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Representations of Witches and Witchcraft
In Children's Literature

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1 The Problem with Jadis	17
Chapter 2 Murder, Misogyny, and Mayhem in Roald Dahl’s <i>The Witches</i>	44
Conclusion	71
Bibliography	76

Introduction

The witch figure has long been the quintessential female villain. On the surface she is menacing and dangerous because she casts harmful spells and hurts children; on a deeper level she is a threat to the stability of heteronormative and patriarchal Christian societies. The European and North American witch hunts of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries brought her supposed existence to life while leaving many in modern times to wonder why the witch hunts occurred and how they persisted for so long. Even though the executions have stopped, and magic is not generally perceived as the threat it once was, there is no doubt that her importance as an icon of wickedness still captivates us today. Her history as a practitioner of magic and malevolence in literature can be traced at least as far back as the murderous mother, Medea, in ancient Greece. Since then she has inhabited various iterations of the character in Western literature from Circe to Morgan le Fay to the Weird Sisters in Europe, and Marie Laveau to Tituba in America. She has also appeared in films as the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*, the Evil Queen from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and the Sanderson Sisters from *Hocus Pocus*. While each of these characters are unique, they all share some consistent attributes: independence and autonomy, the use of magic and/or the perceived ability to produce nefarious outcomes, and their female gender.

Appearing in literature and films during times of economic or cultural instability, the witch figure oftentimes parallels anxieties surrounding the changing position of women in societies. Such is the case with Jadis in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, as well as the Grand High Witch and her coven in *The Witches* by Roald Dahl. Both texts participate in a

lengthy and sexist tradition of the vilification of women via the witch figure.¹ According to scholar and Professor Dr. Heidi Breuer, evidence of this trend is seen as far back as Arthurian literature of the fourteenth century. In her text *Crafting the Witch*, Breuer argues the anxiety regarding the position of women in the newly forming capitalist economy was expressed via a narrative that represented female magical power as dangerous. Her review of legal evidence suggests the belief in real-life witches was sincere, while the literary evidence she provides suggests that the representation of magic and the threats it posed ebbed and flowed with legal verdicts and trends. Following the evolution of prophetic magic from fairly benign to outright heresy, Breuer links thirteenth century legal proceedings in England to the literature of the time to illustrate the shift towards demonic magic as a threat to the Catholic Church. At the same time, Breuer argues, the changing economic system produced opportunities for women that were not previously available. By utilizing the witch figure in literature in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, she argues that women who aspired to take advantage of these opportunities (and possibly neglected their feminine duties as wives and mothers) were portrayed as villainous, child-hating monsters that represented everything that was wrong with the changing economy. I believe Breuer's assertion that women who failed to live up to expectations regarding motherhood and marriage were penalized can be seen in the portrayal of one the most famous witches in Western literature, Morgan le Fay, in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. Betraying her husband Uriens with her lover Accolon, Morgan le Fay seeks autonomy and sexual freedom outside the patriarchal authority of her marriage. By enlisting Accolon to fight her brother, King Arthur, in one of her repeated attempts

¹ See Lisa Bernstein's "Demythifying the Witch's Identity as Social Critique in Maryse Conde's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Edward Bever's "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community," Clarke Garrett's "Women and Witches: Patterns of Analysis," Linda Holland-Toll's "Bluestockings Beware: Cultural Backlash and the Reconfiguration of the Witch in Popular Nineteenth-Century Literature," Eric B. Ross' "Syphilis, Misogyny, and Witchcraft in 16th- Century Europe," and Jeanette C. Smith's "The Role of Women in Contemporary Arthurian Fantasy," which all discuss various ways in which the witch figure is used to vilify women.

to destroy him and his kingdom of Camelot, Morgan arguably attempts to symbolically destroy the patriarchal code of chivalry itself. Obligating her son, Yvain, to thwart her attempted murder of Uriens, Morgan effectively renounces any maternal obligations she has to her son. Prior to *Le Morte Darthur*, Morgan's magical powers had often been represented as a positive attribute to her character. In *Le Morte Darthur* we see a shift in the representation of her powers as helpful to hurtful as her attacks against the men in her life proliferate. This list certainly isn't inclusive of all of Morgan's transgressions, but it highlights Breuer's point that female characters in literature who don't conform to the expected standards of marriage and maternity are punished. I believe Morgan's desire for agency over her own body and destiny are not portrayed as positive aspects of her character in the text, while her attempts to ruin her brother, King Arthur, are representative of the danger of female power and ambition.

Professor and literary critic Dr. Lisa M Vetere also proposes an interesting theory regarding the evolution of the witch figure, specifically the hag, in American literature. In what Vetere calls the "malefic unconscious," literature of Antebellum America can't escape the limiting genre conventions of the writings on the Salem witch trials. Beginning with the typical elements of narratives about the witch trials (horror over the events in Salem as well as the rejection of witchcraft as a realistic threat) and extending to scary children's stories of nineteenth century America, the genre as she describes it almost always includes a powerful and horrible old woman who terrifies her innocent victims. This old woman, or hag, is the malefic unconscious Vetere argues that appears in much of the literature about witches and witch hunting. Following the devolution of the powerful old hag to only a lowly and ignorant instrument of Satan during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Vetere resituates the formerly malefic acts of the hag with the witch hunter himself in a transfer of power from the feminine to the masculine beginning in the

literature of the mid-eighteenth century. She argues that even with this transference the gendered genre conventions of the Salem trial narratives remain in conjunction with the emergence of the white, middle-class male in the antebellum political and economic landscape. Vetere examines “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving to illustrate her argument. This short story, she argues, is an amalgamation of the genre conventions and history of witchcraft tales coupled with the gender anxieties of the day regarding the public and private spheres in which men and women were expected to exist. Vetere explains that language, the weapon of the older women of Sleepy Hollow, is wielded by telling ghost stories and folktales to scare listeners and rid the town of outside influences (like Ichabod Crane) that may threaten the women’s social and political control of the village population. Filled with a nostalgia for a supposedly simple past of patriarchal village leaders, Vetere argues “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” attempts to eliminate the public power of the old village women by transferring their malefic language (and the power that goes with it) of scary stories to various males such as the Headless Horsemen who bewitched the village. This transference, she argues, assuages the gender anxiety regarding publicly powerful women to accommodate for the inferiority felt by emerging middle-class men during this time. In my opinion, the type of malefic act committed by the village matrons, and the absence of actual witches in the text, makes this short story an unexpected choice for the literature of witchcraft which is why I included it here. I agree with Vetere’s claim that the presence of Cotton Mather’s *History of Witchcraft* as a seemingly favorite text of Ichabod’s confirms his belief in witches and the devil, which is why the stories of the Galloping Hessian are so powerful to him. Her observation that the village matrons’ malefic act of scaring Ichabod with their tales of ghosts and goblins ensures the continuance of their privileged position by removing the threat of education and outside information also makes sense. I agree that the narrator’s reference to ghost stories

mainly surviving in only the older Dutch communities is a slight against the power these women hold because it implies that the villages are behind the times, i.e. they should be listening to powerful men in the community, not old women. Clearly this is reinforced in the final thoughts of the narrator as he/she refers to the “superstitious awe” in which the villagers view the bridge where the old women believe Ichabod was killed by the Headless Horseman (and not expelled by Brom Bones). Breuer and Vetere’s observations are important to understanding the politics of power as it relates to gender in witchcraft tales. Such understanding is important to my argument regarding gender and power in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, and *The Witches* because both scholars clearly demonstrate a lengthy and established tradition in literature of utilizing the witch figure to label feminine power as dangerous or undesirable.

Because the breadth of scholarship on representations of witches and witchcraft in literature is so vast, I will not focus my argument on *if* Jadis and the Grand High Witch and her coven are examples of the vilification of women. Instead, I will add to the critical conversation by examining *how* they are examples of such vilification and *what* qualifies them to be classified as such based on their historical context. My argument focuses on how a negative backlash against the progressive push to change social and political standards for women during the war years and the 1960s to the early 1980s in Great Britain influenced the way in which both texts utilize the witch figure to punish women who don’t fit the conservative expectations for them. Both texts reestablish a traditional view of gender to assuage the uneasiness over the place of women in society. I believe these texts not only utilize the witch figure to vilify certain women, but to expressly privilege and promote a very specific beauty and behavioral ideal for women by gendering the negative qualities of the witches in each text to send the message that the value and success of a woman are dependent on her fitting into a precise set of feminine ideals.

Grounding my analysis of both texts within a historical context requires an appreciation for how historical events shape culture. Taking a New Historicist approach to my analysis allows me the flexibility to review actual events in history and analyze how they impacted representations in literature. Both *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* and *The Witches* were born out of culturally turbulent times in twentieth century Great Britain, and the witches in each text arguably respond to uncertainties over women choosing professional careers over motherhood or marriage. By responding to these feelings in the manner they did, both texts participated in redefining, and unfortunately re-perpetuating, old myths about femininity, maternity, and the witch figure in new ways identifiable to the twentieth century. Included in my analysis is the behavior and appearance of the witches, in conjunction with the twentieth century struggles over economic and social dominance between the sexes, to demonstrate why the negative portrayals of the witch figures are essentially reconfigured regurgitations of historically-specific social and political expectations regarding the roles of femininity as defined by heteronormative patriarchal ideologies.

In order to understand how women were perceived and expected to participate in British society during the early to mid-twentieth century, I examined several historical events to discern their various cultural impacts. Since *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* was published a few years after the end of World War II, an understanding of the roles of women at the beginning of the war years was necessary. I began with an examination of the reception of the first wave of feminism in Great Britain, and what influence it had on the treatment of women. Second, I looked at how World War I necessitated the participation of women in the public sphere not previously required or desired. Third, I considered how the emotional scars of the Great War arose from not only the trauma of the war but as a result of the social turmoil it introduced during a particularly vulnerable time. Recognizing how these events contributed to British culture going into, and

exiting, both wars was essential to my analysis of how Jadis represents the type of woman Great Britain was so ill at ease with in the first half of the twentieth century. To understand the historical context of *The Witches*, an examination of the second wave of feminism and its effects was necessary to fully appreciate the origins of the New Right and Margaret Thatcher's administration's focus on the "traditional family" in the latter part of the twentieth century. My examination of the use of policy initiatives to reduce government dependence, and encourage women to embrace motherhood and childcare as their primary occupation, proved invaluable when analyzing how the text utilizes the witch-hag to disparage women in the public sphere. Reflecting on various media publications championing the "cult of domesticity," or the belief in the complete devotion to being a wife and mother as the only source of gratification in life, proved invaluable to my analysis of how the reinforcement of such ideas proliferated in both texts.

My understanding of the events mentioned above informed my analysis of how the witches in each text represent many undesirable or unfeminine attributes as defined by social standards of twentieth century Great Britain. Chapter 1 – "The Problem With Jadis" defines Jadis' abjection and vilification through the analysis of key scenes involving Jadis, Aslan, the Pevensie children, and the Beavers. Through close reading, my analysis exposes a preference for the maternal (as represented by Mrs. Beaver and the Pevensie girls, Susan and Lucy) in contrast to the anti-maternal witch figure (Jadis). Jadis' behavior as an aggressive and unscrupulous usurper who plans to murder four children to secure the throne for herself responds to the resentment felt by many in British society during the war years who didn't approve of women forgoing their feminine duties as wives and mothers in favor of careers. Chapter 2 – "Murder, Misogyny, and Mayhem in Roald Dahl's *The Witches*" explores the use of the hag figure to represent corrupted femininity through the analysis of key scenes involving the narrator, his grandmother, The Grand High Witch, and

her coven. The Grand High Witch and her coven are portrayed as physically disgusting and repulsive anti-maternal child murderers who don't need men to support them financially. They respond to the anxiety in British society regarding the disintegration of the traditional family resulting from the second wave of feminism. They also highlight the fear that politicians and the public had regarding the future of the family and continued existence of the State. The use of the witch figure as villain in both texts can arguably be attributed to the how the feminist movement shifted ideas about the roles of women, and why that was so threatening to the stability of society and the State.

Utilizing feminist theory and gender studies as the theoretical basis for my thesis, I explore how the witch figure is used to portray female characters by contrasting their behavior and appearance to traditionally defined concepts of femininity or masculinity. My use of feminist theory is grounded in my understanding of gender as defined by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, the concepts of privilege and oppression as defined by Christie Launius and Holly Hassel in *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies*, and ideas about motherhood from feminist writers Eleanor H. Kuykendall, Susan J. Douglas, and Meredith W. Michaels. In examining ideas about gender and society in *Gender Trouble*, Butler insists upon the constructed nature of gender by suggesting that notions of gender identity exist primarily to create a heteronormative binary that ensures the privilege or submission of certain categories of bodies within a heterosexual hierarchy. According to Butler, such heterosexualization insists on feminine and masculine, or female and male, and those that don't fit into this idea are erased (Butler 24). Butler contends that the resulting instability and discomfort produced by an absence of such a distinction forces people to believe that gender is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Butler argues that such a phenomenon

is not naturally occurring; there is no original gender, only that which is culturally inscribed upon a body out of political necessity.

Butler makes a distinction between the performative nature of gender and the performance of gender to clarify how the meaning of gender is established versus how it is contradicted and disrupted. Much of Butler's discussion aims to endorse the idea that gender is performative, meaning that gender is essentially a series of repetitive acts carried out to create the meaning of gender. The performance of gender differs from the performative because a performance is intentionally to convince others, not to convince the self. Butler examines drag as a performance that exposes the constructed nature of gender. Her argument considers the difference between the anatomical sex of the performer versus the gender being performed; the "original" versus the "imitation" (Butler 187). The "original" being the biological sex and the "imitation" being the performance. Her analysis demonstrates how the biological sex, gender identity, and gender performance of the individual in drag disrupts the stability of the relationship between these three elements by demonstrating the falseness of their certainty as naturally occurring phenomena. Butler's ideas are especially relevant to my analysis of *The Witches* not only because The Grand High Witch and her coven dress in costume every day to perform the role of "normal" women, but also because the discovery of their true identities is so unsettling to our notions of what femininity is that they must ultimately be destroyed.

