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**Rewriting the Witch in Alix E. Harrow's *The
Once and Future Witches***

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ABSTRACT

This undergraduate dissertation contributes to the existing scholarship about witches by exploring the intricate and myriad representations of the symbol over time, concretely, from its origin in the Early Modern Period to its revalorization in the present time. In addition, certain identities of the witch are analyzed: as a monster, as a girl, as a mother, as an old hag, as an herbalist-healer-midwife witch, queer and black. The focus of the research is Alix E. Harrow's postmodernist novel *The Once and Future Witches*. In it, the figure of the witch, affected by the shattered postmodern actuality, is reappropriated as a signifier of feminism. However, this study also reflects on the potential contradictions derived from its imitation of the shifting tendencies of the movement. The key findings demonstrate the advancement of the feminist agenda of the novel, although pointing simultaneously to regressive and patriarchal ideologies that are difficult to detach from the figure.

Key words: Feminism, Postmodernism, Witch, Patriarchy, History

RESUMEN

Este trabajo de fin de grado contribuye a la bibliografía existente sobre brujas mediante la exploración de las complejas y múltiples representaciones del símbolo a lo largo del tiempo, en concreto, desde su origen en la Edad Moderna hasta su revalorización en la actualidad. A su vez, se analizan determinadas identidades de la bruja: como monstruo, como chica, como madre, como una anciana bruja, como una curandera o matrona, queer o negra. El enfoque de esta investigación es la novela postmodernista de Alix E. Harrow *Las Brujas del Ayer y del Mañana*. En ella, la figura de la bruja, siendo afectada por el mundo postmoderno fragmentado, es reapropiada como un significante del feminismo. Sin embargo, este estudio también refleja las posibles contradicciones derivadas de su imitación de las cambiantes corrientes del movimiento feminista. Los principales hallazgos demuestran el avance de la agenda feminista de la novela, aunque señalan simultáneamente las ideologías patriarcales y regresivas tan difíciles de separar de la figura.

Palabras clave: Feminismo, Postmodernismo, Bruja, Patriarcado, Historia

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INTRODUCTION

The witch has been a very productive figure in popular culture and literary works since its apparition until nowadays. Women's fantasies are also populated by witches through whom they project their desires and fears. Thus, its liminality and deemed 'abnormality' promote its wide range of identities and representations. However, its characterization is subjected to the standpoint of the beholder, with a clear distinction between early modern portrayals and contemporary ones. The conservative and repressive ideologies dominating the Early Modern Period infuse the symbol with everything that was discarded or frowned upon by the imposed order. Contemporary recuperations, meanwhile, are gradually reevaluating the witch, specifically, the feminist movement. Moreover, marginalized groups are recuperating the figure as an expression of empowerment and visibilization. Nevertheless, some traces of its past negative associations are still noticeable, rendering a complex and opposing symbol that reflects the postmodern present reality.

The present study explores the multitudinous facets of the witch, traversing at times competing discourses, and paying attention to the significance the stereotypical past image plays in their composition. Hence, the present study aims to analyze how the image of the witch evolves and conflates from the Early Modern Period to the present in the postmodernist novel *The Once and Future Witches* by the American Alix E. Harrow from 2020. To do so, it focuses on several identities of the figure from a feminist perspective: as a mother, as a girl, as a monster, as an herbalist-midwife, as an old hag, queer and black. All of them feature in this historical fantasy book that juts out into the witchy world of New Salem, where an assemblage of women unite to recover the power stolen from them.

Notwithstanding the extensive scholarship concerning the witch, this undergraduate dissertation offers a different approach in the field, shedding light on how the symbol is affected by literary and cultural movements, as is the case of postmodernism, and socio-political like feminism. In addition, *The Once and Future Witches*, being so recent a book, hardly any examination of it has been conducted. Therefore, to achieve the purpose of the research a theoretical framework is essential for it, followed by the subsequent analysis of the novel. The theoretical framework is divided into two sections: 'Postmodernism and

Postmodernist fiction' and 'Postmodern Witches'. The former provides a definition of postmodernism accompanied by its distinctive characteristics, in particular, applied to fiction. The latter is, in turn, split into two subsections: 'Evolution of the Image of the Witch' and 'Contemporary/Postmodern Witches'. The first, as its name indicates, displays how the depiction of the witch develops throughout the Early Modern Period to the contemporary time, tracing back the origins of the stereotype of the witch. The second subsection focuses on the feminist mediation of the witch, playing postmodernism a key role in it. Ultimately, the analysis is presented with three divisions. 'The Postmodernist Construction of Worlds' section delves into the building of the fictional world and its multiple narrative levels. 'The Reworking of Fairy Tales' deals with the rewriting Harrow does of a selection of Grimm's tales featuring witches, and 'The Fashioning of the Witches' Stereotype' describes the merging of the different feminist memories of the witch in connection to past traits of the same.

1. METHODOLOGY: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Postmodernism and Postmodernist Fiction

Postmodernism is a complex term that arose as a reaction or response to the “poetics of early twentieth-century modernism” (McHale 5) during the 1950s and 1970s (Nicol 22), although modernism and postmodernism share some features. Postmodernism, however, is characterized, as the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard points out in his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (2010), by “incredulity towards metanarratives” (xxiv) or grand narratives. These metanarratives are ideologically charged narratives that serve to impose a totalizing or universalized sense on a range of elements, structuring discourses such as that of philosophy or science (Nicol 11). This position is based on “the maintenance of a skeptical and ‘deconstructive’ attitude” promulgated by the philosopher Jacques Derrida (Butler 13, 27). Likewise, it depends on relativism, which consists of the rejection of any universal or absolute truth: “Truth itself is always relative to the differing standpoints and predisposing intellectual frameworks of the judging subject” (16). Relativism thus, results in a multiplication of signifiers that no longer correlate with their external reality, liberating them from their fixated meaning (19) and augmenting the playfulness of postmodernist texts (23).

Another significant feature of postmodernism is its disbelief in realist approaches. Nevertheless, it does not completely oppose them, given that it aims to be truthful about “what fiction is and what its function should be” (Nicol 22, 23). Postmodernist fiction challenges the grounding of realism: that the fictional world created in a narrative mirrors the real one, the consequent referentiality between the two worlds, and the *mediating* role of the narrator in a ‘natural’ story (24). The act of *mimesis* or literary imitation requires a distinction between the real and the fictional world, between the replica and the replicated (Nicol 25; McHale 28), destabilizing the object of realist fiction. Since the narrative process relies on the interpretation and selection of its narrator, as postulated by relativism and Peter Brooks, there is always a “*perspective* on a story” (Nicol 27).

Disciplines like history are deemed as “just another narrative” (Butler 32), a direct consequence of the disruption of metanarratives. Consequently, a correlation between ‘the

past' and narrative is no longer possible since every historical account is subjected to the viewpoint of the historian in charge, who tries unsuccessfully to advocate for their veracity (35, 36).

