

**Women as Witches: Witchcraft, Oppression and Empowerment
(800BCE-1990AD)**

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the BA (Honours) Degree in Design for Film – Model-making

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Design for Film. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Mo Campbell

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the repetition of the use of the word *witch* throughout history to further oppress women and other marginalised communities in a continuously male dominated society. I cover multiple continents and time periods where witches were a legitimate fear, but witchcraft allegations had resulted in the deaths of many innocent women, children and people of colour. I discuss the official definitions of the words *witch*, *witchcraft* and *woman* which harbour misogynistic undertones. I delve deep into the extremely racist and misogynistic points in history where witch allegations were an excuse for mass femicide in events such as *The Salem Witch Trails* (1692-1693), and the enslavement and attempted elimination of West African tribes with alternative religious beliefs (1700s). Christianity's role in this is tremendously shocking to a baptised Catholic like myself. The overruling of Christianity over many religions such as Voodoo and Paganism was successful through satanising their beliefs and eliminating any non-believers of Christianity. Concluding with the prominent female figures in history who turned the oppressive title of the *witch* to one of Empowerment through protesting for our rights or shamelessly presenting as a strong powerful woman in times where women were incredibly oppressed. This thesis aims to bring these issues to light, eliminate any misunderstandings towards non-traditional religions and to highlight the very important issue of systemic oppression, femicide and the demonisation of powerful women.

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Introduction

In my thesis, I will be discussing the weaponisation of the word *witch* as a tool of oppression to aid in the systematic marginalisation of women. Particularly vulnerable, old or outspoken women. I will argue the point of why witchcraft accusations have been an excuse to further oppress strong women and other marginalised communities for centuries. This issue stems across America and England from 1600 – 1900. “Witch – a Woman thought to have evil magic powers...a follower or practitioner of modern witchcraft” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2011, p.1657)

I will define the word ‘Witch’ and delve deep into the origin of the stereotypical features of a witch, and the history and evolution of witchcraft. From 1700s VooDoo to modern day Wiccan witches. I will discuss witchcrafts prevalence in mass media from the 20th century such as TV shows, movies, books and alike.

The Oxford University Dictionary defines witchcraft as being: “Magic or other supernatural practices; (the use of) magical or supernatural powers, esp. for evil purposes or as used by witches.” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2011, p. 1657)

Especially how such stereotypes, force you to associate a powerful woman with controlling and evil behaviours. I will identify the source of these stereotypes by studying witches in Art, specifically the depictions of witches in The Bible. Highlighting how the depictions of a witch harbour antisemitic, racist and sexist undertones.

In chapter 1, *What was a Witch* I am defining the word witch and how the term has been weaponised to control, execute and i still fear in women. I am discussing relevant points in history and including historical art to accentuate this point.

In chapter 2, *Women as Witches: Oppression* I am discussing the pivotal points in history that shaped the idea of witch-based fear. Starting from pre-Christianity (800BCE) and concluding with

In chapter 3, *Women as Witches: Empowerment*, I am discussing the reclamation of the word *witch* by women beginning with the 1990s “third wave” of feminism. I cover the pivotal point in history where women began shamelessly taking pride in their power. Beginning with prominent female leader, Marie Laveau, the VooDoo Queen of New Orleans and concluding with how modern-day feminism changed witchcraft forever.

I have researched the history of witches across different countries, cultures and time periods in order to understand where the fear of witches and witchcraft began. Similarly, I have identified why the word ‘witch’ was used primarily towards women, in particular outspoken, educated or single women spanning from 1500s Europe to 1800s American.

I am discussing multiple times in history which I believe to be extremely important for the evolution of the witch culture and its various communities. I am shedding light on the serious topic of female oppression and the condemnation of black culture due to their alternative religious beliefs, emphasising Christianity’s tremendous roll in such oppression. Ultimately, I will discuss the reclamation of the word witch which began with 1990s female activism. Calling attention to how a word once used to oppress is now used to empower!

Chapter One: What was a Witch

In this chapter I am discussing the historical context of the meaning of *Witch*. I cover the official Oxford English definition of the words *witch*, *woman* and *witchcraft* and the misogynistic undertones in each. I briefly discuss Christianity's role in the condemnation of witchcraft due to Christianity prohibiting polytheistic beliefs and self empowerment. I compare the treatment of powerful men in history with powerful women and ultimately determine that *witch* has been used as a slur for women who threaten the patriarchy or are seen as invaluable to society. The weight of this word *witch* and the deep fear of witches resulted in a mass femicide which repeated in history for centuries.

Witches and Witchcraft: Historical Context

A witch by definition, as 'a person (in later use typically a woman) who practices witchcraft or magic, esp. of a malevolent or harmful nature'. (2011, p.1657)

This definition seemingly describes powerful women as being malevolent. An outspoken and powerful woman must have evil intent. Oxford defines a woman as typically being powerless and secondary to men. A woman by definition, "An adult human female...a female domestic help" (2011, p.1659) Although the role of a woman in humanity is the most powerful, the giver of life. A woman's role in society is diminished to wife, lover of man and domestic servant. A man however is defined as "An adult human male...A person...A group or person in a position of authority over others" (2011, pg.856) The act of 'witchcraft' is defined, in *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction* as

Witchcraft encompasses practices intended for both harm and healing, and its meaning varies greatly across different cultures and historical periods (Gaskill, 2010, p.1).

Witchcraft is the practice of magic and sorcery which includes a variety of practices and beliefs based on the culture it resides in. Witchcraft aims to influence the world through supernatural means. It is commonly believed to be used for evil, but in most cultures is actually seen as a positive spiritual practice.



Fig. 1: Gaskill, M. (2010). *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, England

The Oxford University Dictionary defines witchcraft as being: “Magic or other supernatural practices; (the use of) magical or supernatural powers, esp. for evil purposes or as used by witches.” (2011, p.1657)

The terms *witchcraft* and *witch* always harbour negative connotations, especially towards women, but why? Well in this lengthy Oxford English University Dictionary (OED) definition, Michael Proffitt, the chief editor of OED continues on by recounting some historical facts on the origins of the words.

From the Old English period onwards, *witch* has carried negative connotations of malevolent or harmful magic, but this is complicated by the fact that, according to orthodox Christian belief, practitioners of both

benevolent and harmful magic derived their powers (wittingly or otherwise) from the Devil or evil spirits (Proffit, 2011, p.1657)

They continue on by stating the controversial use of the word *witch* and how it's been used as a weapon towards marginalised communities. Firstly, they acknowledge the difference between a *white witch* and a *black witch*. “Where *witch* was applied to all practitioners of magic, a differentiation was made between benevolent white witches and malevolent black witches” (anonymous, 2011, p.1657) A white witch defined by Oxford English Dictionary, “A practitioner of magic for altruistic purposes” (2011, p.1647) Altruistic meaning a selfless concern for others. White magic is defined as “magic used only for good reasons.” (Proffit, 2011, p.1647)

White magic stems from Pagan tradition in Europe. Paganism is from the latin word ‘Paganus’ meaning ‘of the countryside’. (The Decolonial Atlas, 2018. Article.) The article discusses indigenous religions such as Paganism and how Christianity tried to abolish these religions to grow its following.

The Spanish inquisition (Where Jews, Muslims, Protestants and old Christians were targeted for minor crimes against Catholicism. 1490s – 1800s) and the witch hunts (16th-18th Century) aimed to abolish Indigenous religions around Europe. Fig. 2 portrays the Triumph of Jesus over all the Pagan gods.

Paganism, a polytheistic religion, involved the practice of white magic; a practice forbidden by the Catholic church, a monotheistic religion. Paganism flourished in Europe but particularly Ireland where nature worship was essential to the agricultural society. Paganism involved white magic as its primary goal is healing, involving ceremonies around the cycle of life (birth-death), spiritual and herbal healing, meditation, prayer and spiritual communication for wellness and guidance.

A white witch in history would therefore be a practitioner of a nature-based Indigenous religion such as Paganism.

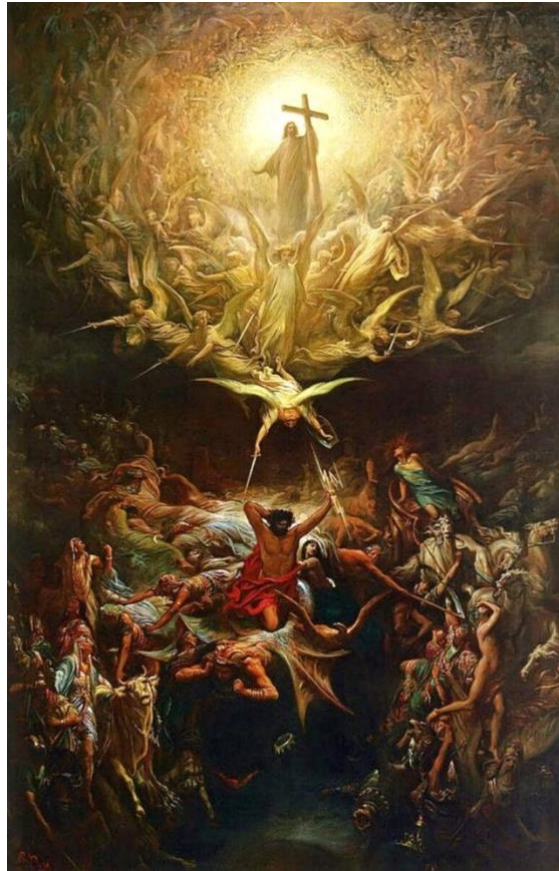


Fig. 2: Gustave Doré. (1869) *The Triumph of Christianity Over Paganism*. [Engraved in Wood]. Victoria & Albert Museum, UK.

The opposing side is black magic. Black magic is defined as “magic involving the supposed invocation of evil spirits for evil purposes.” (Proffitt of OED, 2011, p.142) A black witch was not defined in this edition of Oxford English Dictionary but would be defined as a practitioner of Black magic.

In the article, *Black Witches Debunk the Biggest Myths about the Occult, Essence*, it states that VooDoo is one of the most commonly inconvenienced forms of black magic. This again stems from Christianity's condemnation of witchcraft as a whole, especially black magic. The black witch accusation is derived from racism and sectarianism. White communities commonly misunderstand Africa's non-traditional spirituality and deem it as dark or satanic.

The devil's a Christian thing. You guys [Christians] came up with that. That doesn't actually play into witchcraft as I know it – Self Proclaimed Black witch, Mya Spalter, tells *ESSENCE* in this article (A. Oatman, 2022)

This comment perfectly encapsulates Christianity's ignorance towards alternative religious beliefs, forcing the idea that it is the only true religion. Fighting the devil-worship allegations, M. Spalter emphasises how her own religion doesn't even believe in Satan contrary to popular belief.

A black witch is defined as evil and malevolent; this definition is mostly misplaced upon black communities with non-traditional spiritual beliefs. I will explore this concept in depth in the next section *VooDoos "Black" Magic* and explain the abhorrent history behind the use of the term *witch* for the condemnation of black culture, especially towards women of colour.

Early depictions of witches show seemingly normal, lower to middle class women. Dressed in the modest clothes of their century. Most original *witch* art dates back to the 15th-17th in the height of the *witch* hysteria. The long cloaks commonly seen being worn by witches in modern media resemble the garments worn by everyday people in this time period.