Christie Launius and Holly Hassel provide a feminist analysis of privilege and oppression by discussing how gender is used to segregate labor, and therefore economic benefits, within a patriarchal society. According to Launius and Hassel, gender is a socially constructed system of privilege and oppression, and their work is especially concerned with how, where, and to what effect it operates (Launius and Hassel 26). For example, the authors explore how certain traits that

have historically be associated with femininity and females developed an association with professional fields such as nursing or secretarial work. These professions sometimes require a nurturing or attentive demeanor which is often associated with females and mothers. Launius and Hassel argue that because fields mostly dominated by men require workers that are traditionally unencumbered, i.e. not weighed down by personal responsibilities like motherhood, leadership roles are thus associated with masculine traits which reinforces the belief that leadership is a masculine calling (Launius and Hassel 51). Also reinforcing privilege and oppression is sexism, which the authors define as prejudice and discrimination based on sex. According to the authors, part of the functionality of gender as a social construct is to propagate sexism (Launius and Hassel 26). While many concepts in feminist theory are addressed in this text, the concepts of privilege and oppression are particularly useful in my analysis of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. Jadis, the White Witch of Narnia, is arguably subjected to judgement regarding her behavior as it relates to her femininity, or lack of it. As a female in a position of power, her behavior is highly scrutinized because of how she obtained such a position.

Exploring the witch figure as an anti-maternal figure necessitates defining its opposite, the maternal, to illustrate the important differences between the two. The association of mothers and the maternal to safety and comfort is almost universal. Often this association carries over to women, regardless of the number of children they have or don't have. In her essay titled "Toward an Ethic of Nurturance: Luce Irigaray on Mothering and Power," Eleanor H. Kuykendall declares the responsibility of nurturing falls upon women and thus contributes to the expectation that they become mothers. Kuykendall states:

Nurturance, or the providing of material and emotional support to a dependent or vulnerable being, such as a child, had traditionally fallen to women, and especially to

mothers. Sometimes nurturance has been seen as a culturally imposed task, and so as an aspect of women's oppression in which women become merely mothers. But sometimes the capacity to nurture, as in mothering, has been seen instead as a gift, or rather as a special power at once corporeal and psychic. (Kuykendall 263)

By identifying "nurturance" as the responsibility of the mother, Kuykendall equates the "material and emotional support" of a "dependent" to women. Describing this responsibility as a "culturally imposed task" she implies that the expectation of the nurturing and care of vulnerable beings is socially constructed. Such a construction arguably forces women into the burden of motherhood where they become "merely mothers." This is not always the case though; sometimes the ability to nurture is a positive talent as experienced through the body and mind. Kuykendall's concept of nurturing is important to my analysis of the witches because it is a skill they are incapable of possessing. Their inability to nurture and protect is the foundation of their witchy-ness; their lack of these attributes creates a deficiency in their femininity which is the basis for their vilification.

In addition to the concept of mother as nurturer, the early 1980s saw the emergence of a new definition of motherhood as discussed by Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels in their text: *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. The "new momism," as the authors call it, is defined as "the insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she had kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children" (Douglas and Michaels 4). The first sentence of this quote is so powerful because it expresses the crushing social and political pressure exerted on women constantly to be mothers. The idea that women should be the "primary caretakers" adds another layer of responsibility while their performance evaluation will be based

on their total physical and mental devotion (and exhaustion!). Douglas and Michaels further define the “new momism” as “a set of ideal, norms, and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond your reach” (Douglas and Michaels 5). This statement illustrates how the media not only communicates the message that women should be mothers, but that they should be in competition to be the best mother of all! Douglas and Michaels argue that this representation of motherhood and the “new momism” is damaging not only because of unattainable standards but because it guilt trips women into thinking motherhood is their only option. The authors argue that “new momism” really forces women into a choice they don’t have to make: “The only truly enlightened choice to make as a woman, one that proves, first, that you are a ‘real’ woman, and second, that you are a decent, worthy one, is to become a ‘mom’...” (Douglas and Michaels 5). Everywhere women turn, the message is clear: the only way to prove your worth is to become a mother.

Not all mothers are celebrated, however. The anti-maternal witch figure is uncomfortably close to the monstrous mother. Under the umbrella of the monstrous feminine, the monstrous mother appears often in novels and films but isn’t generally associated with “classical monsters” such as vampires or werewolves. I use the term “classical” to mean monsters usually recognizable to most people based on consistent representations in literature and film. In fact, in the horror genre most monsters are males who enjoy the privilege of going about their monstrosity without enduring pesky labels associated with their gender. Female monsters such as witches and monstrous mothers, however, must bear the burden of their monstrosity as a result of their sexuality or reproductive status. Scholar Barbara Creed addresses this issue in her text *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. According to Creed:

The reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why a male monster horrifies his audience. A new term is needed to specify these differences. As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity. (Creed 3)

In other words, the term "monstrous feminine" exists because female monsters are monstrous specifically because some aspect of their femininity has been tainted. Such a difference from male monsters necessitates the creation of a distinct and separate category: the "monstrous feminine". Witches, the only female monster included in the "classical monster" category, are defined by their monstrous femininity. The foundation of the witch figure is built upon the concept of witch as anti-maternal, child-murdering female who uses magic to wreak havoc on the community. The witch figure can't escape her association with the monstrous feminine because of her inability to act appropriately within the confines of her gender; she is monstrous precisely because she fails to do what is expected of her as a female just like the monstrous mother. According to Creed: "when woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions" (Creed 7). This idea applies to witches as it is their lack of mothering, and possible stifling of reproductive functions, that categorizes them as monstrous. Just like the monstrous mother, Margaret White, in Stephen King's *Carrie*, the witch figure generally seeks to prevent reproduction. This action perverts the role of the maternal as the creator of new life. As the monstrous mother, Mrs. White acts out her religious bigotry in an effort to destroy her daughter, Carrie, because she believes Carrie is a witch. Both females in the novel represent the monstrous feminine; Mrs. White poisons the concept of the maternal with her domineering presence and ultimately her attempted murder of Carrie while Carrie herself is a creation of her monstrous

mother: the monstrous child. Her puberty, and thus her telekinetic powers, signify the pollution of the feminine with her abject menstrual blood and her ability to destroy the community with her telekinesis. Mrs. White and Carrie's existence, like that of Jadis in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, and The Grand High Witch and her coven in *The Witches* is such a contamination of the feminine that they ultimately must die.

Chapter 1

The Problem with Jadis

The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe by CS Lewis, while unmistakably a fantasy novel for children, is more than children's story. Not just home to Narnia, a magical place where animals talk and children can be heroes, the text is one of the battlegrounds in the fight for the preservation of traditional and conservative values concerning British women and their place in society in the twentieth century. At the heart of the struggle for Narnia lies a usurper's claim to the throne; at the heart of the struggle over women's place in British society lies changing cultural values regarding who should hold positions of leadership or power, and/or have access to financial independence. The Narnian usurper, Jadis, aka The White Witch, epitomizes many of the common characteristics generally associated with witches: female, manipulative, cold and calculating, anti-maternal, possesses magic, murderous, etc. Such characterizations of female witches are nothing new; however, I believe in this case the characterization of the villain as a female witch matters a great deal as it speaks to how certain women were perceived in British society at the time of the text's creation. Any good story about the struggle between good and evil must have a villain, otherwise who would represent evil? In this case, however, the problem with Jadis is not just that she is a villain but that she is a specific type of villain that has historically maligned and disparaged certain women who do not fit into particular roles within society that are deemed appropriate and acceptable for them: she is a witch figure. Her rejection of socially acceptable feminine behavior, coupled with her violent seizure of power, represents the type of woman British society was so uncomfortable with in the early twentieth century. I believe that a negative backlash against the progressive push to change social and political standards for women during the war years in Great

Britain influenced the way in which *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* utilizes the witch figure to punish women who don't fit the conservative expectations set for them.

Critical attention given to *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* covers a wide variety of topics but does not generally address the witch figure or her function within the text as it relates to the social and political culture of early to mid-twentieth century Britain. Many critics debate the use of allegory versus myth in Lewis' writing, while some argue whether or not he wrote the *Chronicles of Narnia* to deliver a religious message.² Some critics focus on Lewis' participation in the writing group the Inklings, and his friendship with J.R.R. Tolkien, as great influences on his writing and creation of the White Witch, Jadis.³ Some critics have argued Lewis' writing is sexist based on his understanding of gender as a theologically based concept.⁴ Other critics have examined the ways in which Jadis' appearance and demeanor were inspired by Hans Christen Andersen's the Snow Queen.⁵ And one last critic addressed later in this chapter, Jean E. Graham, discusses female power as it relates to Jadis and her origins in relation to Circe of Greek mythology and Lilith of Jewish folklore.

² See Ruth Berman's "Watchful Dragons and Sinewy Gnomes: C.S. Lewis's Use of Modern Fairy Tales," James Como's "Mediating Illusions: Three Studies of Narnia," and Peter J. Schakel's *Reading With Heart: The Way Into Narnia*, all of which discuss Lewis' use of fairytales or allegories and religion as they relate to the Narnia series.

³ See Stephen P. Joy's "Goddess or Witch? The Pale Queen's Rise in Postwar British Literature," Josh B. Long's "Disparaging Narnia: Reconsidering Tolkien's View of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*," and George Watson's "The High Road to Narnia: C.S. Lewis and His Friend J.R.R. Tolkien Believed That Truths are Universal and That Stories Reveal Them," all of which discuss Lewis and his relationship to Tolkien and/or the Inklings and their writings.

⁴ See Gretchen Bartel's "Of Men and Mice: C.S. Lewis on Male-Female Interactions."

⁵ See Jennifer L. Miller's "No Sex in Narnia? How Hans Christian Andersen's "Snow Queen" Problematizes C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*," and Ruth Berman's "Watchful Dragons and Sinewy Gnomes: C.S. Lewis's Use of Modern Fairy Tales," as both address the influence of the Snow Queen on Jadis.

Because my argument focuses specifically on expectations for women in British society during the war years, some historical context is necessary. The beginning of the twentieth century brought great cultural turbulence and uncertainty to Great Britain. Before WWI, the first wave of feminism forced many British people to question what they felt about the place of women in society. With the Great War came many unexpected and uncomfortable changes. Historian and feminist critic Professor Susan Kingsley Kent argues that such changes had a significant impact on the social, political, and cultural realities for women in the United Kingdom. In her text *Gender + Power in Britain, 1640-1990*, Kent examines how the first wave of feminism divided the population, and how the emotional trauma from the front further polarized society as men returned from the war to find their jobs occupied by women. With the separate spheres of men in public life and women in private diminishing by the day, Kent argues a social identity crisis ensued that has had lasting implications on the treatment of British women. Kent analyzes how the intensity of the emotional pull to return to normalcy after WWI turned into a hatred of working women, and women in general. Because the British government used the threat of rape and protection of British women from sexual violence as a propaganda tool to recruit citizens in the war effort, Kent argues an association was subconsciously created between trauma experienced on the front to the independence and sexuality of women. Kent offers a disturbing glimpse into the effects of such trauma: “Many soldiers, and former soldiers, had difficulty returning from the war and thus directed their anger and violence towards women and girls. Accounts of sexual attacks upon women filled the columns of newspapers” (Kent 292). Using the descriptor “many” implies a number large enough to create concern while the word “filled” also suggests a noteworthy volume. Kent links these attacks to the threat of rape and the crazed German soldiers used as a propaganda tool during the war: “The version of masculinity fashioned by these media stories of criminal acts

and sexual assaults recalled and played upon the images of rapacious and lustful soldiers circulating during the war; they informed interwar fears of postwar disorder and the solutions that would be put forward to allay them” (Kent 293). The “solutions” Kent refers to were essentially coerced marriage. Media reports like these were used as justification to support quelling the violence not by way of providing violent men with the psychiatric help they needed but instead providing them with a human female in which they could act out their frustrations upon and express their emotions as they saw fit.

Kent argues that marriage became society’s answer to cure the troublesome aggression, which led to further demands on women to stay home and have children. According to Kent:

At this time, marriage became the answer many in society thought would cure the aggression and violence stemming from sexual repression and war. The idea that sex, and the war between the sexes, caused war, the answer was in marriage as a stabilizing force because sex could be expressed in marriage safely. (Kent 295)

This quote explains the justification for pushing many women into domesticity and reveals society’s propensity to take responsibility away from men who exhibited “aggression and violence” while placing the responsibility for these men’s actions on women. Coercing them to marry and presumably submit to all their husband’s sexual demands forces women to abandon their own personal goals to provide an outlet for masculine aggression and needs. And it wasn’t just marriage that was expected; motherhood was the next logical requirement. According to Kent: “A more insistent ideology of motherhood demanded that women leave their wartime jobs, give up their independence, and return to home and family, where their primary occupation—their obligation in fact, would be the bearing and rearing of children” (Kent 295). The key word in this statement is obligation. An obligation is not a choice; a woman’s only option in life was to tolerate

the sexual demands (possibly violent) of her marriage, to provide children, and be an outlet for her husband's bellicosity. And to add insult to injury, according to Kent, women were then threatened by child psychologists that their children would grow up to be criminals if mothers didn't constantly stay with them at a young age. Talk about a guilt trip! In these examples, it appears that a woman's womb was the only thing of value she possessed; sacrifice for the greater good of the patriarchal State was all that was necessary.

According to Kent, these ideas about women and their place in society, as well as attacks of sexual violence against them, persisted for the next two decades until the start of World War II. Beginning in 1945, the Royal Commission studied families for four years and came to the following conclusion:

[T]he commission blamed feminism for having contributed to the decline of the birth-rate. By promoting the interests of working mothers and by contesting the paternal authority of men within the family, feminists had introduced friction between husbands and wives, thus reducing the birth-rate and threatening the stability of the family. (Kent 321)

Kent demonstrates how the idea that feminism threatened the stability of the family really meant it threatened the stability of the State. The commission's findings point directly to a need to devalue women to ensure their servitude and financial dependence upon the patriarch of the family, while confining them to the home to care for children. Although women had no legal requirement to be married, their personal and professional lives were surely affected by such attitudes.