Postmodernist works represent what Linda Hutcheon calls 'historiographic metafiction' in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988); which questions the reliability of history by self-consciously distorting it (Lewis 171; McHale 96). Historiographic metafiction does not deny the existence of 'the past' but limits our accessibility by means of "its textualized remains" (Hutcheon 16, 119). Apocryphal history, anachronism, or the blending of fantasy and history are employed to accomplish history's alteration (Lewis 171). These strategies involve both the transgression of an "ontological boundary between the real and the fictional" and the breaching of the norms of "classic" historical fiction (McHale 90). It is possible due to the *ontological* 'dominant' of postmodernist fiction that deals with "problems of *modes of being*" (10), in opposition to the *epistemological* 'dominant' of modernist fiction that foregrounds "problems of *knowing*" (9, 10). Apocryphal history entails the falsification of the official record in an attempt to contradict the accepted version of history to a "radically dissimilar version of the world" (McHale 90). Anachronism implies a disordering of temporal order via "inconsistencies of detail or setting" (172), resulting in a tension between past and present (McHale 93). Lastly, for the merging of fantasy and history is necessary to define the fantastic genre. For Tzvetan Todorov, as he exposes in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, the fantastic requires the *hesitation* between two other genres: the uncanny (governed by natural laws) and the marvelous (controlled by supernatural explanations) (McHale 74). Rosemary Jackson (35-7) discards Todorov's definition in favor of an ontological approach. As a result, the fantastic encompasses the confrontation between "the possible (the "real") and the impossible", between two opposing worlds (McHale 75). Historical fantasy, in turn, integrates hesitation between "the supernatural and the historically *real*" (McHale 95), prompting the incompatibility between the norms of the fictional world and those of reality (88). Since postmodernist fiction works to underline "its ontological instability or indeterminacy" (26), the affinities with the fantastic genre are asserted.

Following what has been stated, it will be discussed how fictional worlds are constructed in postmodernism, for “writing fiction [...] is, by definition, an act of creating a world” (Nicol 25). By contrast, postmodernist writing tends to *deconstruct* that fictional space using the strategies of *juxtaposition*, *interpolation*, *superimposition*, and *misattribution* (McHale 45). Juxtaposition consists of the clashing of two unrelated worlds or spaces. Interpolation introduces “an alien space ... *between* two adjacent areas of space where no such “between” exists” (46). The strategy of superimposition, as its name indicates, places two spaces “one on top of the other”, creating through their coexistence a third one (46). Misattribution assigns incorrectly to traditional places what is considered to be common knowledge about that particular space (47). As McHale exposes, “once the unity of the fictional ontology has been split” (52), the possibility of a *plurality* of worlds is attainable, with its subsequent “displacement in *time*” (60). Likewise, these worlds offer the ability to defy the law of the excluded middle, defined by Lubomír Doležel in his work *Poetics and Theory of Literature*, as worlds that open up to an in-between existence and nonexistence (33).

Recursive structures, including that of Chinese-box worlds, in which a “*hypodiegetic* world” is embedded in a “primary world, or *diegesis*” (McHale 113), disrupt the “ontological “horizon” of fiction” (112) permitting simultaneously the shifting of narrative levels. Postmodernist texts draw upon *trompe-l’oeil*, confusing the reader into believing that a secondary narrative level constitutes the primary one (115). Similarly, “the author is another tool for the exploration and exploitation of ontology”, (202) that postmodernism utilizes. S/he abandons his/her position as the origin or authority of a text (Butler 23) to occupy that of a “death author”, a slogan that originated in Roland Barthes’ eponymous essay *The Death of the Author*. The author no longer produces anything from scratch since “writing is rather a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes in McHale 200). The authority of the author is displaced, and, as Michel Foucault argues, s/he functions as “a *construct* of the reading-process, rather than a textual given” (McHale 200), increasing the involvement of the reader in the interpretation of the text (Butler 24).

Ultimately, it is important to consider other principal characteristics of postmodernist fiction: intertextuality, pastiche, and parody. The Italian Umberto Eco describes the very essence of intertextuality in *The Name of the Rose*: “Books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told” (Eco in Hutcheon 128). Hence, no text refers to the external reality outside itself, turning it into an endless loop of inter-texts (Butler 32). This can be exemplified by the metaphor of the rhizome proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. They use this botanical term to signal that “any point ... can be connected to anything other, and must be” (Deleuze and Guattari in Nicol 47) that, when applied to language, as indicated previously, multiplies the meanings underlying a text (Nicol 48). Linda Hutcheon suggests that intertextuality serves to “rewrite the past in a new context” (118), which can be accomplished by the employment of parody. It comprises both the elevation and questioning of the past, striving to redefine it (126). Parody is intrinsically linked to pastiche; a blending of disparate objects that emerges “from the frustration that everything has been done before” (Lewis 172, 173). Postmodernist writing benefits from these strategies aiming to rewrite and retell, for instance, traditional fairy tales, constituting one of the focuses of the present paper. Not only have these revisions worked to subvert our interpretation of those narratives but to uncover their “institutionalized power” (Bacchilega 22, 23). Despite being directed to children, the magic acting behind each of these tales is sustained by “natural” repressions and “ideological expectations” (32, 29) that force gendered socialization, especially for women, projecting an image of them under the masculine and patriarchal gaze (98). By giving voice to female or conventionally marginalized characters, postmodernist fairy tales lay bare the gender and desire dynamics supporting them (45, 101, 140).

1.2. Postmodern Witches

1.2.1. Evolution of the Image of the Witch

Having discussed the characteristics of postmodernist fiction, this section will move to provide an evolution of the image and stereotype of the witch from the Early Modern Period to contemporary times. First, it is essential to signal the contested and diachronic meaning of the term ‘witch’ that slides “across a number of different and competing discourses” (Purkiss 60, 73, 93). The early modern culture was defined by male constructs, shaping not only women’s identities but also that of witches (93, 94), for being a witch was an “identity imposed on others” (Kosmina 1). Christina Larner notes that witchcraft is considered “overwhelmingly a woman’s crime” (Larner in Kosmina 38), highlighting the interconnection between early modern witchcraft and gender, as Alison Rowlands observes (466; Kosmina 46; Purkiss 7). The radical feminist Mary Daly employs in her work *Gyn/Ecology* the ‘Burning Times myth’ that refers “not only to the period of the European witchcraze but to the perpetual witchcraze which is the entire period of patriarchal rule” (Daly 14, 15) to equate the relentless patriarchal persecution of women with witchcraft, so that the witch “can become a synecdoche of female victims of sexualised violence” both physically and culturally (Sempruch 13; Purkiss 13, 15). As its name indicates, the myth emphasizes the *burning* of witches (17), while during the equivocally considered largest witch hunt, that of Salem, they were rather hanged (Schiff 19; Sollée and Conover 28). Nevertheless, the myth of the ‘Burning Times’ proved to be ineffective because it portrays “women as nothing but the helpless victims of patriarchy”, disabling its political potential (17). In addition, it overlooked male witches’ accusations (Apps and Gow 2, 3), and “how women sometimes participated in this system of ideological oppression over their own gender” (Kosmina 47), blaming other women of witchcraft (Larner, “Woman-Hunting” 255).

