatises with a misogynistic tone elite male figures wrote justifies this. One of the most influential examples is the *Malleus Maleficarum*, released in 1486 (Levack 54). Known as a holy book in the realm of witchcraft, despite its fluctuating popularity across regions and times, it strengthened the connection between witchcraft and the female gender due to its complete account of the features of witches (referred to as a feminine "they", hence, not considering men witches), actions, appearance, and means to detect them (Levack 206).

Therefore, the aim behind this dissertation is exploring the stereotype of the witch in the early modern period and contrasting it to the profiles of witches presented in two films set in this very same era: *The Witch* (2015) and *Akelarre* (2020), in order to conclude to which extent they abide by it or not. I believe that like any piece of literature, the media can also provide sharp details on historical events, while especially focusing on how society has built on this topic, accepting, or ignoring certain traditional values.

There are two main sections in this paper. The first one is dedicated to theoretical background, which situates us in the early modern period, its ideas regarding the witch,

the existence of witch hunts, and a deeper insight into witchcraft in New England and Spain. Some information about each film will also be provided here, as well as a more detailed analysis on the specific stereotypes of the witch. The second one is the analytical part of the research, in which I conduct an extensive qualitative study of each stereotype, previously discussed, in relation to the witches in *The Witch* and *Akelarre*. To sum all the findings, some final conclusions will round the dissertation.

The main hypothesis before conducting the analysis is that due to the heavy research both directors undertook, the films are expected to represent a historically accurate stereotype of the witch through their main female characters. Therefore, studying whether the research work behind them is accurate enough, becomes another main objective of the paper.

The choice of this particular topic is connected to my interest in witches and their allure. Although they may sound fictional and mere reminiscences of superstitious beliefs, when studying them from a feminist perspective, they unfold pedagogical information about society's behaviour and (lack of) evolution. Moreover, films are visually detailed in a way a written work may not be, and juxtaposing two films from different geographical and linguistic backgrounds, is a fruitful tool to learn about the powerful feminist image the witch has become.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Witches and Witch Hunts

To fully understand the magnitude of the obsessive behaviour against witches, it is relevant to mention an important historical event: the witch hunts. These were processes in which witches were in the eye of authorities' most wanted people. Thought to be harmful and a danger to safety (Hutton 33), they had to be dismantled.

Behind them was a thorough process which shared similar characteristics around countries Levack sheds light on (2). First, someone was believed to behave strangely, i.e., not accordingly to what society considered to be acceptable. Keeping in mind that all aspects of life were dictated by social, religious, patriarchal, and political rules, the only explanation they could use to account for these "strange" behaviours was that he or she must be a witch. After being accused, denounced, or inflicted by unsolicited rumours, these people were arrested, interrogated, and obligated to confess. Eventually, a formal accusation was enacted, and a punishment established (expulsion, incarceration, or death).

1.1 The European Witch Hunt

There was a time in European history known as The European Witch Hunt, of special interest for this paper. This roughly 60-year period, comprising from 1570 to 1630, saw countries experiencing massive and sudden accusations towards a clearly defined group: women from lower classes, whose marital status was not attached to a man (widows, or still unmarried), and more likely of older age (Clark 1271). Moreover, this era experienced the unseen association of witches and diabolism (Levack 7-8), meaning that witches made pacts with the Devil and performed *maleficium*, or "intentional causing of harm to others" (Hutton 102).

As opposed to what might be thought to be resulting of a generalised hysteria imposed by religious beliefs to a fearful, Christian population, Clark (107) and Levack (163) agree that this historical event was a complex product of connected socio-economic, political, and ideological factors. It is important to remark that The European Witch Hunt took

place in what is known as the “Age of Anxiety” (Levack 164), a period defined as “a world where disease, poverty and famine reigned” by Dresen-Coenders (417). Co-existing with inflation, wars, and tensions between Catholicism and Protestantism, an uneasy people believed that all this was surely the devil’s work. Therefore, the solution was to get rid of the perpetrators of these crimes, and this is where witches came into the picture.

Inevitably, we are faced by gender controversy again. Barstow argues that this rise in prosecutions in Europe was a means “to take away women’s control of their sexual and reproductive lives” (2), according to the rise of midwives, natural healers, and doctors accused of witchcraft in that period. Dresen-Coenders also supports this view, considering that marriage was not a love affair, but rather a social and moral standard which was experiencing fewer formal unions (147).

However, we should be responding a different question: what was a witch exactly accused of? One of the most typical connotations of witchcraft was attacking and killing children as well as adults (Wilby 91). In Early North America, beliefs went as far as thinking that “the accused had killed their cattle, sickened their child, hindered their sexual performance, or ruined their crops” (Games 5). One last important nuance attributed to witches was attending the Sabbath, a night in which they danced, had orgies, and worshipped the Devil (Caro Baroja 158).

Hence, we can conclude that when encountering an accurate historical representation of the witch, it will not portray it in a positive manner. Before shedding light on the specific stereotypes of the witch, in the next two sections a more detailed conception of witches in the two areas of interest for this study, New England, and Spain, will be provided.

1.2. Witchery in New England: A Puritan background

Although some of the most salient cases in the history of witch-hunts took place in Europe (except the Salem Witch Trials in 1692), the persecution of witches was brought across the Atlantic. It is therefore no surprise that if in 1604 England’s *English Act against Conjuratation* considered witchcraft to be a crime, when the first settlers moved to North America, they brought their ideology with them (Games 127).

The first case of witchcraft in New England dates to 1626 (Games 127), and during the seventeenth century, this region saw sixty-one people being accused of witchery, (excluding Salem's figures), of which sixteen were eventually killed (Levack 9). In fact, the first execution for witchcraft did not take place until 1647 in Connecticut (Demos 1314). Compared to Europe, the figures may seem low, but it should be taken into consideration that if we consider that witch-hunting began as early as the fourteenth century, British North America took its first steps in this matter about three hundred years later (Levack 204-205). In addition, the population in the initial British settlements was distinctively lower than that of the continent, rising the percentages of the accusations and victims.

A key and distinctive element of Early North American witchcraft is the importance of Puritanism. It was not merely the religion these first inhabitants were ascribed to, but also the social, political, cultural, and religious axiom their whole existence was based around. Puritans "sought to live by God's laws as they strictly interpreted them" (Games 17). In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, Levack explains how "God and the devil were constantly at work in their day-to-day lives, testing and tempting, rewarding and punishing as each individual deserved". (2)

This, altogether with the concern of salvation after life, resulted in an obsession with their everyday affairs. An unexpected event, regardless of how uncanny or unfathomable, could and had to be explained through religion (Games 17). Although efforts to combat witchery and the devil were made, such as *The Law of the Colony of Connecticut* from 1642, the witch-craze in New England did not last for long (Games 129). It ended shortly after the Salem witch-hunt, when 162 people were accused and 19 executed (Games 56), but their long-lasting impact was unquestionable. Still, the fear of witches was very much present in people's mind during the next century (Levack 16).