While Kent analyzes the events that led to the significant social pressure to marry and procreate, historian Martin Pugh focuses on the after-effects of such pressure in his essay

“Domesticity and the Decline of Feminism, 1930-1950.” Specifically, he analyzes how the momentum of the first wave of feminism was severely impeded in the 1920’s and 30’s by the effects of the cult of domesticity that resulted after years of political and social pressure on women to embrace the role of wife and mother. The discussion surrounding the marketing and consumerism focused on the cult of domesticity, Pugh argues, reflects the agendas of the prevailing political parties of the time to keep women in the home at all costs. Pugh states: “This dilemma was all the more acute because the inter-war period saw a marked revival of anti-feminist forces in British politics and society which sought to capitalize upon domesticity as an alternative ideal which feminists wished to promote” (Pugh 149). In other words, the British government and society sought to undermine any pre-war feminist gains by endorsing domesticity as the pinnacle of a woman’s life. Pugh discusses women’s interest magazines as a social reflection of the State view that family was the most important aspect of a woman’s life. According to Pugh, these types of magazines “all reflected the same character and underlying assumptions about the ideal domesticity and dependence for the female sex” (Pugh 151). If “all” women’s interest magazines represent the “ideal” existence as being a wife and mother, then the difficulty escaping such a responsibility must be tremendous. Exertion of a force like social pressure has tangible day-to-day impacts because it comes from all directions: family, friends, teachers, religious leaders, possibly strangers on the street, etc. Pugh includes in his analysis the government strategy of unequal pay and the family allowance as mechanisms employed to cement the ideology of domesticity as necessary for family survival. In other words, by subjecting women to unequal and oppressive treatment under the law the political pressure to submit to domesticity is effectively reinforced. The tangible effects of this reinforcement are felt as the dependence on males is compelled by way of government policy.

Considering these arguments from Kent and Pugh, clearly the overwhelming message to women is they belong in the private sphere, not in a position of power or influence in the public sphere. Textual evidence of this can be seen in the portrayal of Jadis' rule as dangerous and illegitimate. For example, Mr. Tumnus indicates exactly what kind of ruler Jadis is when speaking to Lucy: "Why it is she that has got all Narnia under her thumb. It's she that makes it always winter. Always winter and never Christmas; think of that!" (Lewis 19). Using the phrase "under her thumb" suggests omnipotence while crediting her with the eternal winter indicates her propensity for tormenting others. Her rejection of Christianity via the prevention of Christmas reinforces her status as a witch; witch figures historically have been defined by their rejection of Christianity. Not only is Jadis presumably powerful and anti-Christian, she employs kidnappers to capture children:

"That's the worst of it," said Mr. Tumnus with a deep groan. "I'm a kidnapper for her, that's what I am. Look at me, Daughter of Eve. Would you believe that I'm the sort of Faun to meet a poor innocent child in the wood, one that had never done me any harm, and pretend to be friendly with it, and invite it home to my cave, all for the sake of lulling it to sleep, and then handing it over to the White Witch?" (Lewis 19)

Mr. Tumnus' "deep groan" hints at his regret and shame. Describing the capture of "innocent" children indicates actions that are anything but innocent. Adding that Lucy "had never done me any harm" highlights her innocence; pointing out that he has to "pretend to be friendly" signifies manipulation and unscrupulous motives. "Lulling" indicates taking advantage of the situation by creating a false sense of security, while "handing it over to the White Witch" evokes a sense of danger and dread. Coercing Mr. Tumnus in committing such heinous acts represents Jadis as unscrupulous and dangerous. This example highlights the fear of powerful women by portraying

Jadis as willing to stop at nothing, including capturing and murdering innocent children, to eliminate any roadblocks to her ascension to the throne. The repercussions of Mr. Tumnus failing to turn Lucy over to the White Witch reveal the draconian way Jadis will exercise her will:

“And if I don’t,” said he, beginning to cry again, “she’s sure to find out. And she’ll have my tail cut off, and my horns sawn off, and my beard plucked out, and she’ll wave her wand over my beautiful cloven hoofs and turn them into horrid solid hoofs like a wretched horse’s. And if she is extra and specially angry she’ll turn me into stone and I shall be only a statue of a Faun in her horrible house until the four thrones at Cair Paravel are filled – and goodness knows when that will happen, or whether it will ever happen at all.” (Lewis 20)

Physically maiming Mr. Tumnus for failing to follow her orders confirms her capacity for callousness. Effectively killing him by turning him into a statue proves her ruthlessness. Arguably, the portrayal of Jadis as a ruthless, power-hungry evil ruler validates the political strategy of the time to do everything possible to stop women from participating in the public sphere. By representing women who are focused on their own ambitions, and not on caring for a family or others, villainous witch figures like Jadis serve as a reminder that women who neglect familial responsibilities for financial or professional gain are dangerous to children and society.

To validate my theory regarding Jadis’ representation of the undesired feminine, I will analyze how the text portrays Mrs. Beaver and the Pevensie girls as the ideal feminine. Mrs. Beaver symbolizes the doting wife and maternal figure: “The first thing Lucy noticed as she went in was a burring sound, and the first thing she saw was a kind-looking old she-beaver sitting in the corner with a thread in her mouth working busily at her sewing machine, and it was from it that the sound came” (Lewis 71-2). Dutifully working away at her sewing, Mrs. Beaver is immediately

identified as “kind-looking” and “old.” Both suggest an approachable and trustworthy maternal figure, possibly a grandmother, who works at the traditionally feminine task of sewing. Not only is she sewing, but she is cooking as well, as she tells the Pevensies: “The potatoes are on boiling and the kettle’s singing and I daresay Mr. Beaver, you’ll get us some fish” (Lewis 72). Mrs. Beaver is in the domestic sphere making potatoes and possibly tea. By requesting that Mr. Beaver catch the fish, Mrs. Beaver signals that Mr. Beaver should fulfill the traditionally masculine role of the hunter. While he is out fishing with Peter, Lucy and Susan assist Mrs. Beaver with the feminine tasks of preparing and serving the food: “Meanwhile the girls were helping Mrs. Beaver to fill the kettle and lay the table and cut the bread and put the plates in the oven to heat and draw a huge jug of beer for Mr. Beaver from a barrel which stood in one corner of the house, and to put on the frying-pan and get the dripping hot” (Lewis 73). The females do all the domestic tasks of filling the kettle, setting the table, cutting the bread, and warming the plates so the male head-of-household can enjoy a beer. Not quite finished with their domestic responsibilities, “Susan drained the potatoes and then put them all back in the empty pot to dry on the side of the range while Lucy was helping Mrs. Beaver to dish up the trout, so that in a very few minutes everyone was drawing up their stools...” (Lewis 74). By draining the potatoes and serving up the trout while everyone else gets their stools ready, Susan, Lucy, and Mrs. Beaver ensure all of the feminine labor is complete so everyone else can get comfortable. Mrs. Beaver completes her celebrated role as homemaker by surprising everyone with one last treat: “And when they finished the fish, Mrs. Beaver brought unexpectedly out of the oven a great and glorious sticky marmalade roll, steaming hot, and at the same time moved the kettle onto the fire, so that when they had finished the marmalade roll the tea was made and ready to be poured out” (Lewis 74). Preparing a surprise “glorious” and presumably yummy sticky role indicates Mrs. Beaver indulges her charges and

possibly spoils them. Preparing tea signals her understanding of what is appropriate for a proper British meal. Obedient Susan and Lucy dutifully act out their expected roles as assistants to the matriarch. Representing these three ladies as devoted domestic engineers reinforces the social pressure to marry and the cult of domesticity that Pugh speaks of. Mrs. Beaver, Susan, and Lucy's preparation and serving of the meal reminds readers that good girls grow up to be the matriarch like Mrs. Beaver; they carry out the responsibilities of feeding and nurturing while the male family members kill the main course then have a beer. This sends the message that the appropriate path for young girls like Susan and Lucy is towards being a wife and homemaker like Mrs. Beaver. Although Pugh's examination of the propaganda effort to bolster the ideology of domesticity via the concept of housewife as a full-fledged profession doesn't include an analysis of novels, evidence of the penetration of such rhetoric into literature arguably can be seen in the portrayals of Mrs. Beaver, Susan, and Lucy as discussed above. The scene in the Beaver's kitchen invokes the feeling that the ladies are *expected* to cook and serve while the male head-of-household hunts the main course. No one questions Mrs. Beaver as she cooks while no one objects to Mr. Beaver killing the fish. Lucy and Susan don't need to be asked to assist Mrs. Beaver; they do it automatically because that is what they are supposed to do. Their actions are necessary to ensure everyone's survival (i.e.: providing nourishment); they act out the cult of domesticity that Pugh examines as if it is second nature. Texts like *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* reinforce the sexist ideology of the cult of domesticity by applauding matriarchal characters like Mrs. Beaver and approving of compliant characters like Susan and Lucy to support the concept of women's second-class status as slaves to the private sphere.

A contemporary book of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, titled *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, illustrates how the sexist ideologies of the British government were bolstered by

some in the medical community. Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, M.D. wrote *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* in 1947 to address the very same social and political issues that Kent and Pugh discuss: questions of women's function in society, equal pay, women in the workforce, etc. Lundberg and Farnham argue that since the roles of women and children changed after the Industrial Revolution, women's neurosis became evident as their contribution to the financial stability of the family (i.e. the production of children) was threatened when children were no longer considered economic assets. To compensate, the authors argue, women then wanted to enter the public sphere and contribute by earning money. Also contributing to their neurosis, both authors claim, is that housewives and feminists suffer from penis-envy, which is the root of their dissatisfaction with life. As a result, they propose the solution for a woman is to adopt a "fully feminine role" in society by taking several actions: enjoy her sexuality but not show it off, know and accept that she is dependent on a man and his phallus for her enjoyment, understand that having children is the most natural thing possible and to want anything else is unthinkable, and most importantly she should like her children and strive to be the perfect mother. Note this text was written by a female medical professional with the title "MD". Arguably, this may lend credibility to its contents if one of the authors is a medical doctor and seemingly an expert on the subject matter. By publishing a book endorsing these sexist beliefs, the authors validated the government's discriminatory strategy by providing a medical justification for subordinating women to men. Identifying women's needs for independence and financial freedom as insecurity and jealousy of men, as Lundberg and Farnham did, further legitimized patriarchal rule by belittling women's aspirations and providing a biological reason for women's inferiority. The pervasive nature of the attitudes regarding women's position in society as discussed by Kent, Pugh, Lundberg, and Farnham clearly illustrate the prevailing sexist ideologies of early to mid-twentieth

century Britain. Such ideologies reinforce the expectation that women must function within certain standards of behavior. *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* illustrates the expectation that being the *right kind* of woman is paramount to good social standing and success via Mr. Beaver's explanation to the Pevensie children regarding Jadis' parentage:

“She'd like us to believe it,” said Mr. Beaver, “and it's on that that she bases her claim to be Queen. But she's no Daughter of Eve. She comes of your father Adam's” – (here Mr. Beaver bowed) “your father Adam's first wife, her they called Lilith. And she was one of the Jinn. That's what she comes from on one side. And on the other she comes of the giants. No, no, there isn't a drop of real human blood in the Witch.” (Lewis 81)

The embarrassment in Mr. Beaver's statement is evident. Some might interpret his bowed head as respect for Adam, but I would like to suggest it could also imply his discomfort (and most likely disapproval) at the mention of Lilith. Notorious for being Adam's unruly and disobedient first wife, Lilith of Jewish folklore refused to be subservient to her husband. According to Jean E. Graham, upon leaving her marriage, Lilith freely chose to have multiple sexual partners and committed maternal filicide, ensuring her eternal reputation as a rebellious woman of ill repute (Graham 33-4). By specifically naming Lilith as her mother, Mr. Beaver connects the shame and embarrassment of being a disobedient wife and murderous mother to Jadis. Mr. Beaver's emphasis on her identity as “no daughter of Eve” indicates he believes that she is an imposter, one of a lower class that can't possibly measure up because she isn't human. This brief exchange between the children and Mr. Beaver is important not only because it reinforces existing ideologies regarding women's place in society, but it also creates a culture in which the expectation to adhere to certain social standards is vital to a woman's acceptance and success. The text isn't just reiterating that a woman's place is in the home, the text is introducing a whole new generation of readers to the idea

that women have an obligation to exist within specific social and cultural categories that are defined by others; otherwise they risk becoming social outcasts. Independence and autonomy are discouraged; any association with Lilith connotes embarrassment or shame. Citing the jinn as part of her parentage, Mr. Beaver associates Jadis with Islam. Professor Amira El-Zein describes the jinn in her text *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* as follows: “jinn are thought to be ‘intermediary’ or ‘imaginal’ beings, above our terrestrial realm but below the celestial realm” (El-Zein x). In other words, jinn are spiritual beings not on earth but not in heaven either. In comparison to the spiritual concept of angels, El-Zein states the jinn are “more complex, multifarious, intricate, and hesitant between obscurity and glow. They are go-between beings. Like humans, they could at anytime shift toward goodness or evil” (El-Zein xi). They are “complex” and “multifarious” which suggests there is more to them than a basic definition. Describing their disposition as good *or* evil indicates a measure of uncertainty as to their intentions or actions while in comparison, angels are always good and peaceful. Given Jadis’ implied rejection of Christianity, her association with Islam is presumably viewed as a negative by Mr. Beaver. In comparison to Christian angels who are always good, an association with the jinn suggests an element of unpredictability and possibly evil intentions.

By citing the other half of Jadis’s parentage as stemming from giants, Mr. Beaver associates Jadis with a long tradition of pre-Christian myths. Giants, like the jinn, are also not human. Scholar Lotte Motz proposes they originated in myth. In her essay titled “Giants in Folklore and Mythology: A New Approach,” she defines myth as follows: “‘Myth’ is understood ... as a tale about gods and events concerning cosmic order, and also as an expression of faith in the gods of which it tells” (70-71). In other words, “myths” are stories about gods and the origin of the world. An “expression of faith” indicates how such stories represent a culture’s gods and

belief systems. According to Motz, giants appear in pre-Christian tales about gods and goddesses in which the giants construct the physical make-up of the world against the backdrop of faith in the gods and goddesses. She explains that “folklore giants are hostile to the human community, so that in Christian times the devil, enemy of God and man, replaces in many tales these figures of an earlier faith” (Motz 72). Hostility leads to anger and aggression while an interchangeable status with the devil indicates a continuous danger to humans. Substituting the devil for giants in pre-Christian myths told during Christian times suggests the representation of evil and danger to the human community is continuous; different forms of the same concepts keep appearing as various representations of cultural artifacts. In this case, the giant represents a continuous threat on par with the devil.