The witch, as indicated previously, does not possess a single or fixed definition, but the archetypal image of the early modern witch will first be described. The witch was characterized, according to the New Englander academician Joseph Glanvill, as a typically female figure whose power seems to extend beyond the natural realm, usually acquired

from “a confederacy with evil spirits” (Schiff 70). These spirits or demons, known as ‘familiars’, adopted the form of animals, such as cats, snakes, birds, etc., and functioned as malevolent servants or allies for witches (Hutton 332). It was believed that familiars sucked the blood of their masters, leaving in their bodies what was known as witch marks (Purkiss 134; Schiff 70, 71). One core feature of this stereotype was the inherent evil or wickedness of women (Kramer and Sprenger 121; Schiff 73), spread by demonological treatises, being the *Malleus Maleficarum* of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger the most notorious (Kosmina 40, 41). The *Malleus*, populated by misogyny, depicted women as lustful and carnal, making them “easy prey for the Devil” (Chollet 14), contributing enormously to the hysteria of the witch trials (Guiley 221, 222). These demonological treatises, along with oppressive patriarchal institutions, such as the State and the Church, underscored “the sexual root of the witch’s diabolical power” (Kosmina 6, 39, 144), coding witchcraft not only as a woman’s crime but a “sexual crime” (145). Although Puritan views of witchcraft were less sexualized than in Europe (55, 144), “the Puritan idea of the passive, pliant feminine soul, just waiting to be penetrated by Christ or the Devil, inculcated an implicit sexual connotation to the Puritan witch...” (144). Witches unleashed their sexual freedom in the Sabbaths, orgiastic assemblies to worship the Devil, as Norman Cohn states in *Europe’s Inner Demons*. The Sabbaths are associated with covens, “a potential model of feminist community and connection” that challenges the nuclear family as “the primary social unit” due to its absence of men (Kosmina 154, 155, 162). As a result, the early modern witch was perceived as monstrous, particularly in a religious sense, for not conforming to hegemonic discourses, like “racial patriarchy or the heteronormative family”; laying bare the ideologies that constrained her (106, 107). This monstrosity has been adapted to a series of cultural anxieties, among them: queerness or queer sex, race, or the monstrous-feminine body (108, 144). The othering implicit in ‘deviant’ genders is “invoked to characterize the witch as the Other as well” (118, 146). The emphasis put on correlating the witch with the ‘abnormal’ or monstrosity strengthens simultaneously the essentialist binary of gender (119, 146). By contrast, contemporary popular representations use witchcraft as a means of “transgender and queer’s people liberation” (22).

Continuing with the marginalized location of the witch (Purkiss 251), Lynda E. Boose explores in one of the chapters of her book *Women, "Race", and Writing* the "early modern fear of the racial other" (270). In turn, the inability to understand alien races, mixed with superstition, led to the linking of ethnicity with witchcraft (253, 264; Kosmina 53). Race, nevertheless, did not play a crucial part in witch trials, but for Salem, a colony where one of the first accused was an enslaved black woman called Tituba (52; Sollée and Conover 63). Even so, the lack of evidence about Tituba's history reveals "the exclusion of people of colour from historical records" (53). Maryse Condé's work *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* is a good illustration of a narrative that gives voice to the silenced Tituba.

Ultimately, the figure of the monstrous-feminine, coined by Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, is encountered concerning to maternity and the female body. Women's narrow identity was conflated with that of the mother (Perry-Samaniego 359) and inscribed within the domestic sphere, compelling their role to be bearing children, organizing, and maintaining the order of the household (Kosmina 183; Purkiss 94, 98). The early modern women saw the witch as "*their* Other" because she posed "a threat to domesticity" (95), transgressing and disrupting the household's order and putting into question the "authority and identity of the housewife" (97). This explains the Western preoccupation with "dirt, filth, and disorder" that pervaded witchcraft depositions (80), given Cixous's placement of the witch (35). Furthermore, the witch, particularly by the Christian tradition, was portrayed as anti-mother, inverting and perverting the characteristics that constitute a good mother, and unveiling, thus, her monstrosity (Thurer in Kosmina 189). Traditionally, it was assumed that witches hated children and even fed on their bodies (Chollet 89). All these anxieties regarding housekeeping and motherhood were imbued in women's stories of witchcraft accounting for a *fantasy*, or, in psychoanalysis, an unconscious expression of "fears, conflicts and anxieties" that enabled women to cope with them (Purkiss 93). Due to the early modern understanding, drawn from classical medicine, of the female body as flowing and leaking, as Elizabeth Grosz shows (203), its formlessness and polluted nature are foregrounded (Purkiss 99, 120, 121). The witch's body further evidences this openness (120, 121) by its capacity to shift shape and blur its limits, "crossing the borderline between human and

nonhuman” (125; Sempruch 126; Creed 11). The fright, therefore, derived from “the perpetual uncertainty about the witch’s ‘true’ identity” and the impossibility of containing the body “within restrictive ideologies” (125; Kosmina 108). The monstrous-feminine is classified as such, besides, because of her “sexual and reproductive behaviors” (Creed 3).

The ugly old hag was another prominent stereotypical image of the witch during the Early Modern Period (127). The term was not pejorative in its original use until the witch-hunts, as Starhawk illustrates (*The Spiral Dance* 153). The horror this figure arose was indebted to the revulsion older women’s bodies awakened as a sign of infertility (Chollet 117, 130) since they did not meet up with the desires of the phallic gaze, as commented in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* by Reginald Scot. This loathing has accompanied women up to the present time (112). Moreover, older women were also targeted because of their gained experience and confidence (Bechtel 746), which raised a threat to male-dominated spheres, such as medicine or science, adding to women’s devilry (Gage 233, 242, 243). The mentioned herbalist-healer-witch or midwife also embodied this perceived dangerous knowledge (Chollet 177). These women possessed extensive understandings of herbs and plants, still relevant to modern pharmacopeia, as Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English pinpoint (17). However, what escaped male professionals’ control was their knowledge with regards to “biology, and, in particular, reproductive health”, often involving abortions and birth controls (Sollée and Conover 32, 33), and causing suspicion from the Church and the State (Purkiss 19, 32) that were deeply concerned with female sexual autonomy (19). These powerful institutions, in their effort to “*regulate* women’s bodies and sexuality” benefited from midwives’ power, in charge of searching for witch marks (Purkiss 21). The witch hunts were an extension of this dominance (Sollée and Conover 35). In so doing, the seemingly ‘subversiveness’ contained in women’s knowledge and control of the body is questioned, for it not necessarily “subverts gender hierarchies” (21).

In a nutshell, witches in the Early Modern Period and Western culture symbolized everything that polluted “the universal “norm”, everything that was “transgressed and therefore eliminated, restricted, or (r)ejected to confined spaces”, against the dominant order (Sempruch 127, 165). As a result, according to Mary Daly, the witch hunts’ purpose

was to purify society of these women, “whose physical, intellectual, economic, moral, and spiritual independence and activity profoundly threatened the male monopoly in every sphere” (183, 194). Despite this repressive and vicious environment, many women accused of witchcraft managed to shape and create an identity of their own, recovering some of their snatched agency (Purkiss 145). They wove into their confessions popular and cultural materials, such as outmoded folktales and fairy-beliefs, to reflect their own desires and concerns (145, 153, 159, 165). Although witches’ stories were frequently constrained by misogynist or gender ideologies, their struggle stressed the power of storytelling as well as their courage and skills (169).