1.3. Witchery in Spain and the Basque Country

As a predominantly Catholic country, when thinking about witches and Spain, the institution of the Inquisition inevitably comes to mind. Contrarily to popular belief, the Spanish Inquisition was not as involved in the search of witchcraft as it may be expected.

Surprisingly, despite more than five thousand trials for witchcraft took place between 1610 and 1700, no witches were burnt (Hutton 261). As Ruth Behar says, Spain had a different conception of heresy. Religious zeal was its main fixation, and it rather focused on the prosecution of false Jewish and Muslim converts than plausible witches (222). While thousands of witches were still tried, their persecution was often led by minor, local administrations who depended on the approval of La Suprema (the Inquisition's central court) to take matters into their own hands (Levack 255-256).

The most affected area by trials in Spain was the Basque Country, the area in which *Akelarre* happens to be inspired (Hoak 1271). The first account of the fear of witches in the Basque Country during the Early Modern Period was in 1466, when Henry IV agreed to give the town mayors the power to carry out trials and executions (Caro Baroja 154). According to him, witchcraft almost existed as an isolated social phenomenon in the country (155). This dynamic changed at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the region saw the massive witch-hunt of 1609 lasting up to 1614 in the adjoining areas of Spain and France (Hutton 256). Pierre de Rosteguy de Lancre, demonologist of Basque ascendancy (Levack 57), became one of the most well-known witch-hunters involved in these processes in the Labourd and the Basque Country (Caro Baroja 166-168). This is the area and timing in which *Akelarre* is set (1609), and its main male character (Rostegui) is precisely a historical representation of De Lancre. It is estimated that around two thousand accusations (Hutton 265) happened, making these sudden, relatively brief yet deadly and intense attacks a typical feature of witch-hunts in Spain.

What type of witches was the government in this area obsessed with, then? As it will be commented on, the stereotype of the witch changed even within the same country. In Spain's case, Caro Baroja (115) and Behar (222-223) agree that the north gravitated towards a rural, anti-social, disruptive witch, dangerous for the community. This contrasted with the image of the young, independent women, or widows or spinsters predominant in Castille; and in the South, moriscas were likely to be accused of witchcraft. Unlike in any other European country, the Inquisition's activity was progressively reduced, and by 1620, after the hectic years of accusations, trials, and death penalties, especially in the north, witch trials were almost non-existent (Hutton 265). According to Levack (280), Spain's last execution for witchery took place in 1781, while the last trial dates to forty years later, in 1820.

1.4. The Stereotype of the witch

The stereotype of the witch has evolved not only through time but differently from one location to another. Along with the stereotypes Levack offers in *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, other works including an extensive focus on stereotypes of the witch in New England and the Basque Country will also receive attention (such as those of Caro Baroja, Hutton or Wilby amongst others), since these are of special interest for this paper. The subcategories “Habitat and means of living”, as well as “Physical appearance” have also been added despite not being categorised in Levack’s work. After analysing these aspects, a more defined image of what a witch could look like will be created.

1.4.1. Sex

Indeed, both men and women could be accused and prosecuted for being witches, but figures show a likelier tendency towards women being the main victims. There is a clear explanation to the fluctuation in percentages of female and male witches: in short, not every man could be accused of being a witch, but any woman could. The men accused of witchcraft belonged to very specific and well-defined categories, and their charges were normally linked to heresy and unaccepted political organisations; charges which, unlike witchcraft, were not sex-linked (Levack 143). Furthermore, interrogations pressured people to confess to these charges, especially if they were somehow related with other women being accused (Kelkar and Nathan 131).

Hence, whether these are reasons enough to declare that witchcraft was not highly linked to sex differences is still controversial. Especially so when men’s experiences contrast with the hyper sexualised nuances of women’s accusations. Apart from the influence of the *Malleus Maleficarum* and other treatises, which directly linked women and witches with despicable connotations, early modern patriarchal societies used women’s lack of presence in male-dominated fields to suspect from them. For instance, it was believed that when women were alone in their households, they poisoned objects, formulated spells, and even when they were exercising, mainly as “cooks, healers and midwives”, they could use their contact with people to harm them (Levack 146-148). Besides, at that

point in history, culture and tradition had made a long-lasting impact on the image of witches, connecting women and witchcraft based on “the merest of clichés” (Clark 114).

1.4.2. Age

It seems like middle age and older women (from 45 onwards, considering life expectancy back then) were the most popular witches. To an extent, this comes from the fact that women who had passed menopause could still enjoy sexual freedom, which was intimidating to men. As Levack says, “underlying the depiction of the old, sexually voracious hag was a deep male fear of the sexually experienced, sexually independent woman” (152). Moreover, these women could no longer reproduce, and their value for society was gone. Therefore, it made sense to believe that older women won the most from magic (youth, beauty, and luxuries), and since all women were filled with sexual lust, they would necessarily succumb to a young, attractive personification of the devil.

Although older women occupy the centrepiece of main victims, a smaller percentage of young women and teenagers was also accused, except they were often linked to that Spanish prototype of the “celestina” (Levack 154). Likewise, children, albeit to a lesser extent, could also be witches. As Demos explains, this was mostly because their parents were witches, and since witchcraft was considered a genetic condition, so they were (1315). Nonetheless, records shows that the number of older women accused was largely more significant.

1.4.3. Behaviour and personality

As Clark states, societies in the seventeenth century had a fixed and very opposite perception of gender values, based on a dual system (120). This means that if men were associated with positive values, (let us say: good, right, perfect), women represented the contrary, (evil, wrong, and imperfect). This is why Purkiss, like many authors, defines how witches were perceived with the concept of “the Other” (97). In this sense, they represented everything a woman was not supposed to be, hence their historical descriptions beginning with the prefix “anti”: witches were anti-mothers (100), anti-housewives (97), and in general, anti-women (94).

Thus, they were considered rebels, people who were anti-social and did not fit into gender roles. Purely non-conformist, they showed an attitude of irreverence to the people who tried them. Indeed, as Levack discusses, witches were “sharp-tongued, bad-tempered and quarrelsome” (160). If language meant communication and peace, “the witch announced herself and often damned herself through her disorderly tongue” (Kamensky 202). Clearly, the list of negative adjectives to define witches is endless. Hutton indicates that they were inherently evil (55), harmful to the community (48) and guilty of damaging enemies (41), but the most extreme ones reach the point of them being sexual obsesses, liars, wicked, (Morales 271), and even cannibalistic (Levack 9).

1.4.4. Marital status

Levack says that although both married and unmarried women were affected, it was the latter that received the most attention. With a marriage crisis hitting the continent, where women seemed to avoid unions (Clark 107), men saw their positions in a patriarchal society questioned. Therefore, single women and spinsters were regarded as dangerous. Many of them were independent, self-focused women who did not abide by gender and social rules. Hence, to men’s widespread toxic masculinity, the belief that these women could be more easily seduced by the devil was added.

So, what about married women? These women who lived with their husbands were mainly accused as victims due to some retaliation towards their husbands, or because they were involved in some economic conflict. Caro Baroja also distinguishes those women whose husbands were working abroad, and as they were left alone, they had more chances of being accused of witchcraft (168). This was because society reckoned that when men left their households to work, there were no real figures to protect them, and this is when terrible disgraces occurred.