Jadis’ jinn and giant genetics, as well as her actions to usurp the throne, highlight her otherness and ultimately her abjection. In her text *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva identifies abjection as “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Jadis fits into the category of abject based on her disruption of identity and her disrespect of rules. Belonging to two separate species through her biological make-up disturbs identity and order because her physicality crosses borders. Her successful ascension to the throne negates all meaning in Narnia; her rule defies the prophecy proclaiming four human children will rule from Cair Paravel. Kristeva also states: “Abjection...is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you” (Kristeva 4). In other words, abjection is someone with dishonest intentions who will hurt you. Jadis, like other witch figures, exemplifies this behavior as she acts only in her interest with the covert intent to hurt others. Her presence in Narnia not only disrupts borders; it causes physical

as well as existential chaos. Jadis' claim to the throne, and subsequent actions, throw Narnia into a transitional state rife with unknowing and uncertainty. The continuation of the conversation between the Beavers and the Pevensie children illustrates how the text suggests Jadis' hybridity is dangerous:

“True enough, Mrs. Beaver,” replied he, “there may be two views about humans (meaning no offense to the present company). But there’s no two views about things that look like humans and aren’t.”

“I’ve known good Dwarfs,” said Mrs. Beaver.

“So’ve I, now you come to speak of it,” said her husband, “but precious few, and they were the ones least like men. But in general, take my advice, when you meet anything that’s going to be human and isn’t yet, or used to be human once and isn’t now, or ought to be human and isn’t, you keep your eyes on it and feel for your hatchet.” (Lewis 81-2)

Danger, in this case, requires a hatchet because in order to defy the prophecy Jadis must eliminate the Pevensie children to secure the throne for herself. Mr. Beaver’s message speaks to the threat of danger in the form of things that appear one way but are another. The hybridity Mr. Beaver notes ensures Jadis’ usurper status because she is not human; her genetic make-up is taboo and her rule defies the prophecy. The liminal state she creates in Narnia by interrupting the predestined monarchy invites dissension in reaction to her subversion. Her aggressive take-over commences a feeling of uncertainty and hostility from many residents of Narnia. According to Lucy:

“She is a perfectly terrible person,” said Lucy. “She calls herself the Queen of Narnia though she has no right to be queen at all, and all the Fauns and Dryads and Naiads and Dwarfs and Animals – at least all the good ones – simply hate her. And she can turn people

into stone and do all kinds of horrible things. And she has made a magic so that it is always winter in Narnia – always winter, but it never gets to Christmas.” (Lewis 42)

Denying Jadis’ claim to the throne and calling her a “terrible person” encompasses the feelings of many in Narnia; apparently “all the good ones” hate her. Being able to turn people into stone produces anxiety as presumably no one in Narnia wants to be a statue. Her prevention of Christmas not only denies the celebration of the birth of Christ but it robs the residents of Narnia their traditions and rituals. Without traditions or rituals, the uncertainty of the future is heightened as the comfort of predictability and stability is removed.

In addition to the angst Jadis’ actions elicit, her physical beauty also produces an unsettling reaction. Edmund’s first meeting with her is a good example of the feeling of discomfort her presence causes in contrast to the attraction her prettiness creates. His description of her suggests she is beautiful but cold:

[She was] a great lady, taller than any woman Edmund had ever seen. She also was covered in white fur up to her throat and held a long straight golden wand in her right hand and wore a golden crown on her head. Her face was white – not merely pale, but white like snow or paper or icing-sugar, except for her very red mouth. It was a beautiful face in other respects, but proud and cold and stern. (Lewis 31)

Because Edmund’s initial impression of Jadis’ face includes the word “beautiful,” I think it is safe to assume he believes her facial features are consistent with at least some expectations of female beauty. His description offers some clues as to what type of person she might be; the colors he notices coupled with the chilliness of her demeanor imply she may not be one to ally herself with others. References to “snow” and “paper” suggests not only the sterility of the color white but

they are objects often associated with inconvenient weather and irritating paper cuts. Snow may often look beautiful but it only falls in winter: a season of unforgiving elements and death by starvation at every turn. Paper, a functional object normally used for communication, in this case suggests the color white and blankness like Jadis' expression. We know from Mr. Beaver's assertion that Jadis' heritage is tainted so it's reasonable to argue that her white pallor doesn't represent purity or innocence. In fact, her white complexion, coupled with the reference to snow, associates Jadis with the sterility of the eternal winter and the prevention of the new births of spring. Preventing new birth creates an association with the anti-maternal; a common theme among witch figures like Euripides' *Medea* and the Sanderson sisters of *Hocus Pocus*.⁶

Jadis' greeting to Edmund isn't any warmer than her appearance: "I see you are an idiot, whatever else you may be," said the Queen. "Answer me, once and for all, or I shall lose my patience. Are you human?" (Lewis 34). Frigid and impatient in her appearance and demeanor, Edmund's first impression of Jadis is discomfiting. Changing her manner just a moment later, Jadis offers Edmund a warm drink to secure his trust in order to elicit information from him: "Edmund felt much better as he began to sip the hot drink. It was something he had never tasted before, very sweet and foamy and creamy, and it warmed him right down to his toes" (Lewis 36). The sweet and creamy drink lulls him into a sense of false security; now he is comfortable accepting food from her: "It is dull, Son of Adam, to drink without eating," said the Queen presently. "What would you like best to eat?" (Lewis 36). By claiming it is "dull" to drink without eating, Jadis is implying she would consider Edmund uninteresting should he decline her offer of food. Not wanting to seem boring to her, he quickly confirms what he would like to eat: "Turkish

⁶ See Euripides' *Medea* and *Hocus Pocus*, Walt Disney Pictures, 1993. *Medea* murders her own children while the Sanderson sisters eat any children they can kidnap.

Delight, please your Majesty” (Lewis 36). It is in this moment that the Queen’s manipulation of Edmund works and her enchantment takes hold. His consumption of the enchanted Turkish Delight ensures his continued cooperation: “Each piece was sweet and light to the very center and Edmund had never tasted anything more delicious. He was quite warm now, and very comfortable” (Lewis 37). The magical taste and false comfort emanating from the Turkish Delight is the very danger Mr. Beaver warns the children about: be wary of things that appear one way but may be another. Edmund brushes aside his unease arguably because although Jadis initially makes him uncomfortable, his instinct regarding warmth and care from a maternal figure overrides his apprehension. If we consider Eleanor H. Kuykendall’s notion of nurturing as assumed to be the responsibility of women, especially mothers, then Edmund’s acceptance of food from Jadis makes sense. If he has come to expect nurturing and safety from other women, then there is no reason for him to suspect that Jadis should be any different. This scene is reminiscent of the evil queen/witch tricking Snow White into eating the poison apple in the 1937 Walt Disney film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. A commonly used witch figure trope, the hag is often used to portray older and unattractive females, like the evil queen in the film. Disguised to project the vulnerability and trustworthiness of an old lady, the evil queen deceives Snow White like Jadis deceives Edmund. Using emotional and/or physical manipulation in preparation for murder, both witch figures prove Mr. Beaver is right. The worst part of the witches’ deception is not just that they are lying to secure the trust of their victims but that they are presenting themselves as caring women who wouldn’t harm children when that is their ultimate motivation. Their violation of Kuykendall’s concept of women as nurturers fuels their abjection because abuse of their trusted position as women desecrates the sacredness of the maternal figure.

For Jadis, this violation is not just an abuse of her position; it is an abuse of the power that comes with it. Jean E. Graham considers the use of power in Lewis' writing in her essay titled "Women, Sex, and Power: Circe and Lilith in Narnia." Graham argues that female power is viewed as a threat in the text as evidenced by Jadis' relation to Circe and Lilith. She suggests that by relating the witch figure Jadis to the myths of Circe and Lilith, Lewis clearly treats female power in the Narnia stories with the same contempt as in his adult novels. By exploring the various iterations of Lilith's story, and her notoriety, Graham connects Jadis to a tradition of emphatically rejecting traditional feminine roles while seeking power and agency. By citing examples related to Lilith's sexuality, and her refusal to submit to male dominance, Graham unites her sexuality and attractiveness to danger and power. Because Jadis is Lilith's daughter, she inherits this association. Relating Jadis with Circe has equally adverse connotations. Graham explains how Circe's phallic wand seizes masculine power by transforming men into pigs, similar to Jadis' phallic wand transforming the anthropomorphic animals of Narnia into stone. Jadis' "lust for power" as Graham notes, is her motivation; Lewis gets it from Lilith and Circe (Graham 38). I agree with Graham that Jadis is not only inspired by Circe and Lilith but that her behavior is reminiscent of their rejection of male dominance. To illustrate my point, I would like to focus on the camp scene in which Jadis forces Aslan to submit to her to satisfy the Deep Magic as retribution for traitorous acts. Announcing Edmund's treachery upon entering the camp, the White Witch reminds Aslan that the Deep Magic must be satisfied, or Narnia will perish:

"Tell you?" said the Witch, her voice growing suddenly shriller. "Tell you what is written on that very Table of Stone which stands beside us? Tell you what is written in letters deep as a spear is long on the fire-stones on the Secret Hill? Tell you what is engraved on the scepter of the Emperor-beyond-the-Sea? You at least know the Magic which the Emperor

put into Narnia at the very beginning. You know every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey and that for every treachery I have a right to kill.” (Lewis 141-2)

By proclaiming “that very Table of Stone which stands beside us,” Jadis implies that everyone present can see what is written because the table is right there for everyone to see. Using a phrase like “deep as a spear” indicates a significant depth for the letters carved into the fire-stones of the Secret Hill. This implies that they are not easily missed when gazed upon. Referencing a presumably well-known object like the scepter of the Emperor-beyond-the-Sea insinuates that what is engraved upon it is well known. Her mention of famous landmarks and objects supports her assertion that Aslan is well aware of the Magic put into Narnia by the Emperor because it is common knowledge. By publicly proclaiming Edmund’s life legally belongs to her and backing it up with physical evidence carved into the Stone Table, Jadis puts Aslan in an awkward position in which he must accept her demands. She confirms for the crowd that Aslan has no choice but to turn over Edmund when she states: ““Fool,” said the Witch with a savage smile that was almost a snarl, ‘do you really think your master can rob me of my rights by mere force? He knows the Deep Magic better than that. He knows that unless I have blood as the Law says all Narnia will be overturned and perish in fire and water’” (Lewis 142). “Fool” implies Jadis has somehow tricked Aslan into falling in a trap. Her “savage smile” indicates the self-satisfaction she gains with the success of her malicious actions. Saying so with a “snarl” makes her seem animalistic. By taunting the crowd with reminders of her ability to bend Aslan to her will regardless of his physical prowess, Jadis calls attention to her own manipulative behavior. She asks if those present believe Aslan “can rob me of my rights by mere force.” Aslan knows the Deep Magic, as she claims, so he must adhere to her demands, otherwise Narnia will “perish.” Jadis’ manipulation of Aslan forces him

to turn over Edmund to her because Aslan's responsibility is to protect the people of Narnia. Jadis forces him into a no-win situation; he must relinquish Edmund or everyone else will die.

This scene highlights the text's reliance on the old trope of the physically inferior female who must use her powers of manipulation to secure power over the physically dominant male. Jadis is not the first witch figure to be associated with this trope; she is part of a long tradition of portraying witches as such. One of the most famous, or infamous, witches in this tradition is Morgan le Fay of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Physically smaller than her brother, and oppressed by the constraints of the chivalric code, Morgan persuades her lover, Accolon, to fight her brother, King Arthur, so that she may take the throne. By taking control of the situation, her manipulation of both men and the code challenges accepted gender norms and forces Arthur to abandon the code when he threatens her with violence, thus securing her notoriety as a dangerous witch (Armstrong 61). Jadis' manipulation of Aslan to end his life and guarantee the throne for herself is a similar use of the trope. By reinforcing the idea that Jadis is physically inferior to Aslan, and therefore must try to trick him into submission, the text reinforces the notion that females must resort to dishonest means to secure an advantage for themselves, and as a result they are a danger to the stability of a male's position of power. Jadis' fear of Aslan's physically imposing presence signals her awareness of her own physical inferiority to Aslan's strength, even when she has secured Aslan's sacrifice in place of Edmund's. This is evident in their exchange at camp when Jadis reminds Aslan of his promise to turn over Edmund: "But how do I know this promise will be kept?" (Lewis 144). Asking signals Jadis' unease about the situation. After hearing Aslan's roar, "the Witch, after staring for a moment with her lips wide apart, picked up her skirts and ran for her life" (Lewis 144). Her "lips wide apart" implies surprise and/or alarm regarding her situation. Because there is no need to "run for her life," her reaction confirms her

fear of his physical capabilities. Her response is unnecessary because Aslan already confirmed her safe passage prior to their meeting when he stated: “I grant her safe conduct on condition that she leaves her wand behind her at that great oak” (Lewis 140). Since Jadis left her wand behind, she should have no fear that Aslan would harm her as he clearly stated so in front of all those present. Additional evidence of Aslan’s intent to acquiesce to Jadis’ request was stated in his conversation with Susan: “‘Oh Aslan!’ whispered Susan in the Lion’s ear, ‘can’t we – I mean, you won’t, will you? Can’t we do something about the Deep Magic? Isn’t there something you can work against it?’”(Lewis 142). Aslan’s response implies the request is completely out of the question: “‘Work against the Emperor’s Magic?’ said Aslan, turning to her with something like a frown on his face. And nobody ever made that suggestion to him again” (Lewis 142). The expression on his face, coupled with the fact that no one made such a “suggestion to him again,” confirms Aslan’s commitment to honoring the Deep Magic, whatever the cost. If he is so unwilling to ignore the Deep Magic that he hands over Edmund to be killed, it makes sense to assume that he will honor his word to Jadis and not harm her to avoid handing over Edmund. Since Jadis is still afraid of Aslan’s physical prowess even after these exchanges, she relies on manipulation to force his hand. In this way, the text reinforces the trope of the sneaky female witch while conveying the message that female power derives from covert and dishonest means, a message that is continuously associated with female witches.