1.2.2. Contemporary/Postmodern Witches

Having defined the diverse stereotypical portrayals of the witch during the Early Modern Period, this section will explore how feminism intervenes in contemporary cultural representations of the figure, utilizing Brydie Kosmina’s book *Feminist Afterlives of the Witch* as the basis. It is necessary to denote the inextricable connection between witchcraft and feminism to the point of mirroring, “albeit sometimes in distorted form, the many images and self-images of feminism itself” (Purkiss 10). The importance of past, culture, and memory studies for this examination will be described. The incredulity towards metanarratives entailed by the current postmodern reality turns the past into a bricolage of competing texts and images, into a “human construct” that determines the present (Kosmina 76, 77; Jameson 18). This is the focus of memory studies, opening up a space for contesting hegemonic ideologies imbricated in culture as well as reinforcing these discourses of power, a double-stake that characterizes popular culture and the symbol of the witch (Hall 228; Kosmina 82). Memory, as the “mechanism for feminist connection to the past” (Kosmina 79), enables the use of cultural memories of the witch in moments of crisis with an “identificatory value in the present”, particularly for marginalized or oppressed groups long associated with the figure (75). These memories are usually rewritten or remembered in favor of feminist present necessities and purposes (78, 82, 96), as this section will illustrate. Furthermore, the multiple temporalities operating “within or alongside the apparent ‘pure present’ of postmodernity” (90) that are embodied by the

ghost or spectre (89), as conceptualized by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* and Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, serve to explain the haunting presence of feminist cultural memories. The ghost, “pregnant with unfulfilled possibilities”, collapses the past and the future into the present, demanding from the haunted subject the acknowledgement of the *unfinished business* of the past (or what has been repressed or lost) that led to the emergence of the ghost (Gordon 183, 184, 190; Kosmina 91; Derrida xviii). This is aligned with the psychoanalytical return of the repressed in the form of the uncanny or supernatural, proposed by Sigmund Freud in *The Uncanny*. Mnemonic afterlives of the witch are thus haunted by the spectre of their traumatic past and future “emancipative possibilities” (Hite and Jara in Kosmina 90).

Feminist cultural recuperations of the witch now will be delineated, including some traditionally excluded groups within emancipatory feminist rhetoric. The 1970s radical feminists constructed the witch both as “a victim of phallogocentric hegemonies, subjected to torture and death”, as displayed by the myth of the ‘Burning Times’, and as a *herstorical* reconfigured powerful ‘superwoman’ capable of accomplishing an upcoming cultural transformation, demonstrating the conflation symbolized by the ghost: the impossibility of escaping her past subordination and the unfolding of alternatives (Sempruch 5, 11, 12, 14, 57). *Herstory* is “a form of feminist mythology constituted as [...] an alternative to the established male-centered master narrative” (53, 54). This convergence is reflected by the midwife-herbalist-healer-witch, who is part of the ‘Burning Times’ myth. Starhawk (*Dreaming* 183), places her in an unchanging and ‘natural’ countryside that counteracts the fragmented postmodern world, as noted by Keith Thomas in *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*. In this fantasy, her domestic and midwifery skills, such as nursing or cooking, are “valued in the community as if they were professional skills” (Purkiss 20). However, the reality is that the fantasy reproduces “patriarchal notions of appropriate feminine behaviour” (21), accompanying the midwife-herbalist-healer witch since the Early Modern Period.

Regarding political power, the late nineteenth-century “suffragettes”, advocating for women’s voting rights, identified with witches. Matilda Joslyn Gage is known to be the

first suffragist to reclaim the word “witch”, challenging in her book *Woman, Church and State*, evil conceptions of this figure in history (Sollée and Conover 40, 42, 43). Likewise, during the Women’s Liberation and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the witch is revived as a political symbol and “engine of activism”, being the witches burned in the witch trials the precursors in withstanding patriarchy (Firestone 15, 16; Kosmina 4, 14; Sollée and Conover 44, 47). Therefore, as Daly contends in *Gyn/Ecology*, “the witch (or hag or crone) becomes a central metaphor through which women’s political, historical, and theological liberation is envisaged” (Kosmina 9). The witch, from the 1960s onwards, begins to transcend her wrongful origins by conveying “the transgressive status of the [fluctuating] category of “woman” and gender in general” (Sempruch 11). In doing so, she not only crosses the borders or limits of the “proper” order, stressing her incompatibility but paradoxically reverses these borderline values into positive and empowering ones (120; Clément and Kristeva 92). The figure of the hag exemplifies this revaluation through the re-appropriation of the term, striving to resist the derogatory signification the patriarchal system assigned to it (Sollée and Conover 71, 72). Daly, in *Gyn/Ecology*, celebrates hags for their resistance to patriarchs and rejects their labeling as ‘ugly women’, constituting only a misogynistic standard of ‘beauty’. Barbara Walker, consequently, demonstrates that the contemporary hag “stands in direct opposition to the malevolent stereotypical hag that still haunts elder women today” (122).

A feminist memory of the witch that also serves as a symbol of political resistance and empowerment is that of the witch as a young girl. Girlhood is a process of gendering the body because, as Simone de Beauvoir proposed, “[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (293). This process is invested with future potential, from becoming a woman (or a future adult) and unbecoming a girl, providing the opportunity to undo regressive ideologies, or vice versa (Kosmina 213, 215, 218). Simultaneously, anxieties about the past are projected onto the figure (Harris 1), revealing the girl witch as enveloping “past, present, and future” (Kosmina 219). Moreover, ‘the modern girl’ signifies political resistance and agency imbued in postfeminist politics or ideologies, like evinces the ‘girl-power’ movement of the 1990s and 2000s. Postfeminism accounts for feminism viewed as ‘completed’ that allows its inclusion into mainstream popular culture, along with a

“neoliberal capitalist bent that consequently renders feminist structural critique undone” (218, 227). Witchcraft is an avenue for girls to become powerful and liberated women, although at times it falls under a “neoliberal rhetoric of self-empowerment” (223, 225, 226).

Certain identities of the witch have been kept out of the emancipatory feminist discourse of the symbol, as is the case of black and queer witches. Witch feminism primarily features the witch as a white woman, excluding black women from “the liberatory power of the symbol” (17). This is so until Kimberlé Crenshaw’s coinage of intersectionality, a theory central to third- and fourth-wave feminism that addresses the “intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” which characterize black women’s experiences and lead to their marginalization within both discourses (Crenshaw in Sollée and Conover 65). The witch, despite this shortfall in representation, is gradually being appropriated by anti-racist and postcolonial trends in feminism (Kosmina 18, 19). Queer and non-binary people, likewise, are posited outside feminist uses of the witch as a symbol of power. The witch has even been correlated with trans-exclusionary radical feminist rhetoric, as Daly instances (67). In opposition, since the 2020s, a connection between the witch and queer and trans-inclusive feminism has surfaced, showing early modern “queer approaches to gender that the witch reflected” (Kosmina 22). One of these approaches is that of lesbianism or shappism (167). Feminism, therefore, is increasingly benefitting from the past condemned otherness of these memories of the witch to positively revalorize it.

The memories of the witch as a monster and a mother are the last ones to be discussed. Under feminist perspectives, the witch is cast as monstrous in the eyes of patriarchy, underscoring “cultural anxieties about powerful women” who step aside from their traditional submissive roles (Kosmina 105, 125). Her monstrosity is actually a feminist protest against what is deemed accepted and acceptable (125) since monsters are boundary markers (Asma 13). The witch as a monster reveals a ‘negative utopianism’: a future-oriented overthrowing of “the current patriarchal system in order to make space for a more feminist world” (Kosmina 132). Besides, the process of ‘de-monstering’ womanhood carried out by feminist recuperations of the witch involves the repurposing of the witch’s

inherent correlation to sexuality and carnality, devoid of its negative connotations (145, 170).

The witch as a mother is a contradictory symbol, posited both as a “liberatory archetype of feminine power, or a confining relic of patriarchal oppression” (Kosmina 183, 203). On the one hand, mothers are primarily defined, in an essentialist and reductive manner, by the biological reproductive function of their bodies, judged also according to patriarchal “ideologies of good motherhood” (188; Podnieks 14). On the other hand, witches have been placed as the anti-mothers in religious discourses, embodying infertility, as considered in the previous section (188, 189). However, across popular culture, several witch mothers match up with ideologies of ‘good motherhood’: self-sacrificing for their children and suppressing *traditionally considered* unfeminine feelings like anger (198; Purkiss 48; Rich 37). What the feminist project is trying to do is validate and liberate the maternal (183) as well as “unshackling women from the body” (Kosmina 188). One feminist route to this liberation is locating the witch as a mother-goddess, elevating and idealizing witch motherhood, but at the same time, confining “witchcraft to the enactment of (remarkably patriarchal view of) maternity” (187, 192, 193). Related to the figure of the mother-goddess is the archetypal goddess triad (maiden, mother, crone) that represents the “biological stages of women’s lives [...] as prehistorical, uncivilised” (Purkiss 37). This triad might also have its origin in the Fates, three ancient goddesses of prediction from mythology (“The Fates” 40; Hutton 82), elucidating the importance of number three in witchcraft. Current feminist scholars are redefining these stages in pursuit of a more comprehensible and benevolent “take on womanhood” (Sollée and Conover 123).

In conclusion, in re-remembering the past and regaining what has been lost or seized reside an alternative to the present world as well as a possibility of imagining the future, for “past, present, and future are tied together” (Kosmina 243). Re-reading and reinterpreting the story of the witch with feminist activist memory imply the rendering of occasionally contradictory meanings that reflect the “shifting cultural memory practices [...] and the mainstreaming of popular feminism” (252, 253). Nonetheless, contemporary iterations of

the witch in popular culture exhibit a desire to release the figure of its traumatic legacy and patriarchal constraints.

2. ANALYSIS OF *THE ONCE AND FUTURE WITCHES*

This chapter, following as a theoretical framework the notions outlined in the previous section, will analyze how postmodernist characteristics and the image of the witch work in Alix E. Harrow's novel *The Once and Future Witches* (2020). It narrates the adventures of three witchy sisters (James Juniper, Agnes Amaranth and Beatrice Belladonna Eastwood) that reunite after seven years apart, and their allies in their fight for women's vote and against a malignant force populating Salem since the first witch hunts.

2.1. The Postmodernist Construction of Worlds

The novel is set in 1893 in New Salem, a fictional city that correlates with modern-day Salem (Massachusetts), where magic and witchcraft awaken amid the suffragist movement and the mill workers' reality, intermingling history and fantasy.

New Salem city is haunted by the memory of a past when witches "were wild as crows and fearless as foxes, because magic blazed bright and the night was theirs" (Harrow vii), until the purges began and were tormented and burned, as evinces the "ruins of Old Salem" (246), situated several miles from New Salem (155). New Salem's witches befall because "history is a circle" and the "past is always waiting to rise again" (444, 508). However, despite the numerous similitudes these persecutions share with Salem's historical witch hunts, Harrow frames the novel in a postmodern world, fostering the alteration of the historical past, and the accepted discourse about witches as a result of the disbelief in the grand narrative spread by patriarchy and the Church during the Early Modern Period (see 'The fashioning of witches' stereotype'). This dismantles the objectiveness attributed to the discipline of history and the impossibility of achieving an unmediated past, offering a new viewpoint on Salem's witch trials: that of the Eastwood sisters, as their multiple-perspective narrative displays, often in the form of a stream of consciousness, for instance: "Why? What does she know about three circles woven together, three lost witches and their

not-so-Lost Way?” (72). Thus, the book is representative of what Linda Hutcheon coined as ‘historiographic metafiction’ (ix).

Harrow proves the subjectivity attached to history by distorting it through the strategies of apocryphal history, anachronism, and the merging of history and fantasy previously asserted. Anachronism is manifested via inconsistencies in setting and temporality. The historical purge, which occurred in 1692 (Schiff 19), is placed in Old Salem “in the seventeen-whatevers” (Harrow 79) and is replicated in New Salem during 1893, developing an atmosphere that both departs and reproduces the one promoted by the early modern trials. This is associated with what McHale designates as “anachronism in world-view and ideology” (93), attributing to 19th-century witches attitudes characteristic of 20th and 21st-century feminists. Harrow, therefore, contradicts the “official” version of Salem’s witch hunts, opening up a breach between the realms of historical reality and fiction (90) by attributing the authorship of the witches’ persecution to a fictional figure, Saint George of Hyll, who never existed. As stated, he repeats the witch hunt a century later, although disguised as Mr. Gideon Hill, a mayor’s candidate. What allows him to linger for so long is not only his binding his soul to “living bodies” (412) but also modifying the “history” of the story for his purposes, using women as scapegoats for his evils, as the workings behind the historical witch hunts reveal (Chollet 13). Another irregularity deals with changing some real male authors’ names into female ones, such as: “Sisters Grimm” (Harrow 18), “Miss Doyle” (258), “Miss Alexandra Pope” (151), or “Charlotte Perrault” (74); to serve the feminist agenda of the novel.

New Salem, as set in the 1890s, provides a glimpse into this historical period. The suffragist movement is coming to the fore with the presence of the New Salem Women’s Association (a reminiscence of real-life New England Woman Suffrage Association), chaired by Miss Cady Stone (a reference to the suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton). One of its members, Miss Electa Gage, might also be referencing Matilda Joslyn Gage, who contributed to the Underground Railroad¹ by offering her home (Sollée and Conover 42). It is constructed by slaves in the story, but the “tunnels are only under New Salem” (Harrow

¹ The Underground Railroad was a series of tunnels that connected the United States to Canada for African American slaves to escape their plantations

196). Connected to race are the Jim Crow laws, which segregate people of color, obliging Miss Quinn (a colored woman who fights with the Eastwood sisters) “to ride out front with the driver” in her visit with Bella to Old Salem (237). Moreover, the unfair situation faced by mill workers and women is presented as well, demonstrated by “aching knuckles from a double-shift at the mill” (42), the pay gap, or the laws on parental rights favoring the father.

Amidst these circumstances the historical figure of the witch and her past surface, yet wrapped by fantastical and mythical elements, conferring the novel its classification as historical fantasy. The witch trials materialize not only in Old Salem, “where Tituba and Osborne and Good [the first three women accused of witchcraft in Salem] and the rest of them had worked their wonders and terrors” (155) but in real places such as “Wiesensteig in the fifteen-sixties ... and the Auld Kirk Green at the end of the century. Navarre in the early sixteen-hundreds” (410). The trial the Eastwood sisters stand also resembles those of the Early Modern Period, consisting of three phases: “the convening of the court” (444), “the evidence against them” (445), and “the confession” (446). However, the intrusion of magical charms from domestic ones to spells to “sunder a soul” (479), accompanied by the calling back of the Lost Way of Avalon (a tower conserving a library with all knowledge about witchcraft) and the Last Three Witches of the West (the last three witches confronting Saint George), considered to be a “myth and witch-tale” (45), tackle the ontological boundary between “the supernatural and the historically *real*” (McHale 95). Likewise, the novel removes the correspondence between the real world and the fictional space. This is also attained by including a “death author”, James Juniper, who is simultaneously a character in her own narration. She chronicles from the 3rd person, not *mediating* in the story until the revelation of her identity in the epilogue: “I figure since I’m the one who started the story, I should be the one to finish it” (Harrow 510). Interestingly enough, she “dies” in the pyre that should have burned the three sisters, underpinning this literary topic.

The Once and Future Witches is as well categorized as a metafictional fiction by foregrounding “its own status as a fictional construct” (Nicol 16). The three sisters are constantly “aware of their own fictionality” (McHale 121) within, in this case, an altered

fairy tale, which will be examined in the following section. In addition, they are conscious of the position they occupy within it, as Agnes “can feel the edges of a story plucking at her, making her the middle sister in some dark witch-tale” (Harrow 65). This awareness entails the sisters’ awareness of the inescapability of their own death, for “witches always burn, in the end” (386; McHale 123).