1.4.5. Social and economic status

The most popular profile, especially in Europe, Levack discusses is that of poor women, who were often related to submerged activities. The dire economic situation, as Clark puts it, “turned local indigence—especially prominent among women of low status—into

a liability that communities no longer knew how to discharge” (108), making them the perfect excuse to blame them for big-picture issues. The fact that the opposite image, especially in New England, also took place, goes to show how varied the accusations to women were. This second profile represented richer women who could now inherit properties, contradicting the tradition in which only men had the economic power and were the only ones who could own wealth, land, or items with high economic value. According to Allison Games, 61 % of accused female witches had no male figure above them to inherit, becoming more likely to be prosecuted (64 %) and killed (89%) (41).

1.4.6. Physical appearance

Image and external appearance are excuses to persecute people considered unwanted, and witches could not be any less. Purkiss reflects upon the stereotypical idea that witches were old, creepy, and ugly, and defends that portraying witches as undesirable creatures, emphasising their “grotesque” external image, was an excuse to criticise that rebellious spirit they had: “the ugly old witch with warts and a beard is a figure who refuses to be controlled or managed as a soft or yielding object of desire” (127).

But what Behar defines as “the northern European image of the witch as an old, ugly, and poor woman” (183) could also be seen from the opposite perspective. Witches could still be deceptively beautiful, exude sexual energy, and be attractive, says Wilby (365), based on De Lancre’s portrayal of Basque witches. She thinks this is partly because of his “sexual desire and the conventionally misogynistic attitudes of the period were conflated with aesthetic sensibility, romanticism and native curiosity about the minutiae of their lives” (366).

Indeed, physical image was important to the extent that it was an essential tool to identify witches, for these were known to have the mark of the Devil (Caro Baroja 178). After making a pact with him, it was believed that he left a mark in “hidden places” (Games 14), normally in the iris, the genitals, or underneath the hair, and was easily recognisable for its lack of sensitivity and pain.

1.4.7. Habitat and means of living

Since films are being dealt with, it is interesting to analyse external aspects like the environment that surrounded witches. The importance of community and a peaceful social order in early modern groups has been remarked. Overall, Levack refutes the idea of the witch as a completely secluded individual and yet defines her as “hardly a typical villager” (162). Furthermore, when Demos explains the functioning of social life in New England, he goes on to defend that witches normally lived inside the community, although they showed an unstable attitude, were conflictive, and malfunctioned inside it (275). In some other social circles, coexistence was not the issue as such, but instead, their allegedly deceiving behaviours resulted in hostility, suspicion, and fear of their neighbours (Levack 162).

1.5. Representation of witches in films

Now that the main stereotype of the witch has been laid out, before beginning with the analysis of the films, some notions regarding them will be included. This section is dedicated to basic aspects of the films studied, such as plot, main ideas, historical background, and commentaries by the directors.

1.5.1. *The Witch* (2015)

Set somewhere in Puritan New England in the 1630s, we follow a family of six (father William, mother Katherine, oldest daughter Thomasin, middle child Caleb, and twins Mercy and Jonas) as it is expelled from the colony they lived in. Isolated and excluded from civilisation, they begin a new life in the woods which is suddenly disrupted by the disappearance of baby Samuel as Thomasin plays peek-a-boo with him. This, along with a dreadful series of events, can only be explained in one way: there is a witch between them. The real question is: who? The psychological terror of a family's suffering, the constant accusations within the family circle and the development of events, build the

perfect atmosphere to discuss the stereotype of the witch, and how the characters react to their situation in an early modern Puritan society.

Robert Eggers, the director of the film, defines it as a “Puritan’s nightmare” in one of his interviews for VICE Talks Films (2016). He acknowledges that even nowadays, New England is still highly influenced and very much aware of its historical and cultural past. When asked about the concept of “the feminine darkness” depicted in the film, he replies that it is a concept based on the following:

“The idea that the witch unconsciously was the dark side of humanity but mainly the dark side of women and everything that female power represented in men’s fantasies and fears, and ambivalences about women and their power, but also women’s fears and ambivalences about their power in a male – dominated society.” (06: 22 – 06:51)

Revising historical data as the main source for his production, he found stories in which he thought not only society, but also the women accused of witchcraft reckoned that they were evil witches. Since they had no scientific or psychological explanations for the uncanny facts that took place, they had to rely on these thoughts as their only source of explanations.

1.5.2. *Akelarre* (2020)

Set in 1609 in a small coastal village of the Basque Country, a group of young girls (sisters Ana and María, Olaia, Maider, Katalin and Oneka) is incarcerated and accused of being witches. During the interrogations, the Spanish Inquisitors question them about the celebration of the Sabbath, the day in which witches reunite and invoke the Devil. The girls are left alone to defend themselves, and led by the main character Ana, the group decides to pretend that they are witches in order to survive. After experiencing Rostegui’s trials and interrogations, accompanied by physical abuse, they perform a Sabbath the day they are sentenced to die. Will they survive?

Director Pablo Agüero says during an interview at the San Sebastian Film Awards (2020) that the inspiration for his bilingual film came from the 19th century book *The Witch*, in which the figure of the witch was portrayed in a positive light: she was seen as resilient, restless, and fully liberated, albeit being the victim of a religious, and misogynistic

society. He admits that all the cases he investigated and happened at the time of the Witch Hunt, both in Europe and America, had basic factors in common: they always repressed local cultures and women, using the superstitious belief in the witch to carry out an ideological prosecution. Like Eggers, he believes that the cultural reminiscence of witches and their place in history in Basque culture is still latent nowadays.

Akelarre provides a feminist perspective of the ideological, patriarchal, and socio-political oppression women in the early 17th century suffered from. The most appealing characteristic of the film is how it is progressively constructed. This is not only thanks to the portrayal of the Inquisition's accusations and beliefs regarding witches, but also because we can grasp what common people, the girls in this case, believed a witch behaved, and thought like. As it will be explored in the next section, stereotypical representation plays a huge role in this film.

2. The Stereotype of witches in films: *The Witch & Akelarre*

Now the stereotype of the witches presented in the previous section will be analysed focusing on whether the witches who appear in the films abide by it or not. For limitation purposes, only the characters who are clearly identifiable as witches will be targeted, since multiples characters can be studied as witches at some level.

2.1. Sex

In both films, women occupy the centrepiece as witches. In *The Witch* the three main witches are women: Thomasin, the witch of the woods, and the young witch; and equally, all the accused witches in *Akelarre* are girls.

When sexualisation and the popular links of women and witchcraft were discussed previously, the huge sexual component in *The Witch* and *Akelarre* was not mentioned. In the former, the hints to incestuous thoughts from brother to sister are the most shocking. Caleb keeps staring at Thomasin's cleavage while she sleeps, and again when she is washing the family's clothes. In the same way, he also approaches the young attractive witch in the woods, which takes over his Puritan beliefs and everything he has been taught

not to do. Gender stereotypes are also seen when the children overhear a conversation their parents have. Due to their economic situation, Katherine proposes that Thomasin be sold to a family to serve them, particularly since she has had her first period. This idea that it has to be the female teenager who has to sacrifice herself to help her family is highly influenced by gender roles.