Taking the concept of manipulation one step further, the danger lies not only in Jadis’ ability to secure power but in her ability to wield it in such a way as to further emasculate and humiliate Aslan. Her employment of the Deep Magic not only guarantees Aslan’s appearance at the Stone Table; it ensures his submittal to his own execution while eliminating the only obstacle between Jadis and the throne. Let’s consider for a moment the power dynamic in this scene

between the unquestioningly dominant male, Aslan, versus the unscrupulous witch and her filthy minions:

A great crowd of people were standing all round (sic) the Stone Table and though the moon was shining many of them carried torches which burned with evil-looking red flames and black smoke. But such people! Ogres with monstrous teeth, and wolves, and bull-headed men; spirits of evil trees and poisonous plants; and other creatures whom I won't describe because if I did the grown-ups would probably not let you read this book – Cruels and Hags and Incubuses, Wraiths, Horrors, Efreets, Orknies, Wooses, and Ettins. (150-1)

“Flames,” “smoke,” and “many” people anxiously waiting create an atmosphere of anticipation and uncertainty while darkness gives the scene an unpredictable and unknown feeling. Monstrous ogres and bull-headed men recall images of dangerous non-human hybrids; their monstrosity immediately communicating their otherness and the unease that comes with being in their presence. Poisonous plants indicate danger and possibly death, while the spirits of trees provide a creepy, otherworldly feeling. By assuming prohibition of the text based on the creatures listed, the narrator brands them as a threat to innocence claiming they can't be described because “if I did the grown-ups would probably not let you read this book.” Presumably, they are so evil knowledge of their very existence could irreversibly corrupt a young reader.

Approaching the Stone Table from the other side is Aslan. From what we know about him, according to Mr. Beaver: “he is King of the wood” (79). A king is the ultimate symbol of male power; a lord rules over all subjects who serve him. If Father Christmas is to be believed, Aslan has the power to defeat Jadis just by being in Narnia: “Aslan is on the move. The Witch's magic is weakening” (Lewis 107). His very presence is strong enough to break the witch's spell to end winter; nobody before Aslan has been able to threaten the witch's ascendancy. He is portrayed as

a lion; he is literally the king of the jungle, or in this case Narnia. Because he is King, his submission to Jadis diminishes his power and humiliates him. We know Aslan understands the humiliation and pain he will endure because his behavior communicated this to those around him: “Aslan’s mood affected everyone that evening...Everyone felt how different it had been last night or even that morning. It was as if the good times, having just begun, were already drawing to their end” (Lewis 147). His long walk to the Stone Table with Susan and Lucy was filled with despair: “I am sad and lonely. Lay your hands on my mane so that I can feel you are there and let us walk like that” (Lewis 150). The knowledge of what is to come is responsible for Aslan’s mood of resignation and loneliness. Needing physical reassurance of the girls’ presence illustrates Aslan’s vulnerability; requesting they touch his mane ensures their connection. His mane becomes the bridge between him and those who love and support him. In a short time, he has gone from proud savior of Narnia to a “fool” as Jadis calls him (Lewis 151). Her commands upon Aslan’s arrival at the Stone Table to “Bind him fast,” and “Bind him, I say!” demonstrate Jadis’ control of the scene (Lewis 150). The elation of overpowering one so untouchable can be seen in the reaction of the various creatures tying Aslan up:

Four Hags, grinning and leering, yet also (at first) hanging back and half afraid of what they had to do, had approached him...The Hags made a dart at him and shrieked with triumph when they found that he made no resistance at all. Then others – evil dwarfs and apes – rushed in to help them, and between them they rolled the huge Lion over on his back and tied all his four paws together, shouting and cheering as if they done something brave... (Lewis 151)

In this moment, the king is dominated and restrained by his enemies with zero resistance. Based on this, the creatures are ecstatic. These hags delight in physically participating in his demise as

his regal status diminishes. Usually the reference to a “hag” in literature calls to mind images of an old, ugly, and repulsive looking woman. The hag figure is commonly used to reveal how the rotten and immoral interior of a witch displays itself on the exterior. Jadis may not physically be represented as a hag but her behavior and motivations are just like these hags that pounce on Aslan. Their “grinning and leering” faces belie their unscrupulous motives; they are ugly on the inside and the outside. Their delight in the triumph over a revered figure like Aslan shows where their moral compass is pointed. By taking such actions against him with no fear of physical harm to themselves, these creatures demonstrate just how far Aslan has fallen. Aslan’s reaction, or lack of, demonstrates his acceptance of his submission: “though, had the Lion chosen, one of those paws could have been the death of them all. But he made no noise, even when the enemies, straining and tugging, pulled the chords so tight that they cut into his flesh” (Lewis 153). By choosing not to fight back even though “one of those paws could have been the death of them all,” Aslan acknowledges their power over him and accepts his fate while enduring the pain of the restraints.

Jadis’ move to shave Aslan’s mane before strapping him to the Stone Table serves only to further humiliate him prior to his death. She cries: ““Stop!” said the Witch. ‘Let him first be shaved’” (Lewis 153). A lion’s mane is one of his most identifiably masculine attributes; shaving it off symbolically erases his masculinity. By pausing the execution to further dramatize the transfer of power, Jadis makes a public display of her dominance: she literally stops everyone around her to witness her symbolic castration of the dominant male. Her final command to “Muzzle him!” serves to illustrate the completion of his submission: he can’t move, can’t fight back, and now he can’t even protest verbally (Lewis 154). This entire scene is essential to understanding not just that female power is dangerous, but why it is so. In this case Jadis chooses

to use her power over Aslan, the undisputed patriarch of Narnia, to humiliate and emasculate him publicly before she kills him. She didn't just manipulate him to get him where she wanted him; she made sure that everyone around her knew she had done so and made him look like a fool. The scene illustrates the risky nature of female power by exposing its threat to the dominance of patriarchal rule. If a witchy female like Jadis can emasculate and humiliate a great, strong king like Aslan, then what else will she be able to do? Jadis answers this question when she tells Aslan:

“And now, who has won? Fool, did you think that by all this would save the human traitor? Now I will kill you instead of him as our pact was and so the Deep Magic will be appeased. But when you are dead what will prevent me from killing him as well? And who will take him out of my hand *then*? Understand that you have given me Narnia forever, you have lost your own life and you have not saved his. In that knowledge, despair and die.” (Lewis 155)

Claiming Aslan's efforts are in vain confirms that power unequivocally resides in the wrong hands; Aslan's actions are ineffectual because they have no bearing on Jadis' plan. Her power not only effectively ends patriarchal rule, its continued existence is ensured because there is no other that can challenge it. Her path as the future ruler of Narnia is unobstructed. Her actions are heinous not only because of the destruction of Aslan; they are heinous because she will steer Narnia from its destined path of rule by four humans. As previously mentioned, her success as a ruler means the negation of Narnia's preordained destiny. Her success as a leader is portrayed negatively because she makes her own destiny at the expense of others. She is a usurper; she is abject. But it's not just her usurper status that makes her the villain. Her plans to murder four children to secure her future as the leader of Narnia cements her association with the monstrous feminine.

Her actions and motivations are so far from what is acceptable behavior for females that her existence can't continue.

Chapter 2

Murder, Misogyny, and Mayhem in Roald Dahl's *The Witches*

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the United Kingdom was awash in Conservatism as the backlash against the second wave of feminism was ramping up. Two decades earlier Betty Friedan helped awaken a Western female consciousness with her blockbuster book *The Feminine Mystique*. In response, many women began questioning their purpose in life before ultimately demanding equal protections under the law. The cultural backlash against this awakening was slow to emerge at first, but by the early 1980s its presence was fully established and the demand to return to the traditional family (i.e. heterosexual couple with children) was front and center in political and social life. Margaret Thatcher's election to the position of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1979 ushered in an era of staunch conservatism which permeated not only government policy but social life and cultural artifacts, such as books. One such book is *The Witches* by Roald Dahl. Published in 1982, *The Witches* tells the story of a young boy who narrowly escapes death at the hands of a murderous coven of witches who spend much of their time plotting to exterminate young children. One would think that such a plot line is the most disturbing aspect of the text, but in the context of the conservative 1980s, it is not. Horrific as their actions and intentions are, what may be more disconcerting to those who subscribe to the conservative ideology of the time is that a financially independent and autonomous underground society of women is operating free of government regulation and patriarchal control. The unflattering portrayal of the unwed witches as child-hating monsters creates a negative association between their independence (financial or otherwise) and danger. If we consider policies enacted by the Thatcher administration as designed to reunite the traditional family, then we must consider how women, or witch figures, who resist such policies by not assuming traditionally feminine roles

like wife and mother are represented. The text not only privileges the idea that women who dare to reject such roles are unnatural or threatening to the stability of the family and the State, but also suggests that their rejection qualifies them for vilification. My argument focuses on how *The Witches* responds to political and social attitudes spawned by the policies of the Thatcherite government that attempted to re-establish traditional gender roles in British society. My analysis of The Grand High Witch and her coven demonstrates how the power of the unfeminine witches in the text is represented as dangerous while the maternal power of the narrator's grandmother is represented as heroic. Utilizing the hag to depict the anti-maternal witches as physically repulsive and evil, the message to women is clear: take the path to maternity or suffer the consequences of becoming ugly and undesirable.⁷

Critical attention given to *The Witches* is wide-ranging but little or no attention focuses on the impact of Thatcherism and the waning of the second wave of feminism in Great Britain. Much of the critical discussion has been devoted to analyzing the sexist undertones and the arguably inappropriate content for children,⁸ while a few critics have suggested Dahl's work isn't sexist because of the folkloric influences within his texts.⁹ Others have suggested Dahl uses exaggeration, parody, and the grotesque to entertain children while exploring themes of adult power and child abuse.¹⁰ And two critics I will address later in this chapter, Jennifer Mitchell and

⁷ See Heidi Breuer's *Crafting the Witch* for discussion regarding representation of anti-maternal witches as hags.

⁸ See Anne-Marie Bird's "Women Behaving Badly: Dahl's Witches Meet the Women of the Eighties," and Jonathon Culley's "Roald Dahl – "It's All About the Children" – But Is It Suitable?" Both address the issue of sexism and appropriateness for children.

⁹ See Jonathon Culley's "Roald Dahl – "It's All About the Children" – But Is It Suitable?"

¹⁰ See Zeljka Flegar's "The Alluring Nature of Children's Culture: Fairy Tales, The Carnival and the World Wide Web," Elizabeth Oliver's "Boil Boil Toil and Trouble: A Critical Look at the Controversy Over Roald Dahl's *The Witches*," Mark I. West's "The Grotesque and the Taboo in Roald Dahl's Humorous Writings for Children," Chen-Wei Yu's "Power and its Mechanics in Children's Fiction: The Case of Roald Dahl," all discuss adult/child relationships, humor, conflict, and/or power as themes in Dahl's writing.

Anne-Marie Bird, analyze gender roles within the text to examine traditional definitions of gender in relation to power.¹¹ Because my analysis focuses specifically on the Thatcher administration's policies, some historical context is necessary to orient my argument. In their text *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain*, feminist authors Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall provide such context in their analysis of British feminism between the 1970s to the 1990s. Important to their discussion, and to understanding the impacts of the Thatcherite policies, is the conservative definition of family during this time. The authors describe the preferred traditional family under Margaret Thatcher's administration as follows: "The conception of the family tends to be traditionalist, at least to the extent of including both a mother and a father, preferably married. The importance of the family was one theme in the Conservative Party's campaign in the run-up to the 1979 general election" (Lovenduski and Randall 37). The word "traditionalist" describes what the Conservative Party constructed as the original or most desired structure of a family. Defining parents by utilizing a male/female gender binary privileges heteronormativity, while preferring married couples actively excludes unmarried individuals. If the "importance of the family" was central to the 1979 election as the authors claim, then the importance of being heterosexual and married must be considered when discussing cultural artifacts like *The Witches*.

Lovenduski and Randall's analysis examines a largely class-driven political system with a long history of often enforcing patriarchal preferences in policy (Lovenduski and Randall 22). In considering the rhetoric and policies of Margaret Thatcher's administration, both authors argue that although the rhetoric surrounding the traditional family and conservative values was aimed at promoting the married, heterosexual, traditional nuclear family, their policies did not entirely

¹¹ See Anne-Marie Bird's "Women Behaving Badly: Dahl's Witches Meet the Women of the Eighties," and Jennifer Mitchell's "A Sort of Mouse-Person: Radicalizing Gender in *The Witches*."

reflect such goals. Lovenduski and Randall maintain that the policies enacted during the Thatcher administration were strictly based on neo-liberal and libertarian economics. The intent, they argue, was not on altering the lives of women to promote the traditional family; the intent was to promote self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on government funded programs (Lovenduski and Randall 45-52). Though Lovenduski and Randall may be correct about the administration's intentions, Thatcherite policies did promote traditional family values, however unintentionally, when they eliminated government programs that either employed working women or provided childcare services so mothers could work. Arguably, such policies participated in a backlash against women: specifically, in this case, against working women who sought full time employment and access to quality childcare but became unemployed or saddled with family care responsibilities as a direct result of new policies that reduced social programs that were utilized by, or employed, these women. If the rhetoric of the administration was focused on disgust over the disintegration of the traditional family, then I can't help but think that such an attitude was also shared by many of the voters who put Thatcher in office. For example, the authors mention one proposed solution to the unemployment problem during the 1980s recession: "though the view was occasionally expressed during the recession at the beginning of the 1980s that women should give up their paid jobs as a way of relieving male unemployment, it was never taken up by the government officially" (Lovenduski and Randall 43). This statement suggests that some people thought a perfectly good solution to fix male unemployment should be to deny working women the same financial stability these men sought. While the government didn't take up this cause "officially," the rhetoric around returning to the "traditional" family arguably contributed to many people setting their minds on where women belong: at home. Lovenduski and Randall also claim that many feminists who

previously declared themselves as not having a desire to have children changed their minds about motherhood; suddenly motherhood was having a moment.