Fig. 3: David Tenier the young (1660). *Nocturnal Witches*. Oil on panel. Location of original unknown. Image sourced from Staatliche Kunsthalle fine art museum, Germany.

Fig. 3 above depicts women in average 1600s European clothing. As the artist David Ternier's Flemish, I have concluded that the clothing depicted above is typical of a lower-class woman in 1600s Europe. Most of the clothing in the early period was modest, with long ankle-length skirts, long sleeves and bonnets. As witches were believed to be normal looking women who've blended into society, they are typically depicted as such, normal women.

This image of witches disguised as normal women; sporting long draping attire has carried on into the modern-day depiction of witches. Although these clothes were normal in the early periods (16th-18th Century) they stand out in the less modest modern world. The long dresses, cloaks and head covers are still commonly associated with witches today.

Figure 4 portrays *Dulle Griet* or *Mad Margaret*, held in Kunsthistorisches Museum, Brussels. The museums official site describes how *Mad Margaret* was "the term used to describe the proverbial evil, cantankerous wife who oppressed her husband, is afraid of no one, and will take on the devil himself". It sounds like Margaret is a

fierce, independent woman who stands up for herself, but such a thing cannot exist in the 1600s, she is simply mad for reversing the gender roles and oppressing her poor husband. Although not a witch, she was accused as being one which is represented in the abundance of gold hanging from her apron. She's depicted warding off evil demons with a broom, a common item associated with witches due to a woman's domestic status at the time (1600s).



Fig. 4: David Ryckaert the 3rd (1612-1661). *Dulle Griet*. Painting. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Brussels.

The term *witchcraft* is also notoriously associated with the oppression of women. Oxford University Dictionary backs up this point by adding:

Witch is not clearly associated with women more than men in early use, but its employment as a term of abuse or contempt for a woman from the 15th cent. onwards suggests that it had begun to be associated particularly with women from at least that date, and the appearance of formations such as he-witch and man-witch around the turn of the 17th cent. indicates that *witch* was by then commonly understood to denote a woman (2018. P. 98-111)

From the 15th Century onward this misogynistic definition of a witch continued. The idea of women being the weaker of both sexes is evident in this statement by Oxford University as they claim women were seen as being more susceptible to the devil. In order to keep women oppressed, the women who were “too educated”, unmarried or widowed were more likely to be accused of being a witch. Evidentially the single and educated women were seen as threats to the patriarchal system they were victim to, in an outdated society where women “needed” men and were discouraged from being independent.

The frequently marginal status of older women (esp. those who were widowed or unmarried) within the community made them especially vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft, particularly if they happened to have knowledge of traditional or folk medicine, a belief that women were more susceptible than men to the Devil being an additional contributing factor (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018. P. 98-111)

Even the term *wizard* denotes the same misogynistic tones as the term *witch*. Where *witch* describes a woman who practices magic as being malevolent and harmful, Oxford Dictionary describes a male witch, a *wizard*, as being “a philosopher or sage, a wise man”. (2011, p.1658)



Fig. 5: Sir Anthony Van Dyck (1593-1595) *Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland* AKA. *The 'Wizard' Earl*. Painting. Pet worth House and Park, West Sussex.

The Earl of Northumberland, England (Fig. 5) was born on April 27th, 1564, at Tynemouth Castle. He was given the name 'The Wizard Earl' due to his vast knowledge. It was his status as a man mixed with his nepotism which allowed Henry Percy to become highly educated. He developed literary tastes, purchased works of art and had an interest in astrology and alchemy. Educated men like Henry Percy were seen as wizards and wise sages. Whereas women, who were not permitted to education, were seen as cunning threats to society if they dared to exercise their human right to education.

His indulgence in scientific experiments gained for him the sobriquet of 'The Wizard Earl' (Luminarium: Encyclopaedia Project. 2009, updated in 2023.
Ref. Pg. 411-413 of The Dictionary of National Biography Vol XLIV, 1895)

His privilege as a man granted him the right to education while women fought for their lives for doing the same. Reading the article, *The Horrific History of the Witch*

Trials in England, the witch trials in England were in full force at this time and innocent women were being executed for being equally as educated in the same subjects. Under the rule of Henry VIII (1509-47) and later James I (1603-1625), it was believed that Henry VIII pioneered the English witch trials and James VI ignited the nation-wide hysteria leading to the deaths of hundreds of women.

To make matters worse for women, the peak of the English witch trials (1650s) brought on demand for a new profession: bringing suspected witches to justice. Of course, this encouraged men to be ruthless and reap rewards from turning in innocent women suspected as witches. Promoting the harassment, mistrust and brutalisation of women. Matthew Hopkins became an infamous witch-hunter in England and ordered the hanging of 19 women in Chelmsford in one day.

Many women fell victim to Hopkins who would locate the “devils mark” on a woman (a mole or flea bite) then inject them with a “needle”. If the woman felt no pain, she was a witch. However, the device was a fake needle that would retract into the handle upon pressure. A painless act that would result in the guilty verdict and subsequent execution of his victims.

This event in particular highlights the differences between witches and wizards according to a society set up by men. The disturbing violence towards women for monetary gain, the victimisation of old vulnerable women, and the education of women being punishable by death. It's evident that men have been violating woman's human rights for centuries in order to assert dominance over the very being that gave them life in the first place.

In the following sections of Chapter 2 I will discuss the numerous events in history where women have been victim to brutal hypocrisy. From the unjust death of a Powerful queen in the Bible to the enslavement and torture of Indigenous tribes for untraditional spiritual practices

Chapter Two: Women in Witchcraft: Oppression

In this chapter I am covering the multiple times in history where the word *witch* has been used as an excuse to execute powerful women throughout history. From the story of Adam and Eve, the earliest tale of male dominance. It concludes with the portrayal of the “first ever human women” Eve as being a cunning, sinful domestic servant to Adam. Eve is adamantly depicted as an untrustworthy betrayer of God who was cursed with the responsibility of bearing children. A beautiful biological phenomenon demonised by the Bible. It seems that in most cases throughout history, women can never win.

I am delving into various time periods, across continents where vulnerable women were accused as being witches and sentenced to brutal public deaths. This allowed spiteful men to execute innocent women due to a very real fear which circulated in the western world.

I am also discussing the weaponisation of the word witch in order to eliminate any threat to Christianity. Resulting in the deaths of individuals with alternative religious beliefs in an attempt to eradicate anything that was Catholic and Godly.

Ultimately, I am reiterating my point that men have set up a system where anyone besides the rich white elitists suffer. Women, children and people of colour have fell victim to the ranting and raving of irrational men. A system that didn't allow women to speak up in the first place forced them to confess to heinous crimes of an unimaginable nature and sent them to an early grave.

Witches in The Bible (800BCE)

In the article, titled *The Origin of Witches*, it states,

It is unclear exactly when witches came into the historical scene, but one of the earliest records of a witch is in the Bible in the book of 1 Samuel, thought to be written between 931BC and 721BC. It tells the story of when King Saul

sought the Witch of Endor to summon the dead prophet Samuel's spirit to help him defeat the Philistine army. (2017, Edited 2023.)

Witches have been the subject of fear since the creation of Christianity's Old Testament. A witch being a person, particularly a woman, that practices magic against the will of the rampantly increasing Christian faith.

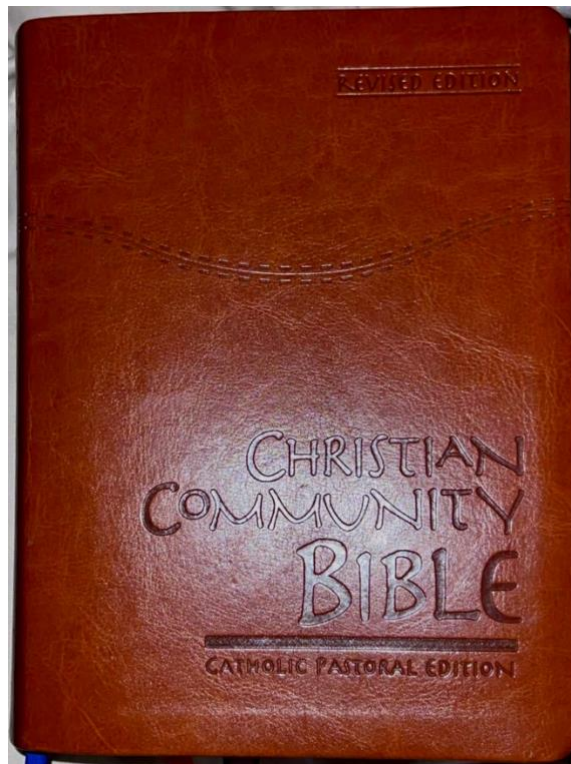


Fig. 6: Anonymous (Revised 2013). *Christian Community Bible, Catholic Pastoral Edition*. 59th Edition. Claret Publishing Group.

The Old Testament is the name given to the first part of the Christian Bible which was completed before Jesus Christ was born. The second half of the Bible, The New Testament, similarly follows the life of Jesus after birth. It includes the 4 Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles and Revelation. Both Testaments adamantly forebode the use of witchcraft, deeming it as Satanic and claiming it opens the way for demonic possession due to its basis on sorcery and spirituality. In the New Testament, *1 Timothy 2:5*, a passage in the Bible, recites – “For there is one God, and

one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”. (Christian Community Bible, Catholic Pastoral Edition, 2013, Page 1780)

This bible verse adamantly states that there is only one God, and one should not play God, or take Gods powers into their own hands. The culture of witchcraft directly apposes this as instead of being mere followers, these witches are their own gods in a sense, as they hold equal power and responsibility for their life and the lives of others.

Similarly, *Exodus 22:18* from the Bible states, “You shall not allow a sorceress to live” (2013, p.1700) or in *Deuteronomy 18:10-12* it states:

You must not have in your midst anyone who makes his child pass through the fire, or one who practices divination, or anyone who consults the stars, who is a sorcerer, or one who asks questions of the dead. (2013, p.296)

This makes the practice a mortal sin in Christianity's eyes, and historically, sinners were punished just as criminals were for breaking the law. Such punishments included penance, fine, imprisonment, stoning, beheading, hanging or other means of execution for the crime of Heresy.

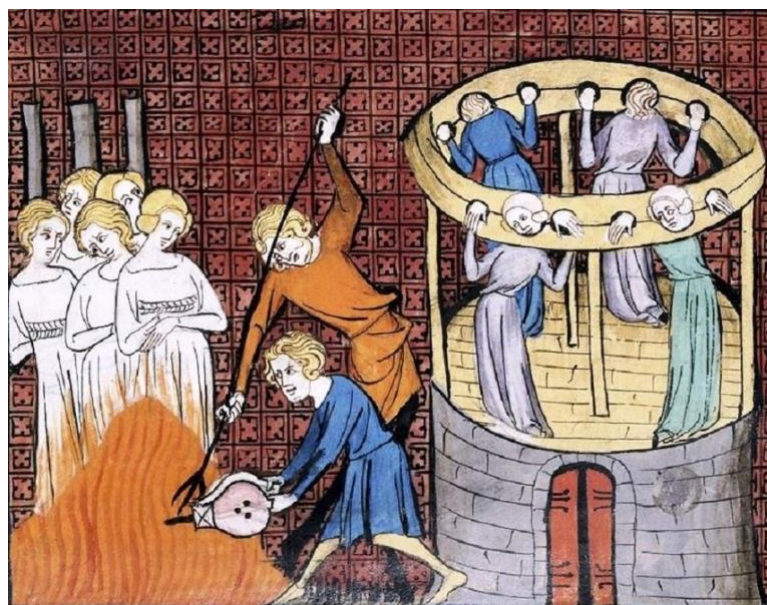


Fig. 7: Royal 16 G VI. (1332-1350). *Witches Being Burnt and Tortured, Mahiet and the Master of the Cambrai Missal*. British Library.