Akelarre's female characters also experience sexualisation. Ana must trick Rostegui to augment her chances of surviving. She takes advantage of the fact that he is attracted to her to seduce him, and eventually succeeds. The "complete" bewitchment formally happens when Ana offers the mushroom to him during the Sabbath's performance, according to the belief that "the exchange of an object, a look, a touch, gives the witches power" (Purkiss 108). There are multiple clues in the film where we see Rostegui falling for Ana's charms: he looks at her eyes more than he is supposed to, (it was believed that a witch bewitched others with her eyes), and he is visibly aroused in one-on-one conversations with her. He shares the vision of witches as sexual beings, representing exactly what De Lancre and the *Malleus Maleficarum* discussed. Clark acknowledges that according to the former, "The key to their [the witches] wickedness lay, above all, in their carnal appetites, which were far greater than those of men" (113). Rostegui admits that Lucifer's main weapon is beauty. If he wanted to trick men into believing in him, he would not choose an old, ugly woman to do so. Instead, Lucifer chose young, adolescent women with a good-looking image as their allies because "men's flesh is weak".

It is interesting how the possibility that men can be witches is not even considered in either of the films; the accusations are always directed at women. In *The Witch* there seems to be an unbiased belief towards the end that Thomasin must be the witch in the family, despite the more than believable accusations directed at the twins. Similarly, Oneka tells the girls that she has found out through gossip that women were being arrested, taken to the hills, tied to a stake, and burnt alive.

So at least formally, there are no male witches. However, the films pose questions to the audience. In *The Witch*, Jonas, along with Mercy, could have been somehow bewitched by Black Philip, the male goat of the family. As they say, he spoke to them, and knowing that goats are the traditional representation of the Devil, he could have done this to enchant them. They add that he told them that it was Thomasin who had bewitched Caleb

in the woods. Then again, it could have all been child play, but from how the events are laid out, it is a likely possibility that they too are witches. This type of evil enchantment is also seen in *Akelarre*, as the Conseiller openly says that Rostegui is bewitched after seeing his relationship with Ana develop.

2.2. Age

It has been discussed that older women were the most stereotypical witches. In *The Witch*, when the witch of the woods appears, she sets a historically accurate behaviour by kidnapping the baby of the family, as according to Levack, witches “were allegedly eager to obtain unbaptized babies so that they could sacrifice them to the Devil, feast upon their flesh at the sabbath meal and use their remains in the production of magical ointments” (147). Although we can only see quick flashes of what she does, this old looking woman runs away with him and performs these acts in an unknown location. She greedily touches Sam, grabs a knife, and the next thing we see is her shaking a stick, and slathering his remains in her body. She also uses them to cover a long stick (most likely a broom), which she then puts behind her legs. With a full moon on the background, the naked figure of this old witch suddenly exudes a rejuvenated and empowered energy to nature: she is triumphant and a reminder of Goya’s *Capricho 68: Linda Maestra!* (1797-1799).

Her second appearance takes place when the children left are trapped in the barn. Thanks to her supernatural abilities, she manages to get inside, and is found laughing evilly while sucking at the goats’ milk. Since only Thomasine is left, it is assumed that Mercy and Jonas have also been taken by the witch. *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1820-1823), another Goya painting, comes to mind in this sequence, and it is clearly a means to emphasise that connection between the witch, the anti-mother and infant cannibalism (Purkiss 280).

The image of the old witch differs greatly with the one in *Akelarre*. This prototype is represented by Mrs Lara, the woman who welcomes the men in the village. To begin with, she does not openly say that she is a witch, but she shows signs which make us believe that she is one. As mentioned, the only thing she has in common with the one in *The Witch*, is her age. Mrs Lara is shown as a wise, patient, and nurturing woman, who must bear the continuous disrespect to her customs, culture and land from the Inquisitorial men.

Instead of being cannibalistic, or evil, she warns and advises Ana to use her attributes in her favour, since, as she says, “I once was like you”, implying some sort of connection between herself and the girls’ situation. This, along with her speech about freedom, not wanting to associate with men and following her own path, could be interpreted as an act of sorority and a confession in which she hints that she understands the girls more than they think. Besides, when the girls manage to escape the Inquisition and lay on the verge of a hill, she takes her *cofia* off (a traditional Basque hat) and shows her long white hair as a sign of respect to them.

The young, sexy woman also appears in both films, although it is more obvious in *The Witch*. When Caleb and Thomasin go to the woods to look for food, the horse is unsettled by a hare Caleb and their father were unable to kill. He gets disoriented and lost in the forest, when he finds a hovel from which the second witch comes out. She is the youthful, good-looking witch, who can charm others with her astonishing beauty. Indeed, her creepy smile attracts him despite his apparent hesitance. She reaches to kiss him, and he does not resist, but when her hand grabs his head, it turns into a larger, older woman’s hand with long nails which rather resembles a claw.

The other witch that can fit into this category is Ana. She is a teenager like Thomasin and the rest of the girls, but she acts more maturely, and is forced to display a more sexualised energy similar to the young witch of the woods. As she creates her witch-image, she realises that she has a captivating effect on Rostegui and uses this as her weapon. The scene that better represents this is the one in which she explains an encounter with the devil. She mocks Rostegui by describing the devil with his same physical traits (tall, dark hair, light eyes), adding some extra sexual connotations, and sexually attracts him by moaning and faking an orgasm. He gets closer and closer to her and is even furious at the soldiers when they cover her eyes and interrupt their conversation.

Thomasin, for instance does not display this behaviour, hence why she fits into the next category: the young adolescent witch. Corcoran links how American culture in the first half of the twentieth century compared teenage girls’ behaviours to those of young witches typical in early modern societies (2-3). Indeed, the young witch and the teenager Thomasin manage to fuse together at the end of the film, share the issues of complexity, change, and adoption of new ideas regarding body, mind, and soul (Corcoran 11-12).

Hence, without any of her family members alive, Thomasin chooses to become a witch. As Greene says when discussing this very film, “witchcraft becomes a safety net for the oppressed. She’s a witch because she is damaged” (512). Thomasin follows Black Philip into the barn and conjures him to talk to her. She is unable to resist to what he offers: “the taste of butter, a pretty dress, living deliciously”; and after removing all her clothes, she signs the book placed in front of her, and then follows Black Philip into the woods fully naked. What we see after is a coven celebrating the Sabbath. Surrounded by the whispers of women’s voices, which turn into chants and conjurations in multiple languages, she approaches the women around a fire. They are all carrying long sticks (like the one the witch who stole Sam was oiling up), screaming and enjoying themselves. In the very last scene, Thomasin levitates and laughs, as she is finally free, and fully transformed into a witch.