The Witches expresses the desire to return to the traditional family by portraying the unwed and childless witches as gross and inhuman. The text begins with the notion that the goal of witches is to get rid of all children: “A real witch spends all her time plotting to get rid of the children in her particular territory. Her passion is to do away with them, one by one” (Dahl 7). Right away the narrator tells us a “real” witch not only devotes her entire life to exterminating children, but that she loves to do it. Then the narrator goes on to connect the witches with the female gender when he claims that all witches are women: “A witch is always a woman. I do not wish to speak badly about women. Most women are lovely. But the fact remains that all witches *are* women. There is no such thing as a male witch” (Dahl 9). A gender binary is established and women are clearly the villains. To further cement this idea in the reader’s minds, the narrator goes on to say: “On the other hand, a ghoul is always a male. So indeed is a barghest. Both are dangerous. But neither of them is half as dangerous as a REAL WITCH” (Dahl 9). In other words, male villains can be dangerous, but these female villains are much more of a threat because they don’t like children. The coven’s goal of eliminating all children from the earth is a clear representation of the anti-maternal. The horror of such a goal is reflected in the witches’ desire to rid the world of children: they are the antithesis of the goals of the Thatcher administration as well as the newly maternal-feeling feminists of the time.

While Lovenduski and Randall analyze a broad spectrum of issues related to feminism and the Thatcher administration, Professor Elizabeth Meehan focuses her analysis on specific initiatives of the second wave of feminism and their success or failure prior to and during the Thatcher administration in her essay, “British Feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s.” Meehan

argues that although Thatcher's policies weren't aimed at women, they weren't helpful to women either. Like Lovenduski and Randall, her analysis includes cuts to state-funded professional areas like healthcare and social services where women are the primary labor force. Meehan also examines an outdated taxation system that in many cases favors the male as head-of-household, the contrast between feminist consumers and the lack of female leadership in the media, and the appalling lack of women in leadership positions in government or political parties in comparison to the percentage of females in the population. She concludes that these policies led to a decrease in employment opportunities for women and an increase in their domestic responsibilities (Meehan 202). Arguably, these combined factors contributed to an overarching attitude that women belonged in the private sphere, and their contributions to society were better left to traditionally feminine pursuits like motherhood and domestic responsibilities. Meehan's examination of taxation also reveals a history of unequal distribution of tax benefits between men and women. She discusses the impact of various laws that were written based on the marital or employment status of women, but not men, and argues that such laws limited the financial independence of women. By granting the coven financial independence, *The Witches* portrays the prospect of women's financial independence as frightening. Possessing money gives women too much power that makes them difficult to control. The narrator and his grandmother discuss this very issue in relation to catching and defeating The Grand High Witch. Doing so will be difficult because of her unlimited resources: "‘She's rolling,’ my grandmother said. ‘Simply rolling in money. Rumour has it that there is a machine in her headquarters which is exactly like the machine the government uses to print the bank-notes you and I use’" (Dahl 40). "Rolling" implies that The Grand High Witch has so much money she can't walk around and must roll over piles of it to get anywhere. By referencing the "machine the government uses" the grandmother implies that the

odds of challenging The Grand High Witch are as insurmountable as challenging the all-powerful Norwegian government where she lives: the government makes their own rules, and by owning a printing press so does The Grand High Witch. Equally as unsettling is the idea that The Grand High Witch shares her wealth and access with her coven. According to the grandmother ““The Grand High Witch makes all the money she wants and she dishes it out to witches everywhere”” (Dahl 41). This quote suggests the coven’s self-sufficiency is unsettling and overwhelming because it presents The Grand High Witch’s wealth as a source of unlimited power she can share with her coven. By adding in foreign currency, the grandmother indicates the power of the coven is enormous and uncontrollable: ““What about foreign money?’ I asked. ‘Those machines can make *Chinese* money if you want them to”” (Dahl 40). This quote suggests that with unlimited access to any currency, The Grand High Witch and her coven may be as unstoppable. Later, when the narrator is trapped in The Ballroom during the fake Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children meeting, The Grand High Witch confirms what the narrator and his grandmother suspect: ““Money is not a prrroblem to us vitches as you know very well. I have brrrought vith me six trrrunks stuffed full of Inklish banknotes, all new and crrrisp. And all of them,’ she added with a fiendish leer, ‘all of them homemade”” (Dahl 79). The point is clear: money and the power it grants are not a problem for the coven. In this way, the text highlights the anxiety over women having access to unlimited power and resources because it hinders the ability to control their behavior and actions.

After reviewing various governmental policies like the outdated taxation system, Meehan concludes her essay by pointing out the disturbing comfort with which one conservative member of Thatcher’s cabinet publicly made anti-feminist statements that invoked God in the name of discrediting equal rights for women in the workplace. Meehan states:

Education and training policies have also had direct and indirect adverse consequences for women. New Right policies link ideas about economic libertarianism and social conservatism, a combination which makes many people pessimistic about the prospects for women's liberation. This outlook seems to be corroborated by the fact that some Conservatives seem to feel again that it is respectable to make anti-feminist remarks. One minister in Thatcher's first cabinet observed in 1979 that, 'if the Good Lord had intended us to have equal rights to go out to work, He wouldn't have created man and women'. (Meehan 202)

In considering the impact of New Right policies on education and training for women, Meehan's quote above associates their impact with the desire of some in the administration to purposefully hinder the progress of women. So great and esteemed is the desire to do so, it is deemed "respectable" to proclaim it publicly. It is important to note that a quote from one cabinet member who invoked the "Good Lord" to justify the submission of women doesn't necessarily mean all cabinet members shared his views. However, considering it in combination with other initiatives like the unevenly applied tax laws and the focus on returning to traditional marriage, it is further evidence that the policies of the administration were anti-feminist and promoted a singular and narrow-minded view of the roles of the sexes. Considering this quote in relation to *The Witches*, the portrayal of independent and unfeminine single women as witches is particularly significant. Dahl's text responds to the conservative Christian ideology underlining the cabinet member's invocation of God by making these women into the most evil and anti-Christian women possible: witches. In other words, women who resist being restricted to the private sphere are portrayed as witches because to a conservative member of the New Right, witches represent the most dangerous things a woman can be: unwed, anti-maternal, and dangerous to children.

Further evidence of the promotion of Christian values can be seen not only in the vilification of the coven but also in the elevation of the good, Christian grandmother to a position of impeachability. The narrator references her attendance at church as proof of her integrity and honesty: “I couldn’t believe my grandmother would be lying to me. She went to church every morning of the week and she said grace before every meal, and somebody who did that would never tell lies. I was beginning to believe every word she spoke” (Dahl 32). The fact that he “couldn’t believe” that his grandmother would lie to him because “she went to church every morning” and she says “grace before every meal” highlights an assumption that all those who attend church are automatically assumed to be good, honest people. So much so, in fact, that he believes anyone who does so “would never tell lies.” It is precisely because she goes to church and says grace that he believes “every word she spoke.” By attributing honesty to devotion to Christianity, the text is promoting a belief that religious conservative views are the appropriate and correct way to live life. The text supports conservative Christian views, like those of the cabinet minister, by reinforcing them with the use of the witch figure as the undesirable and the church-going grandmother as above reproach. Combine this with a focus on the traditional family, the negative consequences for many women resulting from the elimination of specific government programs, the lack of female leadership in positions of power or influence, and the uneven application of tax benefits, and this generates a political and social climate that unmistakably endorses the suppression of female independence while encouraging the path to maternity.

In addition to financial independence and integrity, *The Witches* emphasizes the importance of gender as it relates to the distribution of power and privilege as evidenced by the treatment of the female versus male characters. Critics Jennifer Mitchell and Anne-Marie Bird analyze gender roles to examine how traditional gender definitions function within the text in

relation to power. Mitchell considers how traditional gender differences are explored in the text in her essay: "A Sort of Mouse Person: Radicalizing Gender in *The Witches*." Mitchell considers how traditional gender roles are established at the start of the novel with the narrator's unambiguous declaration that: "A witch is always a woman" (Dahl 9). Upon further examination however, Mitchell concludes that the ambiguity of the gender of the narrator and his ultimate transition to a mouse, as well as the masculine attributes of the grandmother, ultimately undermine the initial establishment of such roles. She begins questioning the stability of such distinctly defined gender characteristics with her analysis of the transformation of the narrator and Bruno Jenkins into mice. The reader's initial reaction to the narrator's predicament is one of pity: the boy will never grow up to be a man. His transition, she argues, forces readers to question the accuracy of gender identity when the narrator ends up being happy as a mouse and not as a boy. His transformation is seen as positive (Mitchell 26). Mitchell argues that this transformation compels readers to question whether gender is natural or a performance, which in turn allows for the possibility of an alternate gender. Mitchell contends that because the narrator's grandmother is accepting of him as a mouse, and Bruno's family is horrified at his new identity, the text implies that queer readings of it are possible (Mitchell 26). Mitchell's analysis considers how the male characters subvert gender norms as evidenced by the initially genderless narrator, but that the female witches are denied this privilege when they are immediately labeled dangerous and unfeminine. If Mitchell's argument that gender differences are established from the start is to be believed, then the text arguably reinforces societal expectations for women regarding femininity. Nowhere is this more evident than in the conversation between the narrator and his grandmother regarding how to recognize a witch:

"The second thing to remember is that a REAL WITCH is always bald."

“*Bald?*” I said. “Bald as a boiled egg,” my grandmother said. I was shocked. There is something indecent about a bald woman. “Why are they bald, Grandmamma?” “Don’t ask me why,” she snapped. “But you can take it from me that not a single hair grows on a witch’s head.” “How horrid!” “Disgusting,” my grandmother said. “If she’s bald, she’ll be easy to spot,” I said. “Not at all,” my grandmother said. “A REAL WITCH always wears a wig to hide her baldness. She wears a first-class wig. And it is almost impossible to tell a really first-class wig from ordinary hair unless you give it a pull to see if it comes off.” (Dahl 25)

By claiming “there is something indecent about a bald woman,” the narrator expresses his discomfort with a woman missing something as essential to her femininity as her hair. The adjective “indecent” indicates that a woman without hair is improper and offensive. The emphasis on the adjective “REAL” arguably suggests that a “REAL” woman would make sure she wears her hair in an acceptably feminine way so as not to offend. The “horrid” and “disgusting” offense requires her to don a “first-class wig” to ensure an un-offensive and decorous appearance of femininity. The wig must be so convincing that it is “almost impossible” to distinguish it from “ordinary hair”. This statement implies no expense is spared in securing a high-quality wig as it is expected to look a certain way to conform to a specific standard of beauty. The grandmother’s observations continue with an examination of the witches’ facial features: “Witches have slightly larger nose-holes than ordinary people. The rim of each nose-hole is pink and curvy, like the rim of a certain kind of seashell” (Dahl 26). Since noses are for smelling with, the reference to “larger nose-holes” implies their powers of smell may be great, like those of a dog or some other animal. She goes on to say: “The dirtier you are, the less you smell” (Dahl 26). The “dirtier you are” implies you probably smell worse to most people but since witches prefer your smell this way this

suggests they prefer dirt over cleanliness; arguably just like an animal. Moving from the face to the feet, the grandmother explains:

“The feet,” she said. “Witches never have toes.” “No toes!” I cried. “Then what do they have?” “They just have feet,” my grandmother said. “The feet have square ends with no toes on them at all.” “Does that make it difficult to walk?” I asked. “Not at all,” my grandmother said. “But it does give them a problem with their shoes. All ladies like to wear small rather pointed shoes, but a witch, whose feet are very wide and square at the ends, has the most awful job squeezing her feet into those neat little pointed shoes.” “Why doesn’t she wear wide comfy shoes with square ends?” I asked. “She dare not,” my grandmother said. “Just as she hides her baldness with a wig, she must also hide her ugly witch’s feet by squeezing them into pretty shoes.” (Dahl 30)

Having no toes is surprising to the narrator but the idea that the witches have “wide” and “square” feet is more distressing because women “like to wear small rather pointed shoes.” In order to be considered “ladies,” the witches must squeeze their large, square feet into “pretty shoes.” A witch has to hide her head and her subject her feet to discomfort because her actual body doesn’t look feminine enough. Physical pain is the result of her efforts when she “has the most awful job squeezing her feet” into the shoes. Her physical discomfort is necessary to be considered feminine enough to be socially acceptable. Finally, the grandmother delivers the last disgusting corporeal descriptor when she says: “‘Their spit is blue.’ ‘Is it like ink?’ I asked. ‘Exactly,’ she said. ‘They even use it to write with. They use those old-fashioned pens that have the nibs and they simply lick the nib’” (Dahl 31). Blue spit is unnatural and using it to write with sounds disgusting. Just like an animal, witches like to lick things they shouldn’t. By employing such monstrous descriptions to physically devalue and depower the witches based specifically on certain culturally

desired standards of female beauty, the text sends the unmistakable message that femininity and power derive from appearance and possessing certain desired physical feminine characteristics.