Any opposition to the Christian faith was seen as the work of the Devil, like he had tainted the individual, deceived them, and lead them down the path towards hell. Any Christian strong in their faith would have been terrified by anyone who strayed away from God as the Bible condemns anyone who rejects the word of the lord, as stated in *1 Samuel 15:23* (2013) page 391 “For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king”

This verse in particular is striking as it claims Christianity to be the one true religion, and anyone who strays from this will be condemned to an eternal hell. Being “rejected as king” in this verse is symbolic of being sent to heaven, this being an impossibility for those who reject the word of the Lord.

Eve the Original Sinner

Another infamous biblical female, and arguably a figure marking the beginning of female oppression, is Eve the original sinner. The story of *Adam and Eve* is a Christian Biblical tale about the origination of sin and the fall of mankind. The people depicted in Fig. 8 are the characters in question. The tale begins in the beautiful paradise of Eden where Adam resided. Eden was a beautiful garden paradise created by God which was free from shame and sin. Eve was created from Adams rib, automatically being deemed as an inferior character to man, Adam. She was created as an afterthought to Adam, acting as “a helper for him.” (Genesis 2:18)



Fig. 8: Rubens, P. P. & Brueghel the Elder, J. (1615). *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man*. Oil Painting on Panel. The Hague, Netherlands.

God allowed both Adam and Eve to enjoy all Eden had to offer, the only exception was they were forbidden from eating the fruit from the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*. This tree symbolises the freedom of choice, the feeling of shame, self awareness and sin. A Manchester Historian article written by Grace Fowler and titled *Ever Since Eve: How and Why has the Bible Been Used to Justify Women's Oppression?* Highlights the beginning of female oppression.

Genesis tells the story of Eve as a naïve and weak character. God's punishment for Eve was the pain of childbearing and the condemnation of submission to her husband, whilst Adam was punished for listening to his wife (Genesis 3:17) with mortality. This overtly implies that danger comes from listening to women. (2023)

As ludicrous as it sounds to think that an individual could take an ancient scripture so literally that it spurs on centuries of female oppression, is actually in-fact true. The Bible, a popular religious scripture solely written by men with words so powerful and followers so devoted, had the audacity to spread its misogyny to its followers for eternity. The Bible is a device of propaganda, instilling the fear of God into its

followers or otherwise damning them to an eternal fiery hell. It's no wonder people took The Bible verbatim.

Queen Jezebel, The Witch (800 BCE)



Fig. 9: John Byam Liston Shaw (1896). *Jezebel*. Painting. Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth.

An infamous female figure from the Old Testament is Queen Jezebel, The Witch.

Jezebel definition,

An immoral, impudent, or sexually promiscuous woman; (esp. in earlier use) a woman who leads other people into idolatry and sin (see Revelation 2:20); a prostitute or disreputable woman. (Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Jezebel (n.),”2024)

She's known as Jezebel due to her manipulation, apparent seduction, alternate religious beliefs, and misleading the saints of God to commit sinful acts of adultery.

Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab, who ruled the kingdom of Israel in 800 BCE. Her marriage with Ahab united 2 royal houses, Israel and Tyre. She was demonised as she acted out against the societal norm. She disregarded the rights of the common people, defying the great prophets Elijah and Elisha, and she provoked the internecine strife that enfeebled Israel for decades.

A Britannica article (author unknown) written and fact checked by The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, claims this is the reason she's now known as an archetype of the wicked woman. Being described as a “woman of fierce energy” the article continues to state that many were sentenced to death at the hands of Queen Jezebel as she tried to destroy anyone who apposed her. Jezebels last vicious act was when she falsely charged a commoner with blasphemy as he refused to part with his own vineyard. He was later sentenced to death by stoning. The prophet Elijah was enraged and ordered that dogs would devour Jezebel for her wrongdoings.

Jezebel's violent, bloody death represents the expulsion of foreign, cultural and religious influences and the rejection of powerful female leadership in Israel. (Koosed, J. L. *Death of Jezebel*. Article. Bible Odyssey. 2024)



Fig. 10: Gustave Doré (1866) *The Death of Jezebel*. Engraving. Location Unknown.

Jezebel died a horrific death as depicted in this compelling image (Fig 10). She looked down from her window taunting Jehu, the general who had overthrown and killed her son. Jehu retaliated by ordering her eunuchs to throw Jezebel out of her own window. It is said to be true that she was trampled on by his horse and most of her body was left to be eaten by dogs as Elijah had foretold.

Jezebel is synonymous with evil as Judas also was in the Bible. Two separate Biblical stories where betraying a powerful man resulted in death. Jezebel symbolises strong female empowerment but is seen as an evil, controlling seductress. If she was a man however, she'd be viewed as a powerful leader and praised for her numerous sexual encounters. It is believed that there is no real scriptural evidence that Jezebel was a prostitute or an unfaithful wife, yet her name has been tainted for more than 2,000 years as she was branded as a *whore*. It is obvious that the powerful men she challenged defiled her name, condemning her as a whore in order to tarnish her reputation due to her brave outspoken nature and alternative religious beliefs.

Originally, artist John Byam Liston Shaw painted *Jezebel* naked (Fig. 9), but the painting wouldn't sell due to its provocative nature. The Gallery the Jezebel painting resides in is unsure whether Sir Merton Russell-Cotes requested her to be painted clothed or another anonymous source.

As depicted above (Fig. 9) Jezebel is dressed in long flowing fabric synonymous with the modest dress code of the time. Her chest is showing symbolising her seductive nature. The modern-day depiction of witches in long dresses, corsets and capes is an image rooted in reality. The earliest depictions of witches were paintings of normal women doing nefarious acts as witches were speculated to be disguised as average women. This image of witches wearing what was once normal, modest everyday attire has continued through time. The same clothes are worn by witches in media, including films and TV shows, such as Rochelle in *The Craft* (1996, Dir. Andrew Fleming) and Zoe in *American Horror Story, Coven* (S.3) (2013, Dir. Ryan

Murphy). The attire of witches in media is usually black, symbolising their dark magic, the night, fear and power.

Jezebel is holding a mirror and comb symbolising vanity. This image of vanity in women has been replicated in many paintings. Each painting portrays a woman's vulnerability, naked for the viewer's pleasure, but then simultaneously condemning her as a “Jezebel” for doing so. She's called vain for enjoying herself despite the painting appealing solely to the male gaze.

You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting “Vanity,” thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure. (J. Berger, *Ways of seeing*, 1972. Penguin Books, pg. 48)



Fig.11: Titian (1555). *Venus with a Mirror*. Oil Painting. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

This obsessive synonymity of sinful witches with lustful women is prevalent in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or *The Hammer of the Witches*. This text was a handbook on witchcraft originally published in 1487 by Johann Sprenger, dean of the University of Cologne in Germany, and Heinrich Kramer, professor of theology at the University of Salzburg, Austria. Due to their prestige, it is utterly appalling how they could come up with such a perverted take on witchcraft.

Historian Mikki Brock in a WIRED interview on the video sharing platform YouTube (2024) paints this text as a pornographic, vengeful screed meant to be used as a witch-hunting guide. It's highly outdated with misogynistic tones and even tales of demon sex. Kramer had an obsession with the idea of witches being carnal and lustful, believing “mouthy” (opinionated) women tended to be witches. Fig. 12 isn't the original *Malleus Maleficarum* but the cover accurately represents the themes and images of the original.

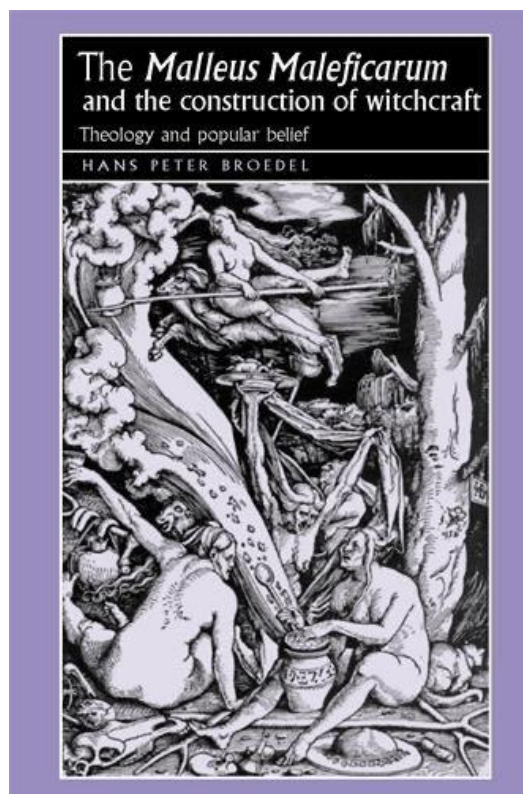


Fig. 12: Broedel, H. P. (2003). *The 'Malleus Maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief*. Book Cover.

There is a black cat in the right foreground of Fig. 9. M. Brock from WIRED explains the belief that witches would have a ‘demonic familiar’ often a domestic animal due to the domestic status of women at this time. The cunning and finicky nature of a cat is synonymous with that of a witch. Black cats are commonly associated with witches as they represent femininity, agility and lust. Cats are viewed as seductive creatures of beauty and are a suited companion of the lustful, sinful witch. Strangely cats have always been sexualised. The term ‘Catcalling’ being a playful term for harassing a woman on the street.

Evidently, Jezebels demise was rooted in misogyny and the fear of a powerful woman. The Old Testament authors often equated worship of false gods, which Jezebel partook in, with foreign deities with wanton sexuality. Mens sexualisation and objectification of women, and obsession with sin coinciding with lust, lead to her being denounced as an evil whore. Even to this day a synonym for the female-directed insult *whore* is a *Jezebel*.

The Salem Witch Trials (1692-1693)

15th Century Europe where witch hunts allegedly began, with the overruling of the Christian religion and belief system, commencing 300 years of *witch* accusations and persecutions. Witches were seen to reject the moral norms of their communities and in some places were ostracised from society, punished, tortured or killed for practicing their faith. A *witch* at the time could merely be a woman who is *too educated* in medicine or has any alternate beliefs to Christianity. Two centuries later the hysteria hit America and thus began the infamous Salem Witch Trials (1692-1693) and the mass femicide of countless innocent women.

A prominent example of anti-witch persecutions was the infamous Salem Witch Trials which began in June of 1692 and ended in May of 1693 in Salem, Massachusetts, United States of America. The Salem Witch Trials was a series of investigations and prosecutions that caused an estimated 19 “witches” to be

convicted and executed for the crime of witchcraft. Many other suspects were also imprisoned, fined or shunned from their community.