Four girls from *Akelarre*, Olaia, Mainer, María and Oneka in particular, are also adolescent witches. Although they seem to mature quickly, they follow Ana’s lead on faking they are witches despite their initial reluctance. As a result, Olaia and Mainer are the ones who suffer the most from the Inquisition’s torture: their hair is shaved, and they are badly injured. Nonetheless, Olaia, the most light-hearted, seems to be the lead while creating the witches they must become, based on what she believes a witch does. She crawls, growls, contorts, laughs evilly, mocks the girls, and happily spins, while Katalin follows her steps.

Lastly, the least popular profile in age was that of the “easily influenced children”, present in both films, if we believe the twins were witches. Mercy and Jonas are cheeky, lazy, and bad spoken, but Katalin is exactly the opposite: she is sweet, reflective, and resilient. She is more mature than the children in *The Witch*, mainly because she is slightly older, but the three of them have in common that they are highly questioned upon their family and friends’ circles. Thomasin confesses to William: “Mercy told me herself by the stream, ‘I be the Witch of the Wood’” (01:04:03 – 01:04:06). Mainer gets aggressive with Katalin, and questions why such a good, young kid would want to become friends with some “poor weavers”. While Mercy and Jonas do not doubt themselves, Katalin is victim of an infliction of “false memories” (Wilby 63). Basically, the Inquisition’s questionings pushed her into thinking that her friends were guilty of bewitching her, hence her not remembering what she was accused of doing.

To sum, both films tend to gravitate towards displaying younger profiles of witches. Despite this, the lesser presence of older women seems to be equally important, from a stereotypical point of view and as major leitmotif for the films.

2.3. Behaviour and personality

This section is one of the most complex and varied, since both works provide us with a large amount of explicit and implicit stereotypes. To begin with, the concept of witches as the “anti-everything” can be explained through several characters.

The figure of the anti-mother is best represented by the old witch in *The Witch* and possibly Katherine. According to Purkiss, “the mother is responsible for feeding and maintaining the child, overseeing it, stroking and caressing it” (108). This is exactly the opposite of what the old witch does. Not only does she steal someone else’s baby, but strokes him with evil intentions, and instead of maintaining him, she kills him. In the case of Katherine, there are hints that position her as a “bad mother”. Apart from her questionable treatment of Thomasin (she pressures her into taking care of multiple activities, makes her take the impossible twins on her watch, and is willing to send her away despite her vital aid), she is unable to maintain her children’s lives: first, Sam then Caleb, and finally, the twins.

Continuing with the “anti-definitions”, we can see that Thomasin here would be the epitome of the “anti – Puritan”. While displaying an obedient and calm image on the outside, she silently yearns for independence, and changes in her monotonous life. Even when she complies with her parents’ wishes, she is believed to behave “selfishly”. In the scene where Thomasin prays and confesses her guilt, we can see how women at this time believed that the slightest proof of deviance meant they had succumbed to the devil (Games 63).

“I here confess I’ve lived in sin. I’ve been idle of my work, disobedient of my parents, neglectful of my prayer. I have, in secret, played upon my Sabbath, and broken every one of thy commandments in thought. Followed the desires of mine own will, and not the Holy Spirit. I know I deserve more shame and misery in this life and everlasting hellfire. But I beg Thee, for the sake of Thy Son, to forgive me, show me mercy, show me Thy light”. (*The Witch*, 04: 58 – 05: 57)

When she confesses to her father his inability to sustain the family as the patriarch, she commits one of the most visual acts of rebellion that goes against the Puritan patriarchal society and her own family as well:

“You and Mother planned to rid the farm of me. Aye, I heard you speak of it. Is that truth? You took of Mother’s cup and let her rail at me. You confessed not until it was too late. Is that truth? You are a hypocrite! You took Caleb to the wood and let me take the blame of that too. Is that truth? You let Mother be as thy master. You cannot bring the crops to yield. You cannot hunt! Is that truth enough? Thou canst do nothing save cut wood.” (*The Witch*, 01:02:35-01:03:15).

William is aware of the connection between the devil and the use of an offensive and disrespectful speech, and reflects this when he replies to Thomasin with corrections, such as “must I hear the Devil wag his tongue in thy mouth?” (01:03:21). He eventually frees his rage insulting his first born calling her “bitch”, falling into the trap of using the same disorderly and devilish language he complains about. However, Thomasin has now discovered the power of agency. When she becomes a witch shortly after, we notice that it is the first and only decision she makes by herself, and thanks to this, she finally “comes to view her body not as a passive object, a repository of Otherness or a negation of consciousness, but as an active, generative materiality” (Corcoran 178).

This use of offensive language takes place in both films. Similarly, in *Akelarre*, the Basque language itself is considered unruly. Rostegui and the Conseiller are offended when Ana and father Cristóbal (the local priest who welcomes the Inquisitorial team in the village) use Basque, and command her to speak “Christian”, that is, Spanish. Regarded as a demoniac language, altogether with the men’s lack of knowledge and appreciation for it, results in the folklore song the girls sing in Basque being misinterpreted as an invocation to the devil and witchery. The line they repeat the most and which seems to be especially controversial for being words directed at the devil (“Ez dugu nahi beste berorik zure muxuen sua baino”, in English, “We only want the heat of your kisses”) proves this best.

The rebellious and non-conformist character Thomasin reflects with language, is seen additionally in *Akelarre*’s witches. While having dinner, Rostegui says that witches must be stopped or else they will reverse the order of the universe, according to the idea that witches, and women in general, behaved contrarily to men, and therefore, incorrectly (Clark 121). Rostegui is aware of witches’ evilness and deceit, and he uses this to play

with Ana's mind in the interrogations. When she is asked if she knows what a witch is, she is blamed into thinking that she is the one who has said she is a witch and not them. Although the inquisitors try to use misrepresentation, i.e., persuading the girls into thinking they have done things they have not, Ana wisely provides them with a conscious fiction (Wilby 62). In short, she uses experiences and events which are true (walking through the woods, smoking, dancing, and singing) but twists them so they seem like a typical witchcraft activity (she bewitched the girls, who went to the woods unconsciously, where she created a fake illusion of mass with smoke, and they invoked the Devil with songs and instruments).

These prove that all the accused witches across the two films, are seen as anti-women. From the old and young witches of the woods and Thomasin in *The Witch* to the girls from *Akelarre*, they are considered maleficent creatures rather than people. In the former, there is a nuance of witchery linked with religious deviance and prohibition, but in *Akelarre*, their struggles are represented by how mistreated they are while they are incarcerated. The idea that they displayed anti-feminine behaviours is seen when links to cannibalism, rebellion, wickedness, or sexuality are presented.

In the same line, the conviction of witches as sexual obsesses is present in the young witch from *The Witch* and in *Akelarre*. Although a proper account of this is better represented in the latter, in the former, the witch somehow proves this by kissing someone a) who is still a child, b) while being possibly unmarried, and c) with lust and not love or "biological" purposes. A reminder that "non-attendance at Church, sabbath-breaking, cursing, fornication, prostitution, abortion and even adultery", were common in witchcraft charges is useful at this point (Levack 161). Olaia jokes about the fact that her favourite thing about her boyfriend is his large penis. This shows a very open discussion of natural, yet often even nowadays, taboo topic: conversations about sex life between women. According to Levack, an English woman was tried after having three illegitimate children, and other women who discussed freely sex and their sexuality, were also tried for witchcraft. Therefore, this could be one of the reasons why the girls were accused of being witches.