Besides the gross descriptions provided by the grandmother, the narrator illustrates the importance of the witches' physical appearance when he first sees The Grand High Witch:

The first thing I noticed about this woman was her size. She was tiny, probably no more than four and a half feet tall. She looked quite young, I guessed about twenty-five or six, and she was very pretty. She had on a rather stylish long black dress that reached right to the ground and she wore black gloves that came up to her elbows. Unlike the others, she wasn't wearing a hat. (Dahl 65)

Appearing "tiny" and "quite young" suggests that the young narrator initially sees The Grand High Witch as possibly desirable and definitely not threatening. Her petite stature and young age suggest she might be easy to control or manipulate, while her "very pretty" face invites attention. Wearing a "stylish" dress adds credibility to her feminine appearance while the long length projects modesty. Including gloves in the look gives off an air of respectability. By calling attention to the absence of a hat, the narrator separates her from the other witches as possibly more important. This first impression is noteworthy because it implies the narrator enjoys a certain level of comfort with The Grand High Witch when he believes she is young and pretty. However, when her true face is revealed upon removing her mask, the narrator's discomfort with her aged skin and body is striking:

That face of hers was the most frightful and frightening thing I have ever seen. Just looking at it gave me the shakes all over. It was so crumpled and wizened, so shrunken and shriveled, it looked as though it had been pickled in vinegar. It was a fearsome and ghastly

sight. There was something terribly wrong with it, something foul and putrid and decayed. It seemed quite literally to be rotting away at the edges, and in the middle of the face, around the mouth and cheeks, I could see the skin all cankered and worm-eaten, as though maggots were working away in there. (Dahl 66)

Removing the “young” and “very pretty” mask leave The Grand High Witch’s face “frightful” and “frightening” according to the narrator. This plus her “crumpled and wizened” skin, presumably reflect her age as he comments on her face being “shrunken and shriveled” as aged skin normally is. Apparently she must be very old because he thinks her skin looks “pickled in vinegar,” which implies a slimy texture and possibly a horrible smell. So horrible in fact, she is “foul and putrid and decayed,” as well as “rotting away,” which all indicate decomposition and the ghastly odor associated with death. To drive the point home, he calls her face “cankered and worm-eaten” with “maggots” to ensure the reader is not mistaken about her proximity to her inevitable demise. Her old face is so scary, the narrator believes she should just stay at home to hide from everyone: “I knew also why she wore a mask. She could never have moved around in public, let alone book in at a hotel, with her real face. Everyone who saw her would have run away screaming” (Dahl 66). Her old age is so offensive he thinks she must wear a mask, otherwise she would scare people away. Expressing the foulness of The Grand High Witch through her aged appearance privileges a specific physical female aesthetic while communicating that appearance matters greatly. In order to express what a horrible person she is, the text focuses almost exclusively on her physical appearance. Another example of this is how the narrator describes her voice: “Her voice, I noticed, had that same metallic quality as the voice of the witch I had met under the conker tree, only it was far louder and much much harsher. It rasped. It grated. It snarled. It scraped. It shrieked. And it growled” (Dahl 68). Her voice is displeasing and uncomfortable because it is harsh and

painful to the ears. Shrieking and growling are sounds often associated with animals, not women. In contrast, the narrator's observation about her voice as she disguises it to lure Bruno Jenkins in with chocolate conveys a preference for how an inviting female voice should sound: "Her voice was quite different now. It was soft and gentle and absolutely dripping with syrup" (Dahl 101). "Soft" and "gentle" are words often associated with femininity while "dripping with syrup" suggests an overwhelming sweetness. In this case, that sweetness conveys a sense of falseness or exaggeration because she is disguising her real voice. Such descriptions echo the "witch-hag" as Heidi Breuer calls her. In referencing the Queen in *Snow White*, she describes the witch-hag as follows:

1) a beautiful grotesque, marked by extreme thinness, pasty skin, and stark make-up (ala the Queen before she takes the potion) or 2) the classic hag-crone, marked by round, shapeless body, exaggerated (or deformed) facial features, and wild hair (the Queen after she takes the potion, as the Hag). The figures are connected, two sides of the same coin, tainted beauty signaling the true ugliness within. The appearance of the iconic witch-hag in *Wizard of Oz* one year after *Snow White* connected her to the wicked Queen solidified the connection between tainted femininity and anti-maternity. The beautiful grotesque is dangerous because she is the witch-hag. (Breuer 150)

The Grand High Witch as witnessed by the narrator is arguably the "beautiful grotesque" Breuer discusses above. She isn't labeled as thin, but the narrator notes her petite stature. She isn't wearing "stark make-up" but instead is wearing a mask to hide her unpleasant facial features. She is arguably the "two sides of the same coin" as Breuer describes based on her pretty versus disgusting veneer. Her mask reveals her true ugly face and her mouth speaks her true evil, murderous intentions. She is the witch-hag; she is "tainted femininity and anti-maternity."

Breuer's argument that the witch figure is utilized in literature to portray women as undesirable based on their rejection of maternity grounds my analysis of this trope in *The Witches*. The embodiment of the witch-hag is clearly identifiable in the portrayal of The Grand High Witch and her coven: their repulsive bodies are berated for their unfeminine attributes while their anti-maternal impulses are disparaged and criticized. The Grand High Witch especially exemplifies this idea as evidenced through the narrator's impressions of her disgusting and aged face. Breuer's observation that "The witch figure, in both legal and literary contexts, functioned as a warning to all women: stay in the home, caring for children, or risk becoming a wicked hag" rings true in *The Witches* (Breuer 142). Her assertion that women who fail to live up to these expectations are penalized can be seen not only in the text but also in the Thatcherite policies of the 1980s in Britain. *The Witches* unmistakably promotes the centuries-old preference for the female path to maternity through the representation of the grandmother as the maternal hero and the coven as the horrific anti-maternal.

I agree with Jennifer Mitchell when she calls the text out for being misogynistic because of the exclusive focus on the physical characteristics of the witches. One notable exception to this is the narrator's grandmother. Her behavior is described in mainly masculine characteristics. Because of this, Mitchell argues, she doesn't fit into the traditional gender role for an elderly female, and thus undermines the conventionally accepted norms (Mitchell 38). Respectfully, I disagree. I believe the opposite is true: the grandmother excels at fulfilling the conventionally accepted norms for a female because she assumes the role of *surrogate* mother to her him when his parents are killed. I agree that many of her physical characteristics are seemingly masculine, but her self-sacrifice of accepting the role of surrogate mother represents the heroic nature of the maternal. The narrator recalls the terrible event that caused him to lose his parents:

And it was over there, while my father and mother and I were driving in icy weather just north of Oslo, that our car skidded off the road and went tumbling down into a rocky ravine. My parents were killed. I was firmly strapped into the back seat and received only a cut on the forehead. I won't go into the horrors of that terrible afternoon...I finished up, of course, back in my grandmother's house with her arms around me tight and both of us crying the whole night long. (Dahl 13)

By describing his presence in the car when his parents died, the narrator articulates the trauma of surviving the fatal accident. Mentioning his position in the backseat, and the lack of injuries he sustained, confirms his proximity to his parents when they passed and implies how horrific that must feel. When he says "of course" he ended up with his grandmother that evening it indicates not only the logic of the reunion with his next of kin, but that his grandmother is the only one who can soothe his aching heart. She is his protector and comforter; she wraps her arms around him like a warm blanket and holds him all night crying. His previous admission of the depth of their relationship hints at his grandmother already being a maternal figure to him: "I have to admit that I felt closer to her than to my mother" (Dahl 12). After his parents' deaths, his grandmother assures him she will take care of him: "'What are we going to do now?' I ask her through tears. 'You will stay here with me,' she said, 'and I will look after you.' 'Aren't I going back to England?' 'No,' she said. 'I could never do that. Heaven shall take my soul, but Norway shall keep my bones'" (Dahl 14). This brief exchange illustrates the grandmother's complete lack of hesitation in taking responsibility for her grandson. She confirms she will "look after" him but that they will stay in Norway, where she lives, and not return to England where he is from. Here she takes on the ultimate female responsibility of caring for a child in need, and at an advanced age, which I believe ultimately secures her status as the maternal hero of the text.

Differing from Mitchell in her analysis, critic Anne-Marie Bird argues that instead of emphasizing gender, the book is concerned with power in her essay: “Women Behaving Badly: Dahl’s Witches Meet the Women of the Eighties.” Because the witches’ sexuality isn’t addressed as threatening, or at all, Bird asserts that the witches are asexual, and therefore gender is not central to the theme because the text doesn’t identify evil with a specific gender (Bird 120-121). Bird contends the text is not exclusively concerned with gender but with power. I agree with Bird that power is an important element in the critical conversation, but my argument differs from Bird’s in that I believe the particularly scary nature of the witches’ power is directly related to their gender, not just their adult status as Bird mentions. Because the witches adorn themselves physically to specifically look like feminine women, the reader can’t easily dismiss the association of the witches to women and thus to gender. In my opinion, gender and power go together in the text: the witches represent a type of power that is scary, uncontrollable, and anti-maternal while the grandmother represents the heroic power of maternal love and acceptance. A significant portion of the witches’ power comes from their disguises because wearing them enables them to exercise their power freely. The resulting anonymity gives the witches the scary and uncontrollable ability to murder children without fear of discovery. For example, the grandmother conveys to the narrator the challenges of spotting a witch based on their convincing appearance: “‘I am going to tell you how to recognize a witch when you see one.’ ‘Can you always be sure?’ I asked. ‘No,’ she said, ‘you can’t. And that’s the trouble. But you can make a pretty good guess’” (Dahl 24). Here the narrator seeks reassurance that recognition of a witch is absolute based on what his grandmother tells him. By affirming that no, he can’t “always be sure,” she communicates the difficulties associated with differentiating between a woman and a witch based solely on

appearance. As their conversation continues, the grandmother explains exactly why judging by appearance in this instance is so unreliable:

“In the first place,” she said, “a REAL WITCH is certain always to be wearing gloves when you meet her.” “Surely not *always*,” I said. “What about in the summer when it’s hot?” “Even in the summer,” my grandmother said. “She has to. Do you want to know why?” “Why?” I said. “Because she doesn’t have finger-nails. Instead of finger-nails, she has thin curvy claws, like a cat, and she wears gloves to hide them. Mind you, lots of very respectable women wear gloves, especially in winter, so this doesn’t help you very much.” (Dahl 24)

The grandmother confirms “real” witches will be wearing gloves, which could be a good visual clue for the narrator. Unfortunately she then confirms that many “respectable” women also wear gloves. In fact, later in the text *The Grand High Witch* herself points out that their exact goal is to appear as though they are “respectable” women at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children meeting: ““Let us by all means get rrrid of this evil-smelling little sqvirt, but vee must do it as quietly as possible, for are vee not all of us the most rree-spectable ladies of the Rroyal Society for the Prrree-vention of Crrruelty to Children?”” (Dahl 90). While discussing how the coven will quietly get rid of the narrator after he is discovered, *The Grand High Witch* specifically reminds the coven that they are “the most rree-spectable ladies of the Rroyal Society for the Prrree-vention of Crrruelty to Children,” and with that identity comes the assumption that they are real women: respectable ones like the grandmother references. In fact, when the narrator sees the coven enter *The Ballroom* for the event, he assumes they are just women: “They wore pretty clothes and all of them had hats on their heads” (Dahl 60). The witches appear as though they are totally normal women; the narrator doesn’t notice anything amiss given that they wore “pretty

clothes” and hats. They look like normal women and because they are “pretty” he doesn’t feel threatened. The narrator is so clueless about their identity in fact that he goes on to say: “Now that the Manager had gone, I was not particularly alarmed. What better than to be imprisoned in a room full of these splendid ladies. If I ever got talking to them, I might even suggest that they come and do a bit of cruelty-to-children preventing at my school. We could certainly use them there” (Dahl 61). Easily convinced that they are ordinary women, the narrator expresses his relief regarding the manager’s exit. Ironic, given that the manager is the one person who could have helped him in his current circumstances. Clearly, he was so confident of their identity that he goes on to say nothing could be “better” than being “imprisoned” in The Ballroom with these “splendid ladies”. Using the words “better” and “imprisoned” indicates a complete lack of fear of being locked in a room with them. So convincing are these ladies that they invoke the exact opposite feeling that they should. Pondering an invitation to his school signifies that he is obviously clueless about their identity; surely if he had any inkling he would not have said they would be useful in preventing “cruelty-to-children”. This quote shows just how adept these witches are at disguising themselves. The witches utilize wigs to cover their bald heads, they wear gloves to hide their claws, and they squeeze their square feet into pointy shoes because such shoes are associated with females, and thus femininity. Utilizing these symbols of femininity creates the illusion that they are ultra-feminine women. Just look at the narrator! He can’t tell the difference. His grandmother directly confirms how challenging it is when she says: ““You can never be absolutely sure whether a woman is a witch or not just by looking at her”” (Dahl 32). By saying “just by looking at her,” the text reinforces the notion that based on appearance alone, women and witches are indistinguishable.

The identity of the witches as safe women of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is shattered, however, when it is revealed that they are child-murdering monsters. Such a revelation regarding their performance masquerading as normal women disturbs the notion of what appropriate and safe femininity is, which calls into question their identity as women. According to Judith Butler: “because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without these acts, there would be no gender at all” (Butler 190). In other words, the performative nature of gender itself creates the gender identity. In this case the witches arguably don’t see their gender identity as female but strive to convince those around them that they are. Considering their intent to fool those around them into thinking they are women, but they themselves know their performance is false, then their performance is arguably akin to drag. Regarding drag, Butler states: “I would suggest as well that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” (Butler 186). Put another way, drag exposes the “inner” concept of gender identity and sex versus the “outer” concept of gender performance. In drag, the sex of the performer may be male, the gender identity may be female or male, and the gender performance is female. Drag itself rattles the notion of any of these categories as stable or predetermined, just like the witches’ performance does. The performance of drag doesn’t necessitate a particular body because it is irrelevant what body is underneath the costume. The focus of the drag performance is oftentimes the exaggerated elements of whatever gender is being portrayed. Being able to put on and take off these elements at will undermines the idea that gender is fixed because any physical body can potentially wear a costume to portray a specific gender. In the case of the witches, discarded costumes reveal monstrous femininity; these witch-hags disrupt the concept of femininity as inherent to females and destroy the notion of stability in gender. The

witches' horrific and unnatural existence must be destroyed not only to save children but to prevent any further disruption to the concepts of feminine and female.