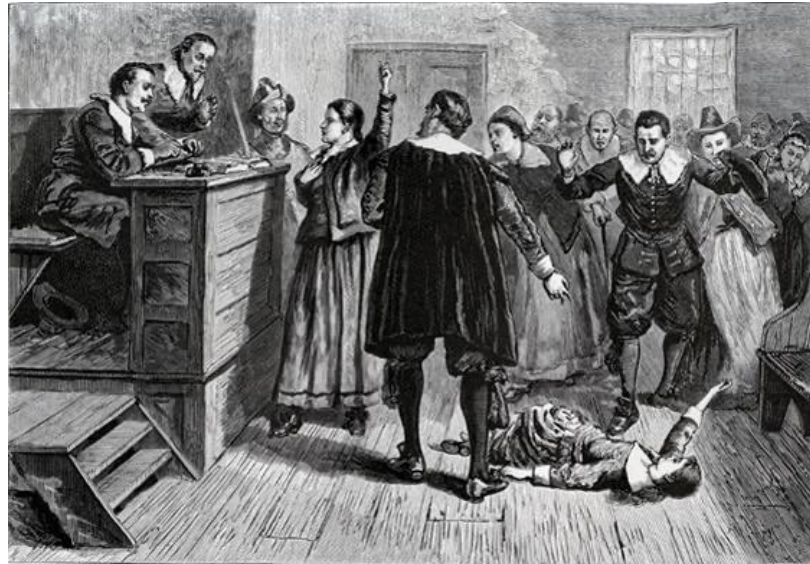


Fig. 13: Crafts, W. A. (1876) *Witchcraft at Salem Village*. Pioneers in the Settlement of America Vol. 1, Boston: Samuel Walker & Company

According to historian M. Brock, in a WIRED interview I sourced from YouTube (2024), America was late to the witch hunting craze as Europe and other areas of the world's witch hunts had ceased or declined almost a century before the Salem witch trials even began. Brock believes this is due to the English coming overseas to the so-called *New World*, to colonised lands in New England and other areas of America. Upon doing so they brought with them these beliefs of demonological ideas and fears. Brock also mentions a need at the time for communities to create a pure and godly society which encouraged people to be on the lookout for threats from the devil. The colonisers of these newfound lands believed the Native Indigenous people to be servants of the devil, especially after waves of New Frontier wars between the Indigenous tribes and colonist settlers.

If Columbus and other early explorers were surprised to find that the Antipodes existed, how much more surprising it was to learn that they were inhabited! Who were these people whose presence surprised, even

confounded, Europeans? Conjectures about their origins began in Columbus's time and have continued into our own. The Bible and Christian doctoring limited the extent of discussion. Indians must have originally migrated from the Old World, for it was impossible to believe that they were not descendants of the first Adam by way of Noah and the Ark. (Author, of *Satanising the American Indians*, 1994, p.603)

In a 621-page long journal titled *Satanising the American Indians* written by D. S. Lovejoy (1994) and published by The New England Quarterly, Lovejoy states the reason why Native Indians were targeted as witches, as they were deemed as ungodly by colonists who failed to discover the Natives origins. They believed that the Native Indians were part of a second creation and quickly deemed them as heretics. In the early years proponents suffered death for heresy as it was seen as a crime in a Christian-dominated world.

A prominent female figure and perceived originator of the Salem Witch Trials was an enslaved Native American Woman named Tituba who lived in Salem Village, Massachusetts in the late 1600s. Although I could find no real images of Tituba, her likeness has been recreated in many forms, from drawings, to book cover illustrations, to diorama recreations of her trials. (Fig. 14)

As Tituba was a slave in the Colonial Era she was dressed according to her occupation, economic power and social status. An article on *The Thread* discusses the type of attire worn by Slaves in this period. Their clothes were cheap and practical for work. Tituba would likely have worn calico cloaks, an apron and a headscarf. Tituba's outfit accurately reflects the depiction of a 17th century Witch as lower-class women were more vulnerable to *witch* accusations at this time.

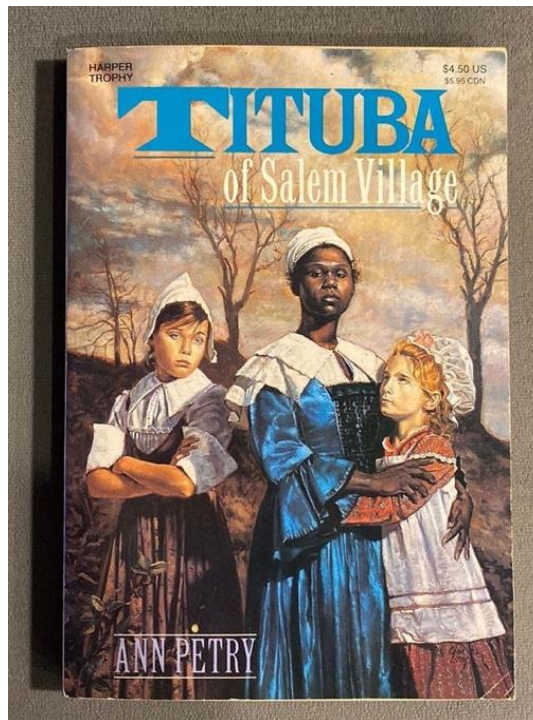


Fig. 14: Petry, A. (1997). *Tituba of Salem Village*. Illustration of Tituba on a Book Cover. https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/256388.Tituba_of_Salem_Village

In an article conducted by WAMS New York Historical Society titled *Life Story: Tituba* with the sub-heading *Survivor of the Salem Witch Trials*, an anonymous writer explains the main origin of the Salem Witch Trials. In 1692 a slave owner and reverend Samuel Parris observed some strange behaviour from his daughter Betty and his niece Abigail Williams who were both children at the time. Upon bringing them to see Dr. William Griggs for their fits of violent contortions and uncontrollable outbursts, they were diagnosed with bewitchment. The girls pointed their fingers at Tituba as the sorceress who had bewitched them. Tituba herself then claims that her slave master Mr. Samuel Parris had beaten her until she confessed to being a witch. She created the story in order to save herself, bringing down 2 more local women with her, a homeless beggar Sarah Good and a poor, elderly lady Sarah Osborn.



Fig. 15: Cullen Bryant, W. (1878) *Tituba and the children*. A Popular History of the United States. Vol. 2. Artist A. Fredricks.

I've cross-referenced my information on the *Life Story: Tituba* article by WAMS New York Historical Society with a similar article simply titled *Salem Witch Trials* on History.com, again with an anonymous writer or a team of editors and researchers. Both articles state that Tituba was later arrested, along with the two other accused women, and trialed for witchcraft. Evidently in a state of fear, Tituba confessed, while the others denied the claims. Tituba even gave false information and falsely accused others in order to spare her life as she became an important witness in the trials.

Many other locals accused their neighbours and peers of witchcraft, speculating that one was a witch due to very little evidence. If you as little as looked at an individual and that individual fell ill the next day, you would face *witch* accusations. This small action is what later saved the life of Tituba as the people of Salem believed that as a confessed witch, Tituba was no longer a threat to the community. In fact, no one who had actually confessed to the crime of witchcraft was executed during the Salem Witch Trials. Tituba outlived the witch trials due to her status as a witness and was later sold to another family as Parris refused to pay for her bail from prison. There is no more information about Tituba following this event.

This one trial began an onslaught of witch accusations and persecutions resulting in 19 deaths by hanging and an estimated 150 convictions of men, women and even children. The Historian M. Brock previously mentioned believes that 75-80% of those accused were women. The men that were accused were only guilty by association, meaning they had an already accused female relative such as a mother, daughter, sister or wife.



Fig. 16: Hytner, N. (1997) *The Crucible*. Play by Arthur Miller adapted to screen.

Play-write Arthur Miller dramatised the events of the Salem Witch Trials in his play *The Crucible* (1953) which was later adapted to the big screen in a 1996 movie with the same title. The film was directed by Nicholas Hytner and starred huge celebrities such as Daniel Day-Lewis, Winona Ryder and Paul Scofield. Bob Crowley was the costume designer for *The Crucible*. The cast wore bland, modest clothing resembling 17th Century Colonial fashion. Tituba stars in the film and is dressed as the rest of the lower-class women sporting a long grey dress and headscarf. (Fig. 16)

Black Magic

The practice of magic was begun centuries before the start of civilisation, and ever since then magicians and witches have been trying to recapture the attitudes and emotions of the original creators of their art. The first magic was crude ritual,

including dancing, chanting, striking objects, and pantomime, designed to influence nature by imitation: magic to keep away lightning and thunder; magic to prevent injury and death; magic to enable man to kill animals”(Author?, *The Complete Book of Black Magic and Witchcraft*, 2020, p.13)

The first chapter of *The Complete Book of Black Magic and Witchcraft* is titled *The Roots of Magic*. This chapter cleverly highlights the importance of magic and witchcraft for the foundations of humanity. Humans have always been profoundly spiritual creatures. Something in our nature allows us to believe in higher powers and a spiritual realm parallel to our own.

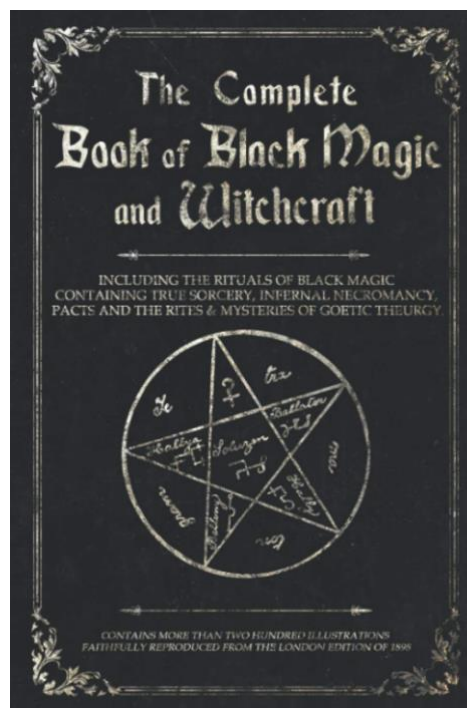


Fig. 17: Paulsen, K. (2020) *The Complete Book of Magic and Witchcraft*. Book cover. Accessed 23rd November 2024 from [https://www.amazon.com/Complete-Book-Black-Magic- Witchcraft/dp/B08CM69346](https://www.amazon.com/Complete-Book-Black-Magic-Witchcraft/dp/B08CM69346)

In the beginning of time, we began communicating with the earth through interpretive dance and the like in order to ask the higher power for help to guide us through the journey of life. This is much like our modern-day prayer. With little to no understanding of why the world came to be, why humans became so evolved and powerful, why water fell from the sky, and why the world would occasionally be consumed by darkness, humans sought answers from the higher power. This concept

has evolved over time with the belief that there is a spiritual creator greater than us. This spiritual belief has divided into many different religious organisations, with different rituals, ceremonies, places of worship and symbolism, but all religions have the same basis; that there are forces greater than we can even comprehend.