It has been mentioned that witches were harmful to the community (Hutton 48) and provoked disasters in their surroundings. We see a couple instances in which Thomasin's actions could have been called out as witchy if someone had witnessed them. For example, when she tries to milk the goat, blood instead of milk comes out. In addition, when she is carrying a jug of water in her head, she spills part of it, and when she is picking up an egg, she drops it, and when it breaks, a dead foetus is made visible. Her most dangerous move is when she is joking with Mercy and tries to scare her by saying that she was the witch who stole Sam. She adds that she needed an unbaptised baby to formalise her pact with the devil, with whom she signed "the book", and made her spirit dance naked in her sleep.

Similarly, Cristóbal wonders why the men are interrogating the girls about the Sabbath and the devil, but they still have not questioned them about the issues villagers have denounced: sheep who suddenly stop producing milk, crops which rot, and spurring unplanned pregnancies. However, the Conseiller says that "His Majesty has not sent them there to resolve neighbour issues, but to fight a Satanic cult".

Following this last thought, let us pay heed to witches considered wicked and evil, or in the words of Rostegui, representatives of "moral corruption". While *The Witch* offers a very serious, and dark representation of this, *Akelarre* gravitates towards a humorous and critical perspective. In the former, everything the old witch does is extreme, reaching the point of cannibalism, and the means in which the young woman grabs and acts towards Caleb is similar. We learn that she has also possessed him when he is bed-ridden, as he utters some expressions with apparent no meaning, but which have multiple hidden nuances about witchcraft. He says: "Get the broadaxe and cut off her head, get the narrow axe and cut off her head. She's upon me, she kneels. My bowels! My stomach! She pinches. Sin, sin, sin!" (54:10-54:38). He then contorts as if the spirit of the witch was inside him and retches a rotten red apple. This holds resemblance to the forbidden fruit Eve eats in *The Bible*, or what is the same: the symbolic representation of temptation.

In *Akelarre*, the girls are not evil by nature, but they decide to act daringly out of necessity. During the Sabbath's celebration, the girls show this aggressive behaviour. They crawl, growl, scream, sing, contort, take off their corsets, and dance around half-naked while they play instruments. Moreover, in this process, they invert the natural order of mass'

elements (Caro Baroja 162): they use black communion bread, and dress animals as religious figures.

In conclusion, both films prove to be accurate at managing the heavy number of suppositions behind a witch's behaviour. From moral (the anti-concepts, rebellion, and wickedness) to character-specific issues (language misuse or promiscuity), all the witches from *The Witch* and *Akelarre* were bound to be misjudged. This is because by having such a misogynistic-influenced long list of actions, behaviours and tropes linked to witchcraft, the chances of these women falling into at least one, proportionally augmented their chances of being accused. The positive aspect is the agency young witches are given in both works. Except for the witches from the woods, who are indisputably evil, the rest of the witches opt to behave in a certain way because they are agents of their own destiny, using this power to strive and survive.

2.4. Marital status

It was noticed that the most common profile of witches was that of unmarried ones, and indeed, both films comply with it. Although with the witches of the woods in *The Witch*, we do not get any pieces of information regarding their background, it is likely that either of them is related to any men but the devil. This is because their image and attitude when performing the attacks and nature seem to fit with the profile of witches who were “anti-social” and very likely spinsters.

Following the same note, Thomasin, Ana, Olaia, Maider, and Oneka are teenagers, and Katalin an older child, who also remain single. Olaia and María are the only ones who do have boyfriends, but since they are still quite young and playful, their relationships do not seem formalised, and would fit into this category better. However, María's case is nuanced, as she is pregnant and unmarried. At the time, this was seen as unholy, profane, and a sign of moral corruption (Levack 161). We can agree that all the girls still have a very naive view of relationships and are not looking forward to any type of settled union just yet other than spending time with their loved ones.

Leaving theories aside, there are no married witches in either of the films, but whether Katherine becomes somewhat of a witch since she succumbs to the Devil at the end of the film is a plausibility. After passing away, Caleb appears carrying Samuel in his hands, and he tells his mother that he has brought a book with him. This is a reference to the book witches signed to formalise their pact with the devil (Games 10). Although she seems to ignore it, she gives in to breastfeeding Sam, and when the old witch appears in the barn, we see the petrifying image of Katherine laughing hysterically. She is holding a red cape (like the one the two witches wear) and a black crow is sucking her nipples instead of carrying Samuel.

Eggers brightly hints to how motherhood was linked to witchcraft. As Purkiss says, “There is an uncanny homology between the witch’s body and the bodies of the bewitched; bewitched women and animals give blood instead of milk, and the witch’s teat dispenses blood” (134). Indeed, when Katherine wakes up, her bloody breasts have stained her clothing, leading us to believe that she too has fallen under the devil’s enchantments. This transformation from milk to blood is equal to the shift from woman to witch, and mother into anti-mother (Purkiss 103).

Hence, both films represent those unmarried women and girls who were victims of a patriarchal structure who accused them of witchcraft for their lack of interest in complying with heteronormative rules. While some may argue that Katherine’s case is questionable, it is highly symbolical of the risks women who were mothers suffered at a time when even raising your children could be misinterpreted as witchcraft. In this sense, *Akelarre* offers us a clearer view of how women and girls, by choosing to love and grow themselves could have their lives taken away due to illogical thoughts based on religious and moral extremism.

2.5.Social and economic status

The most popular representation of witches in both films is the traditional poor witch, who was believed to be willing to do anything in exchange for a better life. Contrarily to the sporadic presence of the rich witch in New England (Games 41), the whole family in *The Witch* could be considered from the lowest social strand. They receive the shameful

punishment of exile after moving all the way from England, receiving double dishonours: isolation and rejection. Their crops rot, they have no money left, and cannot hunt, making William exchange Katherine's family silver cup for animal traps. Another hint of the family's dire situation is Thomasin's mention to the poor nutrition they are suffering. While she is pretending to be the witch of the woods to Mercy to scare her, she mixes the concepts of witches and cannibalism and their family's bad luck sustaining themselves: "Perhaps I'll boil and bake thee since we're lack of food" (25:49-51).

Although we do not get to see how Thomasin lives like after becoming a witch, we can expect her to have the same life as those of all the witches from the woods and the whole coven. From the small images we have of them, at least from the outside, they do not seem to have a luscious lifestyle. They all live in the middle of nowhere and show themselves only to perform heinous crimes.

In *Akelarre* the young girls are nowhere to be rich either. They are common folk, they work as weavers and help their mothers and grandmothers around their village, while all the men are at sea. Their clothes are those of labourers, and their houses modest. Besides, the girls' illiteracy is implied when Ana is barely able to write her name when signing the letter of confession, since her writing resembles one of a child. Lastly, the fact that they do activities in which money is not required, like walking around nature, dancing and singing, gives away their low status in society as well.

The statement that most witches were poor is supported one last time with Rostegui's telling of Frau Troffea's story. She was a witch who lived in Strasburg in 1518, a city which was experiencing poverty and had difficulties maintaining its inhabitants. This woman went to the Rhin, and she drowned her son to avoid him from dying of malnutrition. After this, he says that she began dancing day and night, day after day, until she passed away. The people who watched her were enchanted by her, and 153 people ended up dancing like "mujeres de mala vida", i.e., wicked women.

All in all, the witches from the films belong to the lower classes, and do not have the privileges of wealthier folks. In this sense, both films agree on a more contemporary conception of witches: they chose to be so to obtain salvation, as it is their only chance to survive (Greene 512). Hence, becoming a witch was a successful escape from their

hardships (survival and obtaining a new family for Thomasin and possibly saving themselves from execution for the girls in *Akelarre*).

2.6. Physical appearance

The stereotype of the old, creepy, and ugly witch traditionally represented in films, TV shows and literature, is visible in *The Witch*'s old witch of the woods. In all her appearances, her long, white, mistreated hair is worn down, and there is not an instance where she does not show herself naked. All in all, from her outside image, we can tell that she does not take care of herself. Along with her anti-social and aggressive behaviour, the idea that witches were grotesque and must be avoided is emphasised.

In addition, how the devil chose young women to charm men is seen in characters like the young witch from the woods and Ana. Although the young witch is not seen naked, we do see how her physique is attractive to men through Caleb's temptation. With long, dark hair, and light eyes, she is the beautiful, seductive witch that can allure and influence men into doing what she sets her eye on. The colour schemes chosen to depict her are warm, with red being the protagonist. Known as the colour of lust, Caleb is allured by the cleavage the dress she is wearing shows.

Likewise, Ana's good looks are exploited. To fulfil the Inquisition's wishes, the team watches her while she is naked and bathed by Mrs Lara. In the meantime, she is being painted and becoming the muse of a series of drawings that represents the stages of the Sabbath. At this point, Rostegui admits that "only women with lovely and delicate physique, who have passed childhood, can bewitch us to the point where they turn us into insatiable animals, into pleasure-consecrated dogs" (01:03:57-01:04:05). As the main source of information of the alleged Sabbath celebration, when she makes up that she was wearing a yellow dress when she enchanted the girls which was not even hers, she is given the privilege of wearing it. This makes her stand out even more from the rest of the girls, and compared to the clothes her friends and herself normally wear, the transformation to her witch character becomes more apparent.

The rest of the girls' physical appearance in both films does not seem to be paid attention. While still being beautiful and youthful, they are meant to represent more common, low-

profile girls without having their attributes emphasised. Thomasin is represented precisely like this at the beginning, (except the moments in which her cleavage receives Caleb's attention). She always has her hair up, covered with some cloth or hat, and she wears Puritan, modest clothing, whose colour scheme is cool, with grey, ochre, and beige undertones. While the girls are incarcerated, they are deprived from their clothes and are only allowed to wear their undergarments. Moreover, their physical and emotional health is affected after the days spent in the cell, in which they are treated like animals and not human beings.

However, if we compare the first and last images of all the girls in the films, the difference is immense. In *The Witch*, Thomasin looks intrigued and ecstatic; she wears her long hair down and is, like all the women in the coven, naked. Nudity is shown as a liberating expression, the epitome of freedom, sexual liberation, independence, irreverence, and a luxurious lifestyle. This also happens in a more muted manner in *Akelarre*. During the Sabbath performance, the girls transform into a wilder, almost animalistic version of themselves. They break their clothes apart, let their hair loose and opt for a possessed-looking, intimidating image.

Although there is only one instance of a "devilish sign" in *The Witch*, there are plenty in *Akelarre*. In the first film we can see the "creepy", or evil smile both witches of the woods have, the one of the old witch being more haunting and the one from the young woman intimidating. In *Akelarre*, during her first interview with Ana, Rostegui notes that she has "wide-open legs" while sitting down, as well as a "devilish smile" when she laughs at the idea of Olaia betraying her and accusing her of being a witch. These two were considered "non-feminine" behaviours, especially the former, it being a sign of a non-chaste, promiscuous, and open womanhood (Purkiss 97). In addition, the girls suffer from the men's attempts to find the devil's mark. Maider and Olaia's hair is shaved as a result of this failed attempt, and a man almost stabs Ana's pupil and has part of her hair removed as well.

There is an important aspect which appears in both films that Levack classifies as a belief that was associated with witches but did not settle "the cumulative concept of witchcraft", and that is the power of metamorphosis (50). Despite its popularity amongst cultures through history and slight presence in actual witch confessions, the idea that witches

transformed into other creatures seems to be more exploited in contemporary times than reality. However, since this aspect is important in the films, it should be commented on.

Before he dies, Caleb utters a monologue in which he indirectly hints at witches' power of metamorphosis: "It is her! A black cat, a crow, a raven, a three-legged dog, a wolf, she desires of my blood" (57:21-57:34). Here he is referring to the young witch who bewitched him and her powers to transform into any creature she wants. It is especially through the figure of the hare where we realise this. It always appears when something inconvenient happens (William misses its chance to hunt, we learn about Katherine's plan to sell Thomasin away, and Caleb is bewitched shortly after).

This makes us think that the hare was a witch indeed. Ana also knows about the power of transformation and metamorphosis witches have. She says that she transformed the girls into different animals when she bewitched them. Since her sister did not want to come, she turned her into a lamb (the symbol of holiness and naivety for Christians), Maider was transformed into a donkey (which was dressed as a priest), Oneka into a goat (dressed as Lord Urtubi) and Katalin into a pig.

Clearly, in both films, there is an inclination to promoting being a witch as a synonym of choosing freedom. Both films agree on showing a wild, almost animalistic sense of witches, in which the Sabbath plays an important role as a defying feature of themselves. Apart from the old witch in the woods, an apparent beauty with many skills seems to be linked with the figure of the witch, as the majority of the characters do not display that dangerous and intimidating look society tried to relate them with.

2.7. Habitat and means of living

As it was believed in early modern times, most witches lived in community but somehow stood out from the rest of its members, and this is the most popular case in both films. Thomasin and the girls in *Akelarre* live surrounded by nature with their respective families, but regarding the former, they are isolated from any social life with other individuals. They live in constant tension with the woods and a nature that is turning on them. Although Thomasin is very involved with the house's tasks, Katherine and the twins point out that she is to blame for the disgraces of the family (bewitching Caleb,

crops rotting, Sam getting lost, or not having enough food). The girls, on the other side, are shown to enjoy themselves both working and having leisure in their village, ruled and inhabited by women, for the men have parted to Terranova. However, they do not malfunction inside the community as such, but them walking around the woods, regardless of the time of the day, is seen as suspicious by some villagers and are accused of being witches as a result.

We also see two examples of witches who live outside the community, secluded in the wilderness, as Greene says, in places society “has chosen to abandon” (15). While in *Akelarre* this is not represented, in *The Witch*, the old and young witches comply with the idea that they were anti-social and lived by themselves in isolation. From what we see, whereas the old witch lives inside an enclosed and dark cavern in the woods, the young witch lives in a proper hut or hovel.

To finish, an important question arises in *Akelarre*: why was it believed that some areas were naturally prone to witchery? Geographical stereotypes are of remarkable importance in this film, since from the beginning, there seems to be a predisposition from the Inquisitorial team against Basque people. When Rostegui wonders why there are so many witches in the area, father Cristóbal responds with very specific items. According to him, in the first place, the effect the ocean has on its people is detrimental: it makes them rowdy and uncontrollable. The sea has connotations of freedom, independence, and rebellion, indirectly influencing the villagers´ character, and making them prone to fall into the Devil´s lifestyle. Moreover, not only is it a reduced area far from the control of the government, but it still preserves its own costumes, showing that dreaded irreverence to law. Lastly, they suffer from “pagan” influences: Muslims, Jews, and hidden people coming from the Indies in boats to “invade” Christian lands. He says all these beliefs aim at corrupting people thanks to their illiteracy.

So, the stereotype that witches lived with other people in community is respected in both films, except for the witches of the woods. Furthermore, the historical trend given in some areas in Europe, which saw higher figures of accusations and deaths, as it was the case with the Basque Country, is depicted in *Akelarre* more specifically.

3. Conclusions

Having analysed the traits of the witches in both films, we can draw some conclusions regarding how stereotypical they are in relation to the witch in the early modern period. We can safely say that *The Witch* and *Akelarre* abide by the stereotypical conception of the early modern witch in some respects more than others. Indeed, some stereotypes were not as complex in their discussion, as both films abided by them perfectly, such as sex, social, economic, marital status, and even means of living. Others, such as age, behaviour and personality, and physical appearance, provided more nuances and variety to be commented on.

Two main images of the witch in this period can be identified. On one hand, we have the most popular yet least represented in the films, the old, unmarried spinster who is directly in conflict with the community she lives in. The only character who fits perfectly into this stereotype is the old witch from *The Witch*. The other plausible witch who comes close to this stereotype is Mrs. Lara, although she reluctantly agrees to look after the inquisitorial team's needs, maintaining peace in the village. On the other hand, we have the least historically popular stereotype: the young, unmarried, and attractive young woman or adolescent deceiving witch. This is the image both films opt for, obvious in *The Witch* with the young witch from the woods and Thomasin, and all the girls in *Akelarre*, in exception to the child Katalin and questionably Mercy and Jonas in *The Witch*. What the two films certainly have in common is the witches' sex, as they are all women, their misunderstandings (*Akelarre*) or straight isolation from the community (*The Witch*), and low social and economic status.

All this hints to the fact that women in the process of growing, discovering themselves, and figuring out their sexuality and position in society, were not tolerated since they refused traditional societal structures. This contemporary beautification of witches rather than displaying more mediatic old, ugly, and creepy witches is due to the late twentieth century tendency to display an empowering and liberating representation of witches in horror films, as Greene discusses (497).

Overall, this paper has shown how both films share that witchcraft is not to be seen in a negative light. As they say in *Akelarre*: "Men fear women who are not afraid of them", and the witches of the films are nowhere to be afraid of any difficulty they may face.

Witches now decide to become so to escape from a society which is turning its back on them. Especially in the case of the young girls, who are the central witches, Thomasin, Ana, María, Olaia. Oneka, Mairer and Katalin, fight their accusations with bravery and non-conformism.

Because of the historical background each film presents, I believed that both films were going to be quite historically accurate when characterising the witches, and indeed, this has proven to be somewhat true, as they included particular nuances of witchery in each area, and combined reality and fiction in a balanced means. I was not expecting, however, to see a complete variety of characters with such complex and dynamic undertones underlying their personalities, which was an enriching element for the paper.

Lastly, an important aspect of these two films is the number of nuances and topics which can be discussed independently or in comparison for further studies. Deeper theories about who really is a witch, the symbology of witchcraft throughout the films, or the dynamic of the accusations, are some instances which surely deserve attention in the future.

4. Bibliography

Barstow, Anne Llewellyn. "On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History: A Historiography of the European Witch Persecutions." *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology. Volume 4: Gender and Witchcraft*. Ed. Brian P. Levack. Routledge, 2001.1-13.

Behar, Ruth. "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers: Views from the Mexican Inquisition." *Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology. Volume 4: Gender and Witchcraft*, Ed. Brian P. Levack. Routledge, 2001. 218-246.

Caro Baroja, Julio. *Las Brujas y su mundo*. Titivillus, 1961.

Clark, Stuart. *Thinking with Demons. The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Corcoran, Miranda. *Witchcraft and Adolescence in American Popular Culture: Teen Witches*. University of Wales Press, 2022.

Demos, John Putnam. "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England." *The American Historical Review*, vol.75, no. 5, 1970, pp. 1311-1326.

---. *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Games, Allison. *Witchcraft in Early North America*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.

Godbeer, Richard. "Witchcraft in British America". *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Ed. Brian P. Levack. Oxford Handbooks Online, 2013. 1-26.

Dresen-Coenders, Lène. "Witches as Devil's Concubines: On the Origin of Fear of Witches and Protection against Witchcraft." *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology. Volume 4: Gender and Witchcraft*. Ed. Brian P. Levack. Routledge, 2001. 413-436.

Greene, Heather. *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft: A Critical History of Witches in American Film and Television*. Llewellyn Publications, 2021.

Hoak, Dale. "The Great European Witch-Hunts: A Historical Perspective." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 88, no. 6, 1983, pp. 1270-1274.

Hutton, Ronald. *The Witch: A History of Fear from Ancient Times to the Present*. Yale University Press, 2017.

Kamensky, Jane. "Words, Witches, and Woman Trouble: Witchcraft, Disorderly Speech, and Gender Boundaries in Puritan New England." *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology. Volume 4: Gender and Witchcraft*. Ed. Brian P. Levack. Routledge, 2001. 196-217.

Kelkar, Govind, and Dev Nathan. "Witch Hunting as Women Hunting in Early Modern Europe." *Witch Hunts: Culture, Patriarchy and Structural Transformation*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. 126-142.

Levack, Brian P. *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. 1987. Pearson, 2006.

Morales Estévez, Roberto. *La Bruja fílmica. Conversaciones entre cine e historia*. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. PhD dissertation, 2017.

Purkiss, Diane. *The Witch in History: Early Modern and twentieth-century Representations*. Routledge, 2005.

San Sebastian Festival. "Entrevista a Pablo Agüero "Akelarre" ", *YouTube*, 1st December 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2F3Hmtf4Zw&t=55s&ab_channel=sansebastianfestival.

VICE. "Robert Eggers on "The Witch", Familial Trauma, and the Supernatural." *YouTube*, 20th February 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGNrHzCXpTM&ab_channel=VICE.

Wilby, Emma. *Invoking the Akelarre: Voices of the Accused in the Basque Witch-Craze, 1609-1614*. Sussex Academic Press, 2019.