While permanently eliminating the threat of the witches' violence seems impossible, it is the witches' own actions that ultimately spawn their undoing. Evidence of this conclusion can be derived from their initial deployment of magic as the passive feminine to the final deployment of magic as the aggressive masculine. We know from the grandmother that the witches are normally not discerning about who they accost: "one child is as good as any other to those creatures" (Dahl 46). Children aren't targeted specifically; the witches' actions are crimes of opportunity. So confident is the grandmother with this idea that she tells the narrator:

"There are witches everywhere. There's probably one living in our street this very moment. It's time you went to bed." "A witch wouldn't come in through my window in the night, would she?" I asked, quaking a little. "No," my grandmother said. "A witch will never do silly things like climbing up drainpipes or breaking into people's houses. You'll be quite safe in your bed." (Dahl 23)

Witches are everywhere, possibly in the house next door. The grandmother clearly isn't concerned about this though because she tells the narrator he can go to bed. Expressing concern over the accessibility his house provides to such predators, the narrator questions the security of a possible entry point. When his grandmother responds that witches "never do silly things like climbing up drainpipes or breaking into people's houses" she confirms the witches aren't doing things that would alert others to their wrongdoings. Using the word "silly" suggests the witches act as ordinary as possible to avoid unwanted attention. Because they don't climb up drainpipes or break into houses, the grandmother further indicates the witches maintain normal routines to avoid detection. The grandmother's personal experience informs her statements to her grandson now:

“I have known no less than five children who have simply vanished off the face of this earth, never to be seen again. The witches took them” (Dahl 15). Knowing at least five children makes the experience sound convincing. Describing their absences as “simply vanished” implies events occurred that were not witnessed by anyone; arguably they were crimes of opportunity that took place while the children were alone. The only common link the grandmother identifies is: “In every case a strange lady was seen outside the house, just before it happened” (Dahl 16). No violent or notable action transpired prior to the disappearances, only the “strange” ladies were seen.

Passivity has worked for the witches thus far, but when the fake Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children meets for The Grand High Witch to lay-out her aggressive extermination plan, the witches’ days are numbered. Her grand ambitions are laid out for the coven to hear as she berates the witches for their slow pace of killing:

“Vun child a veek is no good to me!” The Grand High Witch cried out. “Is that the best you can do?” “We will do better,” murmured the audience. “We will do much better.” “Better is no good either!” shrieked the Grand High Witch. “I demand maximum rresults! So here are my orders! My orders are that every single child in this country shall be rrubbed out, sqvashed, sqvuirted, sqvittered and frritered before I come here again in vun year’s time! Do I make myself clear?” (Dahl 73)

One child a week is too little for The Grand High Witch. By laying out a challenge to increase this number, she taunts the witches by asking if this is “the best you can do?” Their retort claims they will do more, but The Grand High Witch makes it clear that “better” isn’t enough. She demands “maximum” results which entail the murder of every child in England by the time of next year’s meeting. Her annoyance with the coven’s business as usual approach is apparent; by laying

down the law requiring the coven to kick things into high gear The Grand High Witch signals a change in the method of their deployment of magic. This is obvious based on the reaction of the coven to her demands: “A great gasp went up from the audience. I saw the witches all looking at one another with deeply troubled expressions. And I heard one witch at the end of the front row saying aloud, “*All of them! We can’t possibly wipe out all of them!*” (Dahl 73). Based on the collective “gasp” the reaction is one of surprise and disbelief. “Deeply troubled expressions” suggests worry or fear; most likely of the consequences of failure. Clarifying that “all of them” need to be wiped out indicates the insurmountable challenge in accomplishing such a task. It’s reasonable to assume from this response that the aggressive plan moving forward is not business as usual. The Grand High Witch confirms this fact when she states: “So now I am having a plan! I am having a gigantic plan for getting rrrrid of every single child in the whole of Inkland!” (Dahl 78). Describing her plan as “giganticus” reinforces the breadth of the scope of getting rid of “every single child” in England. Such an undertaking is ambitious not only because of the size of the task but that it must all be done with magic. The Grand High Witch reminds the coven their actions must be carried out according to her plan to ensure success because the only instrument of terror they have is magic: “Do you not know’, she shouted at them, ‘that vee witches are vurrking only vith magic?’” Since they are “only” working with magic they must proceed strategically so as not to alert others to their plans. The previous approach of casually accosting children near their homes is no longer the strategy. Now they each must open a sweet shop to lure children in with the promise of delicious chocolate: “Next,” continued The Grand High Witch, ‘you vill prepare yourselves for this Great Gala Opening by filling every choc and every sveet in your shop vith my very latest and grrreatest magic formula! This is known as FORMULA 86 DELAYED ACTION MOUSE-MAKER!’” (Dahl 81-2). By requiring every witch to put on a grand opening The Grand

High Witch suggests that tons of children will be in attendance. By filling each chocolate and sweet with her “grrreatest magic formula” she is implying this is possibly the best and most ambitious magic she has every conjured. Calling it “Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker” indicates a deferred reaction that will turn children into mice long after their consumption of the chocolate. The delayed action is important because it ensures the witches will not be suspected: “Put vun drop, just vun titchy droplet of this liqvid into a chocolate or a sveet, *and at nine o’clock the next morning* the child who ate it vill turn into a mouse in twenty-six seconds!” (Dahl 96). Just one small drop in each chocolate or sweet will do the trick. The key is the magic won’t work until “the next morning” when the child will “turn into a mouse” in seconds. Here we see the trope of the manipulative witch figure again. Their manipulation by way of delayed magic ensures the witches can continue their dastardly plans while evading punishment. The Grand High Witch acts out this trope when she states: “And the beauty of it is that the teachers will be the ones who bump off the stinking little children! It won’t be us doing it! We shall never get caught!’ ‘Vitches are never caught!’ snapped The Grand High Witch” (Dahl 89). To frame teachers is especially egregious given their role as protectors and educators of children. Using the phrase “bump off” indicates the callous nature of The Grand High Witch. Her overconfidence is evident in her assertion that “vitches are never caught!” By abandoning their normal *modus operandi* in a transition of passivity to aggression, the witches’ behavior is so egregious, such an abomination and so opposed to the notion of the feminine maternal, they simply must be stopped. The narrator convinces his grandmother it must be done:

“We’ve got to stop them,” I said. She turned and stared at me. “You can’t stop witches,” she said. “Just look at the power that terrible Grand High Witch has in her eyes alone! She could kill any of us at any time with those white-hot sparks of hers! You saw it yourself!”

“Even so, Grandmamma, we’ve still got to stop her from turning all the children of England into mice.” (Dahl 130-1)

Because of the scope of The Grand High Witch’s plan, the narrator understands the witches must be stopped. The grandmother’s hesitation regarding the “terrible” power of The Grand High Witch’s eyes is understandable but the narrator persists by reminding her they must stop her from “turning all the children of England into mice. This last sentiment reflects not only the horrific nature of the act but the fact that the narrator and grandmother must undertake such a task in the face of tremendous personal peril because the witches must be stopped.

Arguably, the transition from a passive method of using magic to an aggressive attack has created such an aberrant concoction that it alone is responsible for the destruction of the witches themselves. According to the narrator, the Formula 86 Delayed Action Mousemaker is so powerful that: “‘One bottle is enough for five hundred people,’ I said. ‘That would give each and every witch down there a double dose at least. We could turn them all into mice.’” (Dahl 134). If one bottle is enough to kill “five hundred people” The Grand High Witch unwittingly created a potion capable of killing herself and the entire coven. The transition from passive to aggressive backfires and the narrator pours a bottle of the potion in a cauldron of soup cooking for the witches. Upon consuming the soup the reaction occurs almost immediately: “‘It’s the Mouse-Maker!’ I cried. ‘Look! Some of them are growing fur on their faces! Why is it working so quickly, Grandmamma?’ ‘I’ll tell you why, my grandmother said. ‘Because all of them have had massive overdoses, just like you. It’s thrown the alarm-clock right out of whack!’” (Dahl 185). The narrator observes the strength of the magic Mouse Maker when the fur grows almost immediately on the witches’ faces. This observation validates the assertion that they have had “massive overdoses” which threw the “alarm-clock right out of whack” causing an almost immediate

transition. This exchange between the narrator and grandmother confirms the undoing of the witches. Although their demise began when their true identities were discovered and their tainted femininity revealed, their deaths were not possible until their behavior crossed boundaries unacceptable for females. The aberration of their physicality was disruptive enough but their egregious behavior ultimately required their extermination lest they further pollute the feminine.

Conclusion

What can we discern about representations of witches and witchcraft in children's literature from two very different stories told decades apart? How can the tale of a beautiful but cruel usurper to the throne of a mythical land possibly be related to a darker tale of a vulnerable and nameless child stalked by a coven of dreadful and sickening hags? At first glance both stories are vastly dissimilar; they contain glaring differences in plot, setting, and characters. Upon critical analysis however, both convey strikingly similar messages about how women, gender, and femininity should function within the hierarchical confines of twentieth-century British society. *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe's* utilization of the trope of the manipulative and power-hungry female witch is an extremely effective way of vilifying any woman who dares to aspire to a position of power. *The Witches'* employment of the disgusting and repulsive hags is extremely effective at denigrating the witches to devalue them based on their lack of desirable physical feminine traits. Neither of these books is the first to utilize the trope of the manipulator or the hag though; both of these iterations of the witch figure are a consistent presence in many witchcraft tales over centuries in Western literature.

What is unique to these texts is the specific complex and contemporary cultural issues that influenced their creation. *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* responds to the culturally destabilizing force of women moving from the private sphere to the public during the demoralizing war years in Great Britain. The portrayal of the villain as a female witch figure who strives to secure a position of power is amplified by her grand aspirations to the highest power in existence: the throne. Jadis isn't just the average imposter; as a usurper she is the supreme representation of someone who doesn't belong in the position she seeks to obtain. The emphasis on her status as a usurper serves to unmistakably represent her ambition and rejection of the rules as dangerous to

the stability of society. It also implies women who don't conform to social expectations while seeking positions of power are unfit; they are imposters not only because of their aspirations but also because they aren't truly feminine enough to be considered acceptable women. Women aren't supposed to seek such positions precisely because they are women. The Pevensie girls, Lucy and Susan, will rule as queens but only if both of their brothers, Edmund and Peter, rule beside them as kings. *The Witches* responds to the yearning to return to what is often described as the "traditional" family after two decades of women forming alternate family structures in response to the second wave of feminism. The portrayal of The Grand High Witch and her coven as un-wed and physically objectionable hags corresponds to the collective distaste for women rejecting their positions as homemakers and mothers in favor of alternative lifestyle choices and professional careers. By representing the physicality of the hags as gross and disgusting, the text utilizes an all too common method for belittling women: denigrating them based on their appearance and using it as the stick in which to measure their value by. The more beautiful or attractive a woman is, the more valuable. The more ugly and hag-like she may be, she has got to go. By portraying The Grand High Witch and her coven as hags, the text responds to the notion that women who choose an alternate lifestyle (i.e. single, childless, professional, etc.) are less valuable, or not valuable at all. Using the hag to do so is an obvious choice for children's literature because child readers will likely interpret the hag as someone bad they should be wary of based on her frightening appearance. The deconstruction of gender in *The Witches* emphasizes the importance of femininity for females by depicting the destruction of the coven as a result of losing their feminine and child-loving façade. The text bases the heroic status of the masculine cigar smoking grandmother as contingent upon embracing her role as a surrogate mother.

While differences between the texts exist as previously noted, more important are the many similarities between these two and many other witchcraft stories in Western literature. Focusing my analysis on *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* reveals that both texts communicate similar messages about femininity, gender, and women. At the micro level, the message is women leaving the private sphere to seek a position in the public sphere are a dangerous threat to society. At the macro level, the message is women who refuse to exist within culturally acceptable and well-defined roles shall be vilified. To accomplish such communication, both texts exploit different iterations of the witch figure while privileging maternal figures as the heroic or appropriate versions of femininity. Jadis' behavior as an aggressive and violent leader is displayed in stark contrast to Mrs. Beaver and the Pevensie girls' assumption of domestic duties in service of their male family members. The Grand High Witch and her coven's greedy child-murdering ways are displayed in sharp contrast to the narrator's grandmother as surrogate mother and savior. Both texts portray the witch figures as inappropriate, gross, callous, evil, etc. while portraying the maternal figures as appropriate, thoughtful, heroic, and possessing integrity. As children's literature, both text have similar targeted audiences. Delivering similar messages years apart leaves little room for interpretation regarding the insistence of such prescribed gender roles within British culture. Conveying the same dangers of foregoing the feminine responsibilities of homemaking and child-rearing for self-serving pursuits like independence and autonomy signifies the texts' participation in the longstanding tradition of the disparagement of women who choose to live their lives outside of prescribed roles. Because the witch figure exists within the concept of the monstrous feminine, the continued existence of the witches in both texts is not permitted. Their unmistakable corruption of the feminine cannot be tolerated; the only solution to the problem of their survival is to ensure that it doesn't continue.

The repetitive use of the witch figure in literature and films illustrates the difficulty of breaking down cultural biases within the confines of cultures born of patriarchal roots. The persistent notion that women's place in society is as wives and mothers will ensure that the unrelenting use of the witch figure as the definitive female villain will continue. The original visual representation of the wicked hag figure from the classic film the *Wizard of Oz*, the Wicked Witch of the West as she is known, will forever be the quintessential hag. Her striking green skin and pointy black hat have become the defining image of witches everywhere. Every year at Halloween I always watch *Hocus Pocus*; the allure of the Sanderson sisters never gets old for me or anyone else who loves the film. These particular representations of the witch figure have secured a special place in popular culture; they are the classics that are familiar to almost everyone.

I do think representations are evolving, however. The tremendous success of the Harry Potter books, and the incredible popularity of the young witch in them, Hermione Granger, speak to the cultural shifts occurring over the last twenty years regarding powerful females. No longer the evil scheming hag, Hermione represents a shift in the way female characters who don't fancy conforming are portrayed. Hermione's intelligence and strength are the glue that holds her and her friends together in their battle against Voldemort. Recognized internationally as a role model for young girls, Hermione is arguably the most popular character from the Wizarding World. Even with witches like Hermione taking center stage, the visual representation of the female witch on a broom wearing a black pointy hat endures. The shadow of the Wicked Witch of the West is long and her memorable attire may forever define the image of the witch. Further study on the number of good and evil witches in children's literature of the twentieth versus twenty-first centuries could provide more insight into how sweeping cultural changes in the current century have impacted witch figure representations as well as representations of female characters overall. While I don't

anticipate the disappearance of the wicked-hag in literature completely, I am hopeful that expressions of her are becoming more nuanced and complex and the old versions of her as the evil, anti-maternal hag are slowly vanishing.

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