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**From Terrifying Witch Trials to Fairy Tales for Children:  
How the Portrayal of Witches Changed in English Literature**

Bakalářská práce

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I confirm that I wrote the submitted thesis myself and integrated corrections and suggestions of improvement of my supervising professor. I also confirm that the thesis includes a complete list of sources and literature cited.

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## Introduction

In order to avoid facing the realities of human evil, people have tamed the witch and turned her into a comedy, dressing her in a peaked cap and setting her on a broom for the amusement of children on Halloween. We can convince our children and ourselves that there is no such thing as a witch. However, there is, or at least there was. A phenomenon that seized people's minds for centuries, from the most illiterate peasants to the most competent scientists or philosophers. This led to the torture and death of hundreds of thousands of people, and it is neither a joke nor an illusion. The study of witchcraft is therefore of fundamental significance for understanding human behaviour. It illuminates theology as well as social psychology. It is essential in the study of folk religion, the Church, religious oppression, and history and sociology.<sup>1</sup>

This bachelor thesis will provide some historical facts about the most famous witch hunts and trials from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century. The first chapter will summarise the history of witch hunts and witchcraft in general. I will demonstrate the means of execution and persecution of witches commonly used in Europe and the USA. I will also provide a history of American and English witchcraft cases and trials. This chapter will also include the portrayal of witches during these witch hunts. Also, there will be a subchapter dealing with cunning folk or the so-called "good witches" who were persecuted in past centuries as well.

The second chapter will provide a brief theory about fairy tales for children. I will demonstrate typical fairy-tale witches and their representation in some well-known stories for children. The third and the fourth chapter of this bachelor thesis will compare two books by English authors. Firstly, I will analyse a short story called *Lois the Witch* by Elizabeth Gaskell. This short story is based on the Salem witch trials, which might provide a good look into historical witch trials. The second book I chose for the analysis is a fairy tale by a well-known author of children's books, Roald Dahl. The work is called *The Witches*, and it provides the contrary portrayal of witches. The author portrays them in a funny way, and this fairy tale is written in the form of a bedtime story for children.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, (Cornell University Press, 1972), 1.

# 1 The History of Witchcraft

The terms *witchcraft* and *witch* derive from Old English *wiccecraft*: from *wicca* (masculine) and *wicce* (feminine), respectively, denoting someone who practices sorcery; and from *craeft* meaning “craft” or “skill.” The problem of defining witchcraft is complex because the concepts underlying these words also change according to time and place, sometimes radically. Besides, different cultures do not share a coherent pattern of witchcraft beliefs, which frequently blend other concepts like magic, sorcery, religion, folklore, theology, technology, and diabolism. Some societies regard a witch as an individual with inherent supernatural powers. However, within the West, witchcraft was more commonly believed to be an ordinary individual’s free choice to practice magic with the help of the supernatural.<sup>2</sup>

The modern English word witchcraft has three possible connotations: the practice of magic or sorcery worldwide; beliefs related to the Western witch hunts of the 14th to the 18th century; and varieties of the modern movement called *Wicca*. Witchcraft, in a general sense, was something ancient in English history. In a more specific and limited understanding, it is a relatively modern phenomenon. The word witchcraft itself belonged to the Anglo-Saxon period. In the seventh century, Theodore of Tarsus (Archbishop of Canterbury from 668 to 690) imposed penances upon magicians and enchanters.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.1 The Picture of a Witch

The people of seventeenth-century Europe pictured witches, mostly women, as rising from their beds in the night to attend their Sabbath, the witches’ version of the Christian Sabbath ceremony presided over by the Devil. Those who lived nearby went on foot; others flew on animals, brooms, or stools to cellars, caves, or isolated fields. During their ceremonies, they would eat, drink, and offer the Devil the bodies of infants.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell and Ioan M. Lewis, *Witchcraft*, (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Wallace Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718*, (American historical association, 1911), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Bryan F. Le Beau, *The Story of the Salem Witch Trials*, (Routledge, 2016), 1.

Hebrew and Greco-Roman demons were described as frigid, barren female spirits with wings and taloned hands and feet. Often accompanied by serpents, such creatures swept shrieking through the night, seducing sleeping men or drinking their blood, attacking sleeping children and their mothers or nurses. Reputedly, Greco-Roman sorcerers, primarily