Voodoo's "Black" Magic – West Africa to Haiti (1700s) [Including images from 20th Century]

Black Magic is commonly associated with the Voodoo religion of Haitian culture. Voodoo meaning *spirit*. In a well written National Geographic article on Voodoo in Haiti, written by Sharon Guynuo, I read that *Mamaissii Vivian Dansi Hounon*, a member of OATH (The Organisation of African Traditional Healers) in Martinez, Georgia, believes Voodoo to be one of the worlds oldest ancestral, nature- honouring traditions. The same article proceeds to prove VooDoos immense popularity by stating that some anthropologists believe VooDoos roots in Benin (formerly Dahomey), West Africa may go back a whopping 6,000 years. It is also estimated that 60 million people practice Voodoo worldwide today.

White magic seeks to reach backwards into an outgrown phase of evolution and release forces which have long since been equilibrated into a static force... In Black Occultism a breaking down of organised form into lower types of forces takes place (Fortune, D. from *The Training and Work of an Inmate*, Referenced in *The Complete Book Of Black Magic and Witchcraft*, 1995, p.5)

A subsection of witchcraft which is typically associated with evil is known as black magic. Black magic is magic used specifically for selfish purposes with evil intent. It involves the practice of summoning demons or evil spirits and casting spells with the intent to harm others, utilising supernatural or occult powers to do so.



Fig. 18: Jallot, N./Gamma-Rapho. (1992) *An engraving representing a voodoo rite in Haiti.*

Fig. 18 depicts a VooDoo ritual. In this chapter I cover the demonisation of alternate religions by Christianity. For example, I will cover the satanic misuse of the pentagram in *Wicca*. Christianity demonised the idea of ritual despite consuming the “body and blood of christ”. The image of chanting in a circle is represented in satanism and subsequently witchcraft. The fear was that witches would gather at night and communicate with Satan by chanting in circles and reciting spells (Fig. 19). However, this is a brutal misrepresentation of VooDoo.



Fig. 19: Anonymous. (1720) *Witches and devils dancing in a circle*. Woodcut. Provided and maintained by Wellcome Collection.

The Voodoo religion combines Roman Catholic Practices with traditional African Magical and religious rites, including sorcery and spiritual possession. The National Geographic article as referenced before, *Inside the Voodoo Rituals of Haiti*, quotes *Lynne Warburg*, a photographer who documented Haitian Voodoo for over a decade: “One common saying is that Haitians are 70 percent Catholic, 30 percent Protestant, and 100 percent Voodoo” (2002, As stated in Warburg book *Voodoo: The History of a Religion*.)

I had significant difficulty trying to find an official picture of Lynne Warburg and her Haitian photography despite apparently being in Haiti for a decade. Surprisingly, I also struggled to find images of her work with proper titles and dates despite her being mentioned in a very reliable source, National Geographic.

I stumbled upon 2 instagram accounts claiming to be her but I determined instagram to be an unreliable source. However, one account named @BlondVodou claiming to

be Lynne Warburg stated in her bio that *Blond Vodou* was a name the Haitians gave her in her time in Haiti. With extensive research I found images of the same blond woman online and on the 2 accounts but could not verify their authenticity. I also found watermarked images of Haiti from an online portfolio with her name on them.



Fig. 20: Warburg, L. (No Date Confirmed). *The Photographic Art of Lynne Warburg*.

Accessed on the 11th of January 2025. WordPress.

<https://photographybylynnewarburg.wordpress.com/2011/10/09/hello-world/>

Haitian Vodoo is said to have begun as an underground activity according to the National Geographic Article previously mentioned. Guynuo, of National Geographic, begins by reciting VooDoos abhorrent history:

During the 1700's thousands of West African Slaves were shipped to Haiti to work on French plantations. The slaves were baptised as Roman Catholics upon their arrival in the West Indies. Their Traditional African Religious practices were viewed as a threat to the colonial system and were forbidden. Practitioners were imprisoned, whipped, or hung. (2004)

The West African slaves were stripped of their culture and religious beliefs to break down their psyche and abolish individuality. This has been a common submission tactic utilised throughout history to shape a marginalised community into the form of

their colonisers, forcing them to become one with their new community. Any resentment toward the new regime imposed by the colonisers was seen as an act of rebellion. The Catholic faith was strong almost globally in this time period. This point is backed up by an article titled *Rosaries and Revolution: Father Philemon, Catholicism and the Haitian Revolution (2015)*, by Age of Revolutions where they acknowledge the Catholic churches long history in the French Atlantic World. The article which is written and edited by a team of people on the site *Age of Revolution* believes that Christianity had reached West Africa well before the population had become victims of slavery, sold to wealthy white people in the Caribbean. Christianity is said to have already been introduced to some of the population, particularly the West African Coast, by Portuguese Captains in 1471.

In the 1700s religion gave purpose to a life stricken by famine and disease. Christianity was growing exponentially. The Bible was law. The fear of God was instilled in its devotees, leading people of the time to take extreme measure to protect themselves and their community from the devil's coercion. Unfortunately, this contributed to the mass slaughter and enslavement of many communities due to their “dark” spiritual beliefs

Reading *The USA and the Haitian Revolution* by Office of the Historian, the anonymous writer discusses that in 1791 the Haitians revolted by practicing their Voodoo in secret and carrying on their traditions. Meanwhile, in the North of France the Haitian revolution began with the signal of VooDoo Priest *Dutty Boukman*, and within 10 days the slaves who had suffered at the hands of their French captures had taken over the whole North of France. An eager army of up to 10,000 fought bravely for their freedom and their right to autonomy. They pillaged and burned plantations, punished their ex-masters, and by 1792 they controlled a third of the country. Image 6 below depicts this rebellion which evidentially was a rebellion which would only succeed with violence. However, the Haitians fought for a noble cause. Their bravery and strength in numbers allowing them to walk as free people, feeling safe in their own skin.



Fig. 21: (2015). *Haitian Revolution: The most successful slave revolt in the History*. Article. Accessed 1st December 2024. <https://blacklegacy.co/blogs/news/haitian-revolution>

Western culture's view of VooDoo involving devil worship, human sacrifice and VooDoo dolls is one rooted deep in systemic racism, West African oppression and ancestral slavery. This misrepresentation likens them to black witches.

"Voodoo, and its symbols like the Voodoo doll, has been misunderstood and misrepresented in Western culture. It's often wrongly linked with dark magic or evil practices, when in fact it is a religion rooted in African spiritual traditions focused on healing and ancestral reverence." (Dr. K. McCarthy Brown, anthropologist and author of *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. 2011, third edition.)

This misconception merely demonises the practitioners of VooDoo and their nature-worshipping religion. The word VooDoo is even the westernised way of spelling the word, with Vodou being the correct spelling. In Haitian VooDoo rituals, the VooDoo doll is indeed used, but not in the way Western culture believes. In the article simply titled *Are VooDoo Dolls Real?* (2024), writer Catherine Breyer confesses that despite

the popular belief that Voodoo dolls possess evil powers to harm their intended target, the Voodoo Doll actually acts as a messenger between Vodouists and the dead.

The doll is placed near a grave or hung by trees as part of this ritual. Often known as a *pwen doll* in Voodoo rituals, the doll's purpose is for healing, guidance and spiritual connection.



Fig. 22: Vandyke, I. (No Date). *Tourist Souvenirs of Voodoo Dolls Play into the Myth that African Voodoo Uses Them for Black Magic*. Accessed the 13th of January 2024.

<https://www.wildimages-phototours.com/photography-tours/benin-photography-tour-voodoo/>

As depicted in Fig. 22 dolls used in Voodoo worship take on many shapes and depending on what/who the Voodoo worshipers want to connect with or represent. In this case the ceremony below in Fig. 23 celebrates feminine divinity, as stated in a Wild Images article about touring in Benin in West Africa, where photographer Inger Vandyke captured this moment on camera. There are no clear dates on the images present on the site. There are only a series of exquisite images with lengthy descriptions.

Vandyke explains that “In a largely patriarchal society, the presence of Guèlèdè represents a feminine opposition and is a reminder to the Yoruba people that the

seriousness of life needs to lighten up a little at times.” This event involved drumming, dancing and a blessing of the guardian Guèlèdè. The Voodoo faith focuses more on unity, equality and nature-based worship. Women are evidently equally worshipped and respected in their culture.



Fig. 23: Vandyke, I. (No Date). *The Wild Dancing Dog at a Guèlèdè Ceremony*. Accessed the 13th of January 2024.

<https://www.wildimages-phototours.com/photography-tours/benin-photography-tour-voodoo/>

The National geographic article continues as Guynuo explains VooDoos rituals and rites. Voodoo practitioners direct their rituals and energy towards the spirits, instead of believing solely in one God as the one all mighty and eternal being. They believe that their chief God, *Bondieu*, does not interfere in people's daily lives, so they seek answers by connecting to the spirit world instead.

The practitioners achieve this by communicating directly to the spirits through dance, trance, and rites. Drums play syncopated rhythms mimicking a beating pulse, as attendees dance in a circle. Sacred symbols are scrawled in dust and rum is poured on the ground to honour the spirits. It is believed that during this ceremony an attendee can go into a trance, supposedly possessed by a spirit as they continue dancing.



Fig. 24: Vandyke, I. (No Date). *A VooDoo Princess Trance Dances during the Ceremony to Initiate Young Girls*. Accessed the 13th of January 2024.

<https://www.wildimages-phototours.com/photography-tours/benin-photography-tour-voodoo/>

During such ceremonies the *houngan* or *mambo* (priest or priestess) is believed to sacrifice a chicken or another animal to the *Lao*, or spirit. The attendees then ask the spirits for guidance and good health. The *Lao* communicates through the possessed, or tranced individual and sometimes proclaims prophecies, shares advice, or warns of imminent danger. Alternatively, messages can come through the priest or priestess during the ceremony or later presented to them in a dream.

Although the houngan and mambo don't claim to be witches, their actions arguably fit into the witch category as they are the messenger between the living and the dead, communicating with spirits and leading sacrifices. Historically these innocent religious practitioners with no relation to satanic worship have faced witchcraft allegations that resulted in mass executions. The peaceful nature of the Voodoo religion goes unnoticed by many in the Western world. Equality thrives between men and women, young and old in their culture. Community's the foundation of it. Voodoo King Daagbo Hounan ("The one who owns the seas") takes pride in his religion stating,

Voodoo is more than a belief. It is the hope of women who cannot conceive children, of men who cannot find work and elders who cannot find peace. It restores our faith, protects our land and brings the cool breeze (2015)

In the next chapter I will be discussing witches and witchcraft: empowerment. I honourably mention prominent female Voodoo figure, Marie Laveau and her immense power in New Orleans in the late 1700s. I also analysis how the 1990s feminist movement reclaimed and redefined the word witch, as powerful women stood up against oppressive titles.

Chapter Three: Women and Witchcraft: Empowerment

I am beginning chapter 3 with prominent female figure, Marie Laveau, the Voodoo queen of New Orleans, America. Despite her living in a time where most women and people of colour were oppressed, she was a well-respected spiritual guider and healer to many. Following the West African slaves escaping from Haiti, they sought refuge in New Orleans. With them they brought their rich Voodoo culture which flourished. The spread of Voodoo to New Orleans and the inevitable overpowering of the Voodoo culture created a safe and inclusive space for people of colour. A place where racial bias was uncommon in the community. This is a pivotal point in history for the reclamation of the word witch as Laveau used this title with pride.