Ultimately, how the structure of the postmodern fictional world is constructed (or deconstructed) will be delineated. Harrow opposes two areas of space, Old Salem and New Salem, mirroring the past and the present, respectively. She introduces between them, using interpolation, the mythical space of Avalon, located “outside of time and mind”, “on the other side of nowhere” (Harrow 353, 403). The space where Avalon is situated defies Lubomír Doležel’s law of the excluded middle, by creating a world “between existence and nonexistence” (McHale 106), as the Last Three and Juniper at the end neither living nor dead exemplify. In addition, the recursive structure parallels a Chinese-box world, where a primary world, Juniper as “author” in the Tower of Avalon, embeds a secondary one, the story or narration itself (a novel-within-a-novel). The reader, nevertheless, is confused into assuming that the *diegesis* comprises the Eastwood’s story, recurring to the strategy of *trompe-l’oeil*. The structure is further convoluted by frequently interrupting the secondary narrative level with the *hypodiegetic* worlds constituted by each of the fairy tales (113). This switching of narrative levels enables the permeating of elements between them, as is the case of the Tower of Avalon.

2.2. The Reworking of Fairy Tales

The postmodernism of the fictional space is stressed through its parodic inter-texts, aiming to rewrite and enrich the historical past of the witches. Harrow “borrows the clothes” of different genres (traditional fairy tales, historical fiction, and fantasy) to underscore the limitless connections a text keeps with other texts and revivify the existing literary forms (Lewis 173; Butler 32). This is evident in the book Bella is writing at the end, “part story and part grimoire, part history and part myth”, affording a different viewpoint of Juniper’s narration (Harrow 508).

The structuring device of *The Once and Future Witches* is, as asserted, a modified fairy tale that works rather like a witch-tale, sticking to the classical “once upon a time” beginning and subverting the magic operating behind these tales (Harrow 5). The antagonistic figure is reversed, being a male witch instead of a female one, and with no princesses or princes showing up. In turn, the story provides seven reworked fairy tales, four of them proving to be retellings of tales from Grimm Brothers’ *Children’s and Household Tales*, which Harrow conveniently substitutes for Sisters Grimm’s *Children and Household Witch-Tales* (18), attending her particular interests and complicating the intertextual references. These tales, whose titles have also been altered, are transmitted orally, concurrently preserving the folkloric tradition and facilitating the apparition of new versions. Allusions to other Grimms’ fairy tales, such as *Snow White*: “Would anyone know Snow White’s name if her Mother never wore hot iron shoes?” (386), or *Little Red Riding Hood*: “She thinks of [...] the little red witch inside the wolf [...]” (217) are incorporated as well.

Concerning the rewritten fairy tales, the four derived from the Grimm Brothers (*The Tale of the Sleeping Maiden*, *The Tale of Rapunzel and the Crone*, *The Tale of the Witch Who Spun Straw into Silver*, and *The Tale of the Brother and the Sister*), along with *The Tale of the Last Three Witches of the West* are essential for the novel’s plot. *How Aunt Nancy Stole the Words* presents an African American folktale character (the spider), and *The Tale of the Death of the Deathless Witch* is an Old Russian tale, signaling the ethnical background of their narrators. All these revisions feature at least a witch as the center of the narrative, abandoning the margins reserved for them in literary and folkloric works. Common assumptions about the inherent malice of witches are reshaped into female rage and agency, although still reproducing “naturalizing gender-constructions” (Bacchilega 19).

As the upcoming section displays, each of the Eastwood sisters matches one stage of the archetypal goddess triad, embodied by the Last Three Witches of the West. The spell they need to restore “what has been lost”, to change the ending of their story, requires “maiden’s blood, mother’s milk, and crone’s tears” (Harrow 240). The first three fairy tales dispense, separately, one of these elements attributed to the appropriate figure, and intrinsically

connected to a tower, implying that of Avalon. These children's stories thus compose the base on which the witches rely for their magical spells: "the stories grannies tell their babies, the secret rhymes children chant among themselves, the songs women sing as they work", never paid enough attention (viii).

The Tale of the Sleeping Maiden re-envisioned *Little Briar-Rose*, hinting at the "rose-briars" that border the tower (37). This version eschews portraying the young maiden, bound irrevocably to prick her finger with a spinning wheel, as "the passively beautiful female ... with very limited options" (Bacchilega 29) by turning her into a witch who purposely pricks her finger, spilling the "Maiden's blood" and obtaining the rule of the slumbering kingdom who refused her a place in the feast (Harrow 37). Although the knight who rescues the kingdom does not strictly "act within the established norms of princely behavior" (Bacchilega 41), he gains his savior title by burning the tower within which the witch resides, prompting the expected "happily ever after" of the tale and replicating the early modern dread of witches.

The Tale of Rapunzel and the Crone, by contrast, in its rewriting of *Rapunzel*, places the girl as the typical helpless victim who is imprisoned in a tall tower by a "bent-backed Crone" (Harrow 115), waiting to be saved by a handsome prince. Nonetheless, the Crone does not lock her out of wickedness but encouraged to recover the leaves that had been usurped from her vines by Rapunzel's parents, now resting in Rapunzel's green eyes. Harrow further reverses the stereotypical image of witches as evil humanizing the Crone at the end. Instead of cutting Rapunzel's hair and leaving her in the wilderness, as the Grimm Brothers' tale shows, she does not oppose Rapunzel's depart with the bard, except for one condition: Rapunzel "must return what belongs" to the Crone, her sight (116). She is left weeping, something unimaginable for a "wicked" witch, materializing the Crone's tears. In addition, her insistence on recuperating what is stolen empowers her and echoes the Eastwood sisters' quest.

The Tale of the Witch Who Spun Straw into Silver retells *Rumpelstiltskin*, replaced by an old witch representing the Crone. A miller's daughter, "exchanged" by his father, is obliged to fulfill the "masculine desire" of the king: spin "a cell full of straw" into silver or "face

the stake” (214; Bacchilega 29, 76). This patriarchal trading of women is culminated by turning the miller’s daughter into the king’s wife after her seeming wonders, unveiling the repressive ideologies sustaining marriage (76). However, the miller’s daughter had been helped for three nights by the old witch, now demanding “the girl’s firstborn child” (Harrow 215). Despite being identified with the Mother, the girl, “who counted her own life more heavily than that of a child not yet thought of or wanted” accepts, detaching her identity from motherhood (215). As in the previous tales, the girl supplies the Mother’s milk, aiding her to find the witch’s tower and keep her child.

Lastly, *The Tale of the Last Three Witches of the West* and *The Tale of the Brother and the Sister* are going to be analyzed altogether. The former illustrates that Juniper’s writing is merely “a story that has been told before and will be told again” (513), emphasizing the core of postmodernist fiction: its multiplicity and relativism. The Eastwood sisters’ story replicates that of the Last Three Witches of the West, picturing women “as the principal agent of transgression” (Tatar 96), refusing to accept the witches’ fate in the hands of men: to be burned. It is inferred that the Maiden, Mother, and Crone appearing in the prior tales double the Last Three, for witching is no more than “a way where there was none”, a liberating path (Harrow 309). The latter is a reworking of Grimm’s *Hansel and Gretel*, as Juniper reminds Gideon Hill: “You’ve had a lot of names [...] Always Gs and Hs, so I guess you must have missed her [...] Your sister sends her love, Hansel” (486). It is narrated from Hill’s point of view. Gretel identifies with the Maiden of the Last Three, who “chose to remain in the woods without him”, not succumbing to Hansel/George’s influence (451). Furthermore, the classical anti-mother child-eating witch who receives the siblings is overturned by one who teaches them ways and words, while the boy symbolizes an evil and threatening force.

All in all, these revisions have worked to interrogate “the fairy tale’s naturalizing of gender dynamics” by empowering female characters and upsetting traditional stereotypes (Bacchilega 113), yet sometimes failing to.

2.3. The Fashioning of the Witches' Stereotype

The contemporary conditions of the postmodern actuality propitiate, as the preceding sections have demonstrated, the displacement of the memory of the witch from its settled definition, and its haunting presence. The conflation of the past and the future into the present that encloses the symbol is captured by the novel's fictional world. The past, not only the harmful legacy of the witch hunts but also the familial resentments of the sisters, is persistently coming to the surface. The memory of the sisters' "mean drunk with hard knuckles" father is tormenting them too (Harrow 104). Nevertheless, the witches can detain this ghostly figure, advancing future possibilities, by addressing and regaining "what has been lost": the knowledge held by the Tower of Avalon (240). This coalescence of temporalities is mirrored by the somewhat contradictory coexistence between early modern images of the witch and feminist iterations of the same.

The historical past of the narrative world matches the myth of the 'Burning Times', which, according to radical feminists, accounts for the analogy of the witch with a victim of patriarchal violence (Purkiss 14; Daly 14, 15). Old Salem was home to powerful women who "were queens and scholars and generals" (Harrow 120) till their fall into the hands of men, condemned to face the stake. This spiral of violence, inherited by New Salem, is carried on until our days. However, New Salem's story constitutes a notable example of a *herstorical* narrative, a feminist reconstruction of history, for women are paving their way from their disenfranchised position to their cultural and political emancipation, as it will be exposed.

Despite this revalorization of the witch, some traits of the early modern stereotyped portrayal still prevail. As expected, Christian and patriarchal discourses are well embedded into the depiction, justifying the purge on the part of the Church, with its minions the Inquisitors, and men. They work tirelessly to suppress the innate sinfulness and wickedness of women from "New Salem—the City Without Sin" (6), as illustrated from the very beginning:

The preacher back home says it was God's will that purged the witches from the world. He says women are sinful by nature and that magic in their hands turns naturally to rot and ruin, like the first witch Eve ... He says the purges purified the earth [...] (viii).

Miss Grace Wiggin, the adopted daughter of Gideon Hill, and her Women's Christian Union, profoundly alienated, ironically perpetuate the same stereotype: "We, the good and righteous women of New Salem [...] clarifying which women are good and righteous—object to the promotion of sin on our streets!" (91), hindering women's advancement and accusing them of witchcraft, participating as a witness in the sisters' trial. She introduces as well the sexual nature of witches asking "will our sons be seduced by their black arts?" (92). Their iniquity is highlighted by identifying witching with the Devil, as the "uncanny" fever that is spreading through New Salem is known as "Devil's-fever" (31) or "Second Plague" (353), following the previous one in Old Salem. The Eastwood sisters acquire their familiars, although they are not depicted as evils or demons, otherwise as "witchcraft itself wearing an animal-skin" (112).

The two figures that best personify patriarchy in this system are Eastwood sisters' father and, in particular, Gideon Hill, paradoxically called Saint George of Hyll, after instigating the purges in Old Salem. The sisters' dead father, who abused her daughters both verbally and physically, represents the conservative and misogynistic ideology endorsing the witch hunts. The sole inheritance the sisters receive from him is nothing but an incessant reminder of the powerless place of women in society: "*Don't forget what you are, girl ... Nothing*" (9). Gideon, being a male witch, smashes the traditional genderization of the witch. He is presented as "a monster who murders women and steals children" (440). His monopoly, erected upon a set of lies, feels jeopardized by the presence of the witches, whom he seeks to erase, as formerly did in the old times. Gideon belongs to that patriarchy of the 'Burning Times' myth that reduces witches to merely victims, applying to them early modern methods of torture, such as "bridles to stop their tongues from speaking the words, shackles to stop their hands from working the ways—and collars" (212). The witches, in turn, in their urge to shatter Gideon's repressive rule in pursuit of a more equitable world, reflect a 'negative utopianism' (Kosmina 132). Moreover, he pushes to the extreme the

formlessness that characterized the witch's body by not possessing one of his own, singly colonizing them.

Concerning feminist depictions of the witch, it is essential to beckon the relation between witchcraft and political power, or suffragism, as Juniper underlines: "Witching and women's rights. Suffrage and spells ... They're both a kind of power, aren't they? The kind we aren't allowed to have" (Harrow 47). This linking is further emphasized by "the Sunday cartoons [where the suffragists are] drawn scraggle-haired and long-noised, suspiciously witchy" (8). However, the New Salem Women's Association soon discloses its traditionalist approach towards the use of magic and feminism at large by fighting for a power that "you can wear in public or argue in the courtroom or write on a slip of paper and drop in a ballot box" (56-57). Therefore, the Eastwood sisters created "a suffrage society dedicated to the restoration of women's rights and powers", or coven, known as Sisters of Avalon (138). It is an inclusive and feminist group hosting women from all backgrounds and ethnicities, where they can freely express themselves and find support. Its primary occupation is collecting the songs and rhymes that were once handed down "in secret from mother to daughter" (45), assuming the notion that witchcraft was hereditary (Bechtel 461), from where witches acquire the power necessary for their road towards emancipation. It mirrors the early modern women's tradition of intermingling folk materials into the depositions of accused of witchcraft, creating an empowering and enabling fantasy. Nonetheless, what the persecutors were burning at the beginning were "books and the women who wrote them", in other words, knowledge (Harrow 277-78). As the library carried by the Tower of Avalon illustrates, magic signifies knowledge, constituting the reason behind Hill's burning of it: a "knowledge being held as evil and dangerous in [women's] hands" (Gage 242-43).

What remains of the analysis will be conducted in relation to the reformulation of the reductive and primitive archetypes of the goddess triad (the Last Three) and the role each of the sisters occupies in it. The ancient significance of number three in witchcraft is also infused with the story, as Mama Mags, the sisters' grandmother, taught them that "everything important comes in threes: little pigs ... Sisters [or circles]" (Harrow viii).

Bella Eastwood, the old Crone, is the clever one, who incarnates the knowledge and shrewdness that lifted fear of the old hag or woman. Although she breaks with the image of older women as “doting and addled, absent-minded grandmothers” (401), Harrow fails to break up the silence encircling aging and, especially, aging women, for Bella is a young woman. Nevertheless, Mama Mags, depicted as an old wise woman, supplies this lack of representation.

By contrast, Harrow frees certain memories of the witch from their traditional othering by incorporating them into the emancipatory feminist discourse, being the case of queer and black witches. For the development of Bella’s queer identity, it is indispensable to examine the figure of Miss Cleo Quinn, an African-American woman who works for the “radical colored paper” of New Salem (58). In *The Once and Future Witches* black people struggle with racist realities, as briefly looked before, starting with the separation of New Cairo, the colored district of New Salem, disdainfully known as “The Jungle” or “Little Africa” from the rest of the city (179). A “withered African woman with an iron witch-collar locked around her neck” (87) is even exhibited at the Centennial Fair, accentuating the exoticism an alien race awakens. In addition, the NSWA, anchored in its first-wave feminism, rejects the inclusion of colored women, displacing their fight:

Some worry that the inclusion of colored women might tarnish their respectable reputation; others feel they ought to spend a few more decades being grateful for their freedom before they agitate for anything so radical as rights. Most of them agree it would be far more convenient if colored women remained in the Colored Women’s League (59-60).

In opposition, the Sisters of Avalon are a prominent example of intersectional feminism, accepting not only African-American women but also from different ethnic backgrounds, such as Russian. Harrow, by positioning Cleo Quinn as one of the protagonists of the novel, detaches black people from their location in the margins. Furthermore, Quinn is a member of the Daughters of Tituba, a clandestine organization of black witches, descendants from the slaves that constructed New Salem, and similar to the Sisters of Avalon. The author thus resolves the underrepresentation of Tituba in historical records, honoring her legacy.

Bella's queerness, repressed by the memory of St. Hale's, a religious convent where her father sent her after "finding Bella with the preacher's daughter, half-naked and ruby-lipped, reveling in sin" (314), gradually emerges with the help of Cleo. They engage in a sex-affective relationship, underscoring "long-beliefs about the link between lesbianism and witchcraft" (Kosmina 167). Their sexuality is positively portrayed, far from Christian and Puritan beliefs about women's deviance, yet Juniper conserves a reminiscence of them by recalling "the preacher's admonitions and about man and wife and the natural order of things" (Harrow 357). Adding to queer associations of the witch in the story is the case of Jennie Lind, a transgender woman, who exemplifies the discrimination non-binary people had to endure, as Jennie's hair has been cut "brutally short" and her skirts burned after her detention (433). However, as current trans-feminist tendencies show, she utilizes witchcraft as a means of achieving liberation.

Agnes Eastwood, pregnant, is the Mother. She substitutes the image of mothers as "weak, weepy creatures, women who give birth to their children and drift peacefully into death" (400), as her mother did, for one of fierceness and courage. Her characterization withdraws from the conventional representation of witches as anti-mothers and devourers of children. It is Gideon Hill, revoking "parental rights of known witches or witch-sympathizers" and snatching Agnes's daughter from her that approaches this trope (382). Instead, Agnes fits into patriarchal ideas of 'good mother', willing to sacrifice herself, as "Mama Mags had done, and her mother before her" for giving her daughter a better life than she had (387). But she unites the Sisters of Avalon, despite the great risk it supposes for her unborn child because Agnes wants "to see her daughter grow free and fearless, walking tall through the dark woods of the world, armed and armored" (126). Additionally, Agnes displays traditional unfeminine feelings, like the rage that drives her to confront Gideon Hill, releasing her from the confined space of the 'good mother' and validating her maternity.

Related to motherhood and childbirth is the figure of the herbalist-healer witch or midwife, personified by two characters: Mama Mags and Madame Zina Card. Zina is a spiritualist and midwife to whom Agnes appeals to get an abortion and who dismisses the

taboo enclosing this practice, asserting that “there’s no sin to it. It’s just the way of the world, older than the Three themselves. Not every woman wants a child” (63). Nonetheless, this apparent progressive attitude is rapidly absorbed and enjoyed by Gideon Hill in the Eastwood sisters’ trial, as Zina confesses and repents her participation “in such wickedness” (445). In so doing, the automatic transgression that the ‘Burning Times’ myth placed on women’s knowledge about the body is discarded. Mama Mags, on the contrary, although dead since the beginning of the story, embodies a positive midwife-witch whose memory accompanies the sisters throughout the story. Besides her work as a clandestine abortionist, “looking for the words and ways to unmake the babies in the bellies” (106), even performing one on Agnes, she taught her granddaughters reproductive rights and notions about witchcraft and spells. Mama Mags thus represents everything that was persecuted and censured by patriarchal institutions, but even so, she managed to leave an inspiring imprint on the sisters. Moreover, Mama Mags lived with her granddaughters in Crow County, until the sisters’ separation, in a country farm surrounded by vast woods, which Juniper nostalgically remembers once in New Salem. It stresses the connection between women and nature, and, therefore, primitivism.

Juniper Eastwood, the Maiden, replaces the “sweet, soft creatures who braid daisy-crowns and turn themselves into laurel trees rather than suffer the loss of their innocence” (400), for she is the most rebellious and feral one of the three sisters. She demonstrates so by firstly killing her abusive father using magic and setting “fire to what was left of him” (213) for taking away everything that belongs to Juniper, even her mother’s life during Juniper’s childbirth: “Her father watching with a jagged wrongness in his face ... not running for help, not ringing the bell that would bring Mama Mags and her herbs and rhymes” (65). Afterward, she is the one who drags her sisters into the suffragist movement, culminating in the creation of the Sisters of Avalon and the quest for the Lost Way of Avalon, intending to “reclaim the power of witches for all womankind, to break the shackles of their servitude” (252).

As the youngest of the sisters, Juniper matches the feminist memory of the witch as a girl. Even though the figure of the ‘modern girl’ is interwoven into postfeminist politics

that confer the movement a 'finished' and uncritical status, Juniper does not take that turn. She remains a symbol of resistance and female power since she does not stop fighting until the liberation of New Salem from the menace of Gideon Hill, at the expense of her self-sacrificing in the pyre arranged for burning the sisters. Juniper, given Hill's determination to possess Eve's body (Agnes's daughter), binds his soul to her in order to "finally redeem all those generations of debt, all the sacrifices of the women who came before her" (485). It is at this precise moment when Juniper completes her process of unbecoming a girl and becoming a woman because she loses her innocence, bitterly acknowledging that somebody has to pay for offering New Salem a potentially alternative future, without forgetting, however, all the past women who combated shoulder to shoulder to make it possible.

CONCLUSION

The Once and Future Witches develop into, as the analysis has revealed, the altered images of the witch from the Early Modern Period to the present, yet the traditional discourse stamping a mark on it. The focus of attention was placed, with a feminist memory, on a series of characterizations of the figure (as a monster, as a mother, as a girl, as an herbalist-midwife witch, as an old hag, queer and black), influenced at once by the postmodern world that frames them.

The findings of this paper disclose that the fragmented and multifaceted reality that postmodernism generates encourages the disruption of the orthodox ideas disseminated by the Church and the State about witches. It also promotes the feminist rewriting of history, as *New Salem* and the reworked fairy tales exemplify. By so doing, it stresses the importance of re-remembering and recuperating the past plays in imagining and threading future fair worlds for women.

Furthermore, the depiction offered by the novel about witches lines up with feminist emancipatory discourses. However, such progressive descriptions are sometimes obscured by incorporating regressive and hindering notions that uncover the paradoxical status of the witch. It is the case of aligning the narrative world with the inaccurate myth of the 'Burning Times', disabling women by reducing them to mere symbols of patriarchal oppression, and the lack of representation the figure of the old hag confronts. All in all, despite the remains that still point out witches as a wicked threat to male spheres, Harrow successfully advances the feminist agenda of the book. The sorority and resilience that arise from the association between women, the validating maternity Agnes experiences, the rebelliousness and resistance Juniper brings along from the very beginning, and the prominence marginalized identities (non-binary, queer, and racial) wield in the story contribute to an intersectional, inclusive, and progressive feminism.

The research provides a notable insight into feminist witches' studies, attending to the possible limitations and improvements required. Nevertheless, the present examination of witches' portrayals is limited to Harrow's novel. Therefore, it would be valuable to expand the research by incorporating, for instance, other contemporary novels from different

backgrounds that allow for a comparative and more global study. It also would be engrossing to inspect other cultural forms, such as films, TV series, or theatrical plays to see how the symbol functions along popular culture.

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