I am also discussing how the 90s female empowerment movement changed the course of witchcraft forever. Discouraging women from feeling shame in using their voice and reclaiming the word witch as a term of empowerment instead of oppression. I will explain the practices involved with modern day witchcraft and encourage other women to take pride in their power.

VooDoos “Black” Magic - New Orleans (1700s – 1800s)

When West African slaves fled from Haiti following the 1791 slave revolt, they sought refuge in New Orleans, Louisiana bringing their rich Voodoo culture with them. They too merged their religious rituals and practices with those of the Catholic locals. Now free from slavery, these followers took the opportunity to expand their religious beliefs and make them an important part of their culture. A huge part of the population of New Orleans were descendants of ancestral slavery which brought a sense of community and safety for people of colour in the area.

A prominent figure synonymous with Voodoo culture in New Orleans is the Voodoo queen, *Marie Laveau* (1794-1881). She was a free woman of colour descended from enslaved Africans and French colonists who went on to become a powerful spiritual leader and feminist icon. Her power and influence are highly commendable to this

day, as being both black and female in America made her vulnerable to discrimination.



Fig. 25: Frank Schneider (1835) *Marie Laveau*. Painting. Louisiana State Museum.

The New Orleans official website aided me a lot in researching Marie Laveau and Voodoo culture in New Orleans. Despite being part of a marginalised community, Laveau became a dedicated practitioner of Voodoo, a powerful healer, an herbalist and an entrepreneur. She was a prominent religious leader and community activist who many sought help, healing and advice from. Laveau became a hairdresser on the side to create economic and financial stability for herself and her family, catering for clients both white and black, wealthy and working class. Many wealthy, powerful, political affluent individuals would pay for her personal advice, protection against evil and healing powers.

Other than her profound knowledge of medicine and healing remedies which many respected her for, Laveau was also a devout Catholic. She also took on an alternative religious practice and merged the 2, such individuals who practiced both Voodoo and Catholicism in this region were known as *hybrids*.



Fig. 26: Hammersmith, P. (1891) *Portrait of an Elderly Woman at Congo Square*. Photo. The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Laveau would frequent Congo Square in New Orleans where black locals would sell their goods in markets every Sunday. Here she would offer advice, sell bags of spiritual and healing herbs known as *gris-gris* and partake in celebrations. Legend claims that it was here in Congo Square that Laveau would sing and perform her spiritual celebrations, conjuring spirits and becoming filled with *Lao*. Laveau passed away peacefully in her St. Ann cottage but the mark she made on New Orleans has never been forgotten.



Fig. 27: Gstohl, M. (2009) *Marie Leveau's Tomb*. Photo. Atlas Obscura.

Even in death the mystery surrounding Laveau immense power and influence lives on as her tomb is laden with Xs in groups of 3s, believed to represent a wish that Laveau will grant for you from her grave. A circle around an X on the grave symbolises a wish that has come to fruition.

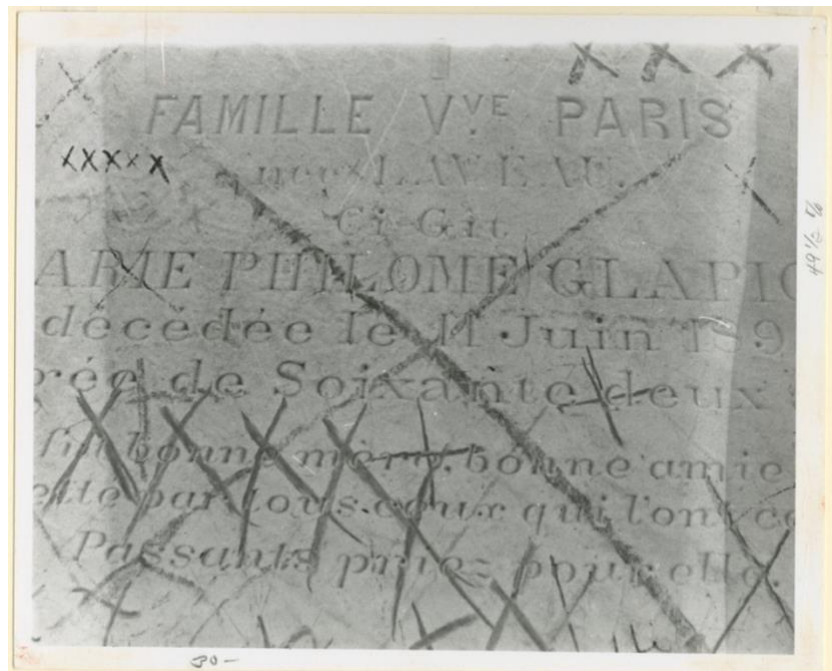


Fig. 28: Kleck, D. M. (1974) *Crosses on Laveau's Tomb*. Photo. The Historic New Orleans Collection

Now Marie Laveau's legacy has become a commodity. Ghost tours frequent the city she resided in, claiming that on a dark, desolate night in New Orleans French Quarter her spirit can be spotted roaming her tomb in St. Louis Cemetery. *Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo* located in New Orleans French Quarter is a religious goods store which contains unique items for practice or ceremony and offers psychic readings to those open to it. Although not believed to house any of Laveau's actual religious items, the namesake alone proves how prominent of a figure she was in the Voodoo community, the black community and an inspiration for women around the world.

Wicca, Pagan Revival and Modern-day Witchcraft: 1940s Britain - Now

Wicca,

The religious cult of modern witchcraft. (OED, 2011. Pg. 1649)

In some culture's witchcraft can be seen as a positive nature-based religious practice, often associated with the pagan derived tradition and commonly known as Wicca. Wicca's beliefs are heavily inspired by extinct pre-christian religions of Europe, North Africa and Western Asia. It is believed that one major influence on modern Wicca derives from the British Occult revival of the late 1800s, which saw the rise of secret societies such as *The Freemasons*

Ethan Doyle White (2025) of Britannica claims that these occult groups drew inspiration from medieval magical texts such as *The Key of Solomon*, which is a medieval grimoire, or book of magic, dating back to the 15th century.

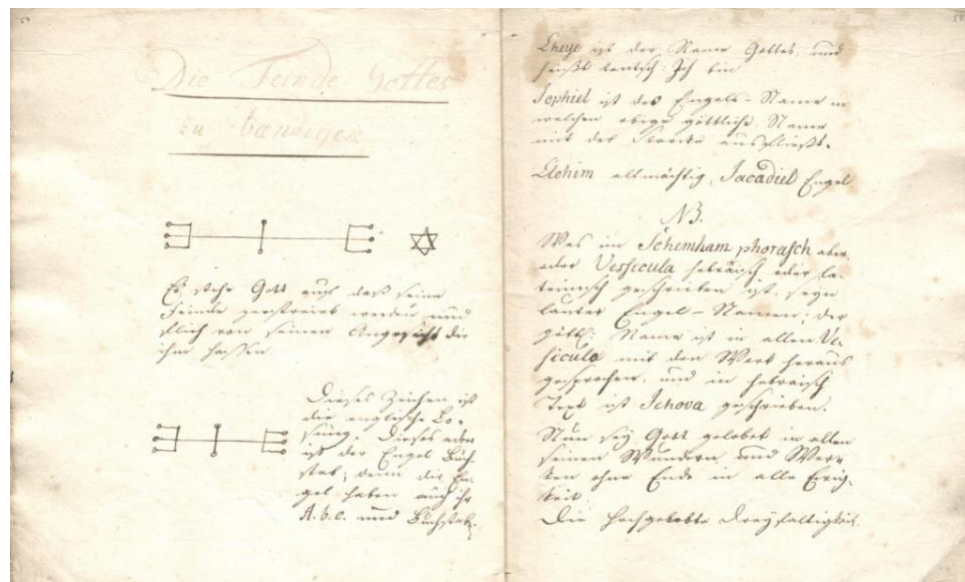


Fig. 29: King Solomon (1400s). *The Clavicula Salomonis (The Key of Solomon)*. Queens University Belfast.

Modern day witchcraft or Wicca was founded by British native Gerald Gardner in the 1940s. Gardner took inspiration from British occultism and began what seems like a cult but later became a widespread, rapid growing witchcraft-based religion. Gardner explains that Wicca is part of the larger contemporary pagan movement, based on practices which predate christian religions and cultures.



Fig. 30: Cardy, M. (2017) *Samhain Celebration in Glastonbury, Somerset, England*. Britannica.

Wicca spread to America in the 1960s. Second-wave feminism inspired Hungarian émigré Zsuzsanna Budapest to create Dianic Wicca (1971) as a women's tradition placing central focus on the Goddess. The inclusive nature of Wicca even spread to the LGBT community when Eddie Buczynski established the Minoan Brotherhood (1977) as a Wiccan tradition for gay and bisexual men.

Witchcraft is an old religion, and it is the one that has been practiced in many countries throughout the world in one form or another. It is not a new cult, but a survival from ancient times (G. Gardener, 1954. *Witchcraft Today*.)

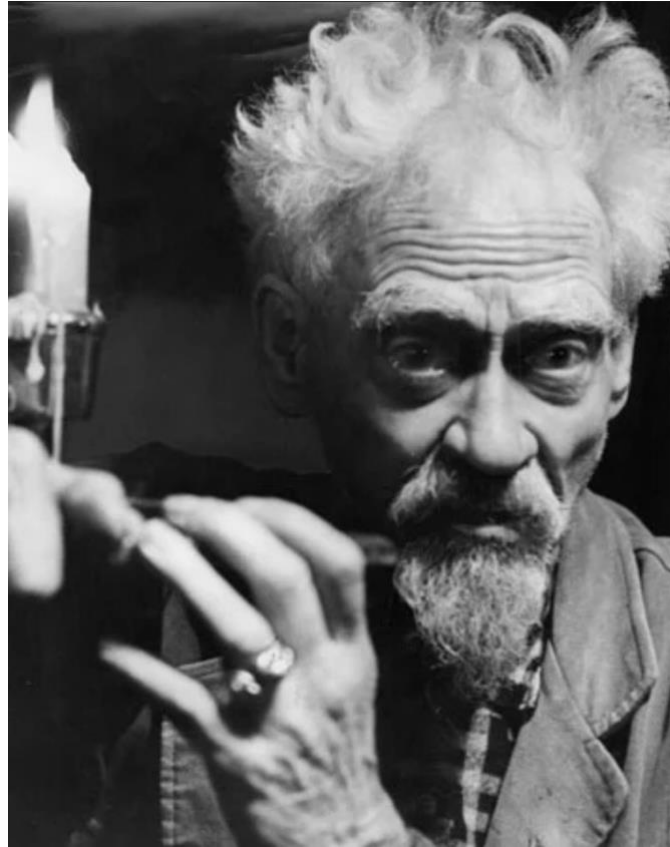


Fig. 31: Jackson, P. (1963) *Gerald Gardner*. Photo. Britannica.

Wiccans usually identify themselves as witches due to their rituals of spell casting, herbal potion making and manifestation rituals. Although they're far from the broom-riding, cackling witches depicted in the media, they identify as witches due to their belief to have supernatural powers and deeper connections to spirits.

E. Doyle White of Britannica explains how the Wiccan subsection of witchcraft is primarily nature based, believing that the world is sacred and that the natural cycle of birth to death observed in the world around us carries a profoundly spiritual meaning. This belief system aligns with the more modern-day beliefs and practices of witchcraft. Wicca involves spiritual and herbal healing, living off the land,

meditation and honouring the elements – earth, air, fire, water and spirit, and their associated directions north, south, east, west and centre.



Fig. 32: Huanaco, F. (2019) *The Elements of Wiccan Wisdom*. Spells8.

<https://spells8.com/topic/elements-of-witchcraft-wisdom/>

Wicca uses cardinal direction, elements, ritual tools, coloured candles and natural plants/herbs as symbols in rituals. Different combinations of these represent different spells, intentions and questions for the spirits.

A Wiccan Living article with no discernible writer further describes the rituals Wiccans partake in. Wiccan rituals do not require a specific place of worship and typically take place in the practitioner's home, most often at night. The individual, or individuals, partaking in a ritual must sit in a circle with an alter at one end.

Wiccan rituals commonly include ritual tools such as incense, candles, a chalice, a wand, a pentacle, and a knife known as an Athane. These tools are used to focus and direct spiritual energy, with the purpose of connecting with the divine. The tools also often represent the elements. The Athane is a black-handled, double-edged dagger which represents fire. The chalice represents the element, water. The wand can take any form and represents the element, air. The pentacle typically represents earth. The elements can be represented by other ritual tools, such as a bell representing air or the candles representing fire. Whatever way a Wiccan wants to worship is valid, it is just vital that all elements are represented for the ritual to commence.

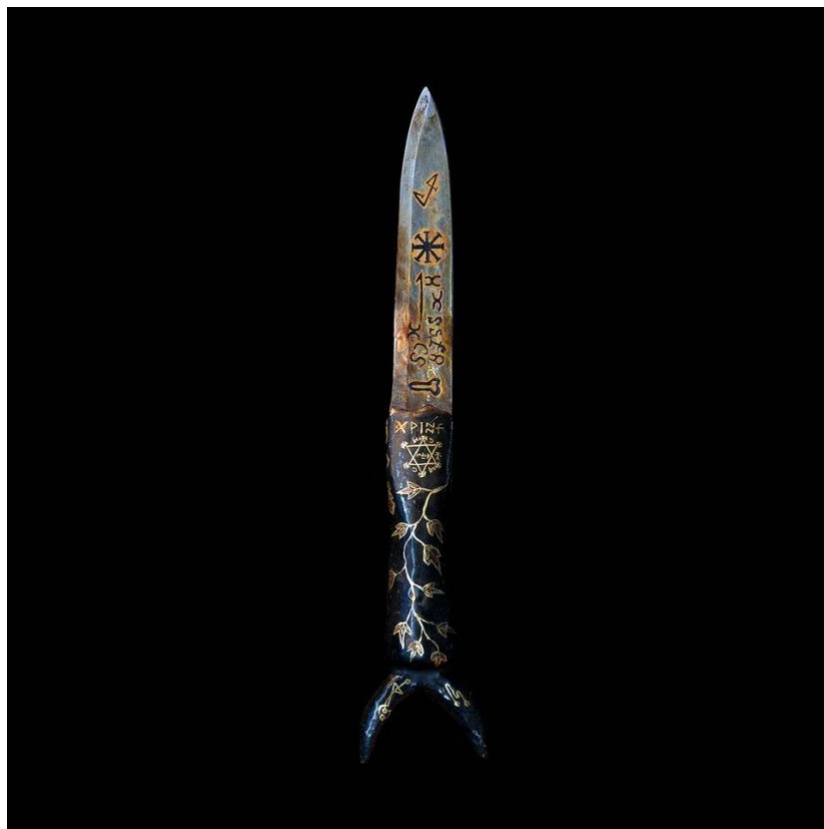


Fig. 33: Hannant, S. (2017) *An Athane (Ceremonial Knife) that Belonged to the Late Brownie Pate, A Modern Witch*. The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic. <https://museumofwitchcraftandmagic.co.uk/>

Other aspects of Wicca are derived from Celtic Pagan traditions, such as worshipping nature, seasonal rituals and observing seasonal and moon cycles. Celtic Paganism is an indigenous religion which flourished in the Celtic regions such as the UK and Ireland before the rise of Christianity. Celtic paganism is not the same as Wicca, but

parallels can definitely be drawn. One major similarity is the annual calendar. Celtic Pagan tradition honours the seasons.

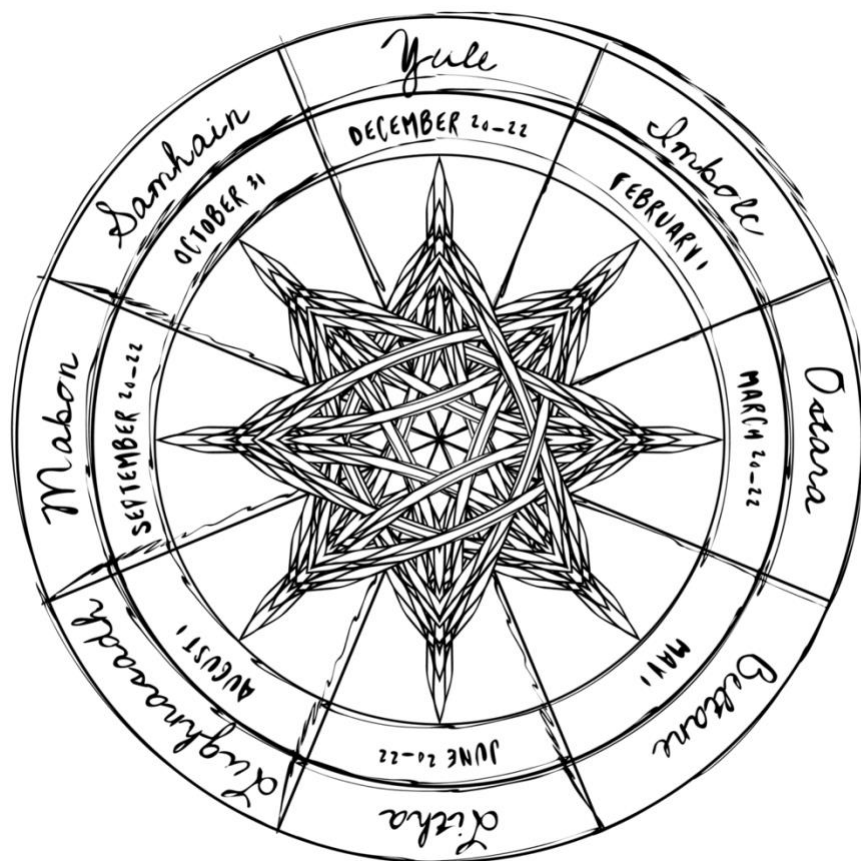


Fig. 34: Anonymous. (2022) *Ancient Celtic Holidays: The Circle of Life*. The Celtic Croft.

<https://kilts-n-stuff.com/9-ancient-celtic-holidays-to-celebrate-this-year/>

There is special emphasis on the changing of the seasons and harvest, honouring 4 special occasions:

Imbolc marks the beginning of spring, the halfway point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. This day marks the feast day of St. Brigid in Ireland and represents new beginning and growth.

Bealtaine is Celtic May Day, halfway between the Spring Equinox and Summer Solstice. Bonfires are lit to represent the bright summer ahead.

Lughnasa marks is the Harvest Festival. The ancient Celts celebrated Lughnasa with competitions, fairs and feasts.

Samhain, known globally as Halloween, marks the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter. Samhain has profound spiritual meaning as it's believed the boundaries between our world and the spiritual world are thinner.

The Wiccan calendar echoes the same annual traditions, worshipping and following the seasons just as the Celts have. R. Scanner of *The Pagan Grimoire* (2017) covers the use of the Sabbaths in Wicca.

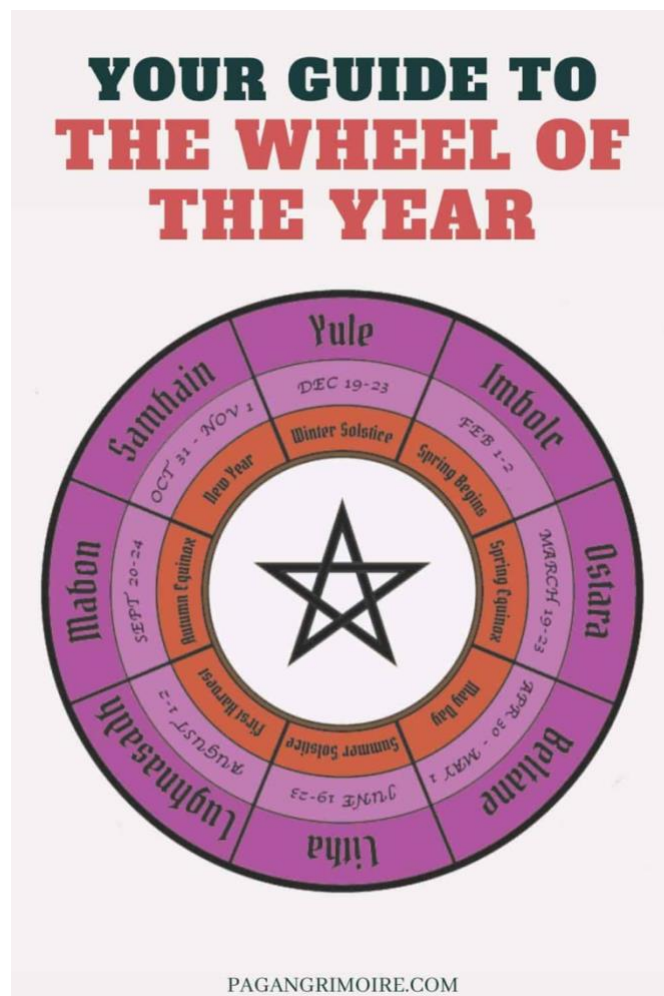


Fig. 35: Swanner, R. (2023) *The Wiccan Wheel of the Year*. The Pagan Grimoire.

<https://www.pagangrimoire.com/wheel-of-the-year/>

Evidentially Wiccans celebrate the same calendar as the Celtic Pagans. The names of the holidays are even still written in Irish. The Celtic calendar brandishes a Celtic knot, a compass-like design or the tree of life in the centre of the calendar. Wiccan calendars have replaced this centre piece with the Pentacle.

The pentacle has been demonised by Christianity as Witchcraft threatens the idea of Catholicism monotheistic beliefs. Witchcraft encourages power to the individual instead of solely God being Almighty. The pentacle or pentagram is commonly depicted in satanic worship which is believed to be propaganda from the Catholic Church.

For the Celts, the marking of seasonal changes was highly important as their agricultural community depended on it to decide when to plow, sow, harvest and rest. However, the Wiccans use this calendar to congregate, celebrate nature and share their spiritual energy with the millions of Wiccans celebrating worldwide.

Modern day witchcraft, involves meditation, manifestation, spell casting, auras, angel numbers and the beliefs that crystals harbour special healing powers. Tarot cards and crystals are utilised to ask for spiritual guidance.



Fig. 36: Viva Luna Studios. (2023) *Tarot Cards*. SLJ

Modern day Feminism

Witchcraft and Wiccan culture rose again after the 1990s witch craze which was pioneered by American film makers and their fascination for the creation of female-lead witch-themed movies and Tv programmes. *Charmed* (1998-2006) was a supernatural fantasy show about 3 sister witches who fight against the forces of evil (Dir. Constance M. Burge). It was popular due to its 8 seasons and 7.2/10 rating on IMDB. The most well-known witch themed show of the 90s was *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003, Dir. Jonathan Schmock and Nell Scovell). It ran for 7 seasons after being based off a comic of the same name and was remade in 2018 as *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (Dir. Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa) due to its emended popularity.

It's the notion that these words that have been used against women were taken back in and refashioned into something that we could use that would be

positive (Professor Helen A. Berger. Ref. by K. Ryan, 2023. Brandeis University)

Modern day *witches* are simply powerful women who have withdrawn the definition of a strong women being malicious and replaced it with empowerment and pride. They have reclaimed the oppressing word that deemed them untrustworthy, ungodly and cunning in the past. Why should an outspoken, educated and independent person be silenced because of their gender? Women take pride in their power and use their voice to encourage others globally to stand up to oppression.

The reclaiming of the *witch* began with the 90s Female Empowerment Movement and the “third wave” of feminism according to the appropriately titled article *Feminism: The Third Wave* (2020) written by Kerri Lee Alexander on the site *WomensHistory*. Firstly, the article mentions a prominent female punk movement *Riot Grrrl* (1990), a surge of underground feminist punk bands in the United States of America, who mixed punk rock with politics and extreme feminism. They would express their rage for certain issues such as sexuality, patriarchy, rape, domestic violence, anarchism and female empowerment. These kinds of bands still exist today and give women a powerful voice to spread awareness to a serious problem while simultaneously letting out all their angst.



Fig. 37: Riot Grrrl (2014). *Riot Across the World (A Tribute to Pussy Riot)*. Album Cover.

<https://open.spotify.com/artist/163uVRmoHnvA9Tz9cDA8Gs?si=vZSRaWnqSkG6dIpv40hfZw>

A personal favourite of mine is the band *Le Tigre* (1998) consisting of 3 strong outspoken women from New York City. To this day they have 2.5 million monthly listeners on the top music platform Spotify, with songs such as *Deceptacon*, *Phanta* and *Hot Topic*. They express how they feel in their songs, almost shouting their lyrics to put their point across of being enraged by the trials and tribulations associated with being a woman in this male dominated world.

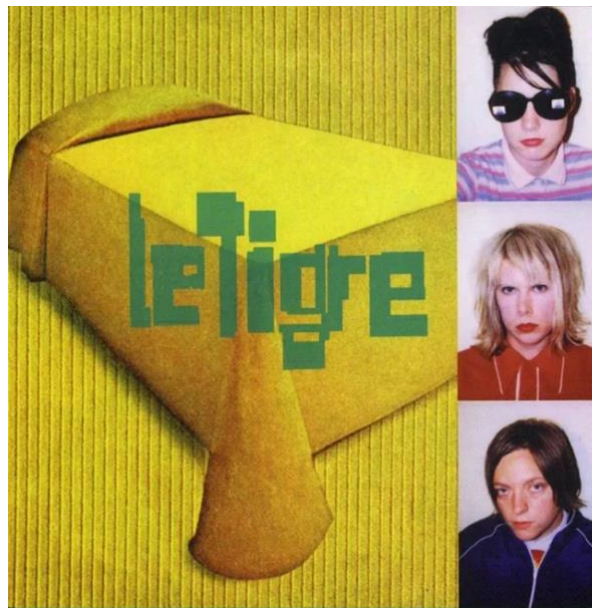


Fig. 38: Le Tigre (1999). Album Cover.

<https://open.spotify.com/artist/2n6FviARgtjjimZXu18uRM?si=z1EqoJ2WTciUyoz8Ma-QJg>

Le Tigre's song *Hot Topic* mentions prominent female figures such as Yoko Ono and Gretchen Phillips, encouraging them not to stop doing what they do no matter what society says. “You're getting old, is what they'll say”. Highlighting a major issue in society where famous female figures seem to have an “expiry date” based on their youth and beauty.

Don't you stop...So many rules and so much opinion...So much shit to give in, give in to...So much bullshit that we don't give in. (Le Tigre, 1999. *Hot Topic. Lyrics*)

The Womens History article (K. L. Alexander) then highlights a key case that took place in the early 1990s that could have encouraged the third wave of feminism.

One being the case of Anita Hill (1991) which sparked national feminist support as Hill testified against a Supreme Court nominee, Clarence Thomas, for sexual harassment. In a world where women were still silenced, Hills bravery encouraged other women to use their voice and speak up against the aggressors. Even as a minority, not only female but also a woman of colour, Hills fought for justice. She claimed that while she was working at the Department of Education and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission when Thomas would frequently make sexually inappropriate comments towards her. Despite her testimony, Thomas was confirmed as a Supreme Court Justice after Hills three-day hearings.



Fig. 39: Jenkins, R. M. (1991). *Anita Hill Testifying*. Court Photograph.

Following this cruel injustice, a group of African American feminists and historians across the USA collectively raised \$50,000 to purchase a full-page ad in the newspaper *The New York Times*. They titled their manifesto *Africa American Women in Defence of Ourselves* which was then signed by an astonishing 1,600 women including prominent black feminist historians.

This case along with the new wave of feminist punk bands and strong female activists was a turning point in female activism. Women proceeded to push for positions of power in political leadership leading to the 90s being labelled “The Year of the Women” when 27 women were elected for congress which was more than any previous decade.



Fig. 40: Anonymous, (1995). *Demonstrators participating in the National Organisation for Women's Rally for Women's Lives.*

Like any word weaponised against a marginalised community the feminist movement reclaimed the word *witch*. This encourages strength, rebellion and self-empowerment.

Reclaiming a word destructs negative stereotypes associated with it and allows room for reinterpretation. We have seen this happen across many marginalised

community's such as the gay community and the black community. Both communities similarly took words once used to oppress them and proudly flaunted their status as the slur they were viciously labelled as. Using these harsh words within the marginalised community is like laughing in oppressions face, taking the power away from the word.

The feminist movement reinterpreted the word *witch* and used it as a symbol of female resistance. The word *witch* was once a tool to condemn powerful, educated or outspoken women in the past. The feminist movement took this powerful word and flipped it on its head. Why is a powerful woman synonymous with evil? If the word *witch* is associated with a powerful woman than it should be embraced.

The word *witch* has always had power, but it's when we take it back and wear it proudly that we begin to fully understand its potential” – (Money, T., 2020, *The Witches Path: Advancing Your Craft at Any Level.p.?*)

With the new empowering meaning behind the term *witch*, an influx of witch-themed movies and TV shows with female leads flooded the mainstream media.

Popular witch-themed Films/TV shows from the 90s include *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996 – 2003) Dir. Jonathan Schmock and Nell Scovell, *The Craft* (1996) Dir. Andrew Fleming, and *Hocus Pocus* (1993) Dir. Kenny Ortega. The portrayal of strong female leaders labelled as witches encouraged the next generation of women to take pride in their power. Encouraging them to be powerful, educated, experimental and to find strength in their voice.

With the rise of the internet feminism thrives online. The creation of feminist witch-themed art is prevalent in certain online communities. The online art Ive sourced from sites like reddit make light of the situation and laugh in the face of the patriarchy, with humorous captions like “Girls will be girls” or “Hex the patriarchy.



Fig. 41: Chiara, LB. (2024) *Hex the Patriarchy*. Digital Drawing. Sourced from Instagram @chiaralbart. <https://www.instagram.com/chiaralbart?igsh=MWJqZ21nZWU3aDg2OA==>

The practice of modern-day witchcraft allows women to feel powerful in a patriarchal system that's set them up for failure. I believe it's the internet that's allowed feminists voices to reach around the world and touch the hearts of many young girls who believe they don't deserve their basic human rights merely because of their gender. If being female, educated, outspoken and independent makes me a witch, then I'll hold that title with pride.

Conclusion

I began this thesis as a study of *The Salem Witch trials* but with extensive research into the topic of witchcraft, I was led down a rather interesting rabbit hole of repetitive female oppression under the guise of witchcraft allegations. This spurred me on to research various topics such as the demonisation of VooDoo, Wiccan culture and the revival of witchcraft pioneered by feminism.

In conclusion women have suffered for centuries at the hands of a domineering male society. Only in recent years have women been given a platform to speak up for what they believe in. The many protests throughout history have been fundamental to speaking out about the very serious issue of female oppression. Shame thrives in silence, and it is up to the next generation to break the cycle of gender-based violence once and for all.

Countless times in history women have faced gender-based violence and oppression. Men set up a society full of war, violence and systematic oppression. They emphasised the fear of anything out of the social norm, deeming it as an act of the devil. Women fell victim to *witch* accusations because they were never given a platform to speak out and stand up for themselves. They were labelled as mouthy, untrustworthy and deceitful, only useful as a man's domestic servant. This idea of women being weaker and more susceptible to the devil's coercion has been replicated through time. Men have even perverted the idea of witchcraft. They've used sex as a weapon to objectify women and strip them of any dignity or status they have left. In art, their perverted view of women is plastered on canvases for their own viewing pleasure. They condemn the woman for being perceived. This echoes modern day where women still suffer this same injustice. Where clothing or the lack of is an “invitation” for unwanted sexual misconduct.

In a society where women are objectified, dismissed, harassed and even underpaid solely due to their gender, we find power in witchcraft. The feeling of having a power greater than mankind can fathom allows women to manifest a better future, seek spiritual guidance and find solace in an ancient practice.

The continuous mention of the Catholic faith as being the aggressors in many of these historical witch events shocked me, yet I wasn't surprised. As a baptised Catholic myself I could now understand how Christianity grew in popularity, especially since they mass murdered anyone who didn't agree with their beliefs. My research has given me an interest in going back to my roots as an Irish native and researching Celtic Paganism further. I adore the idea of worshipping nature, the world and feminine Gods. I'd also like to highlight the very important issue that is still prevalent in 2025, religious based violence. As I was writing my thesis and researching the oppression of non-traditional and indigenous religions, war wreaked havoc on Gaza. It pains me to believe that an evil act like the attempted elimination of an entire community can ring true to modern day. Although the war in Gaza isn't exactly religious-based, I am appalled to see innocent people losing their lives like the events I've researched from centuries ago.

Ultimately, they didn't burn witches, they burnt women. As a strong feminist I am so passionate about this topic that I couldn't stop writing. I've exceeded my word count many times. I delved so deep into certain topics that I felt like this thesis would never end. I even thought about writing a second personal thesis on all the areas I couldn't cover. I had to remove an entire chapter about film just to fit my word count. The history was just so captivating and so unbelievably brutal I just couldn't look away. I hope this thesis succeeded in sharing my desire for equality for every gender, race and religion globally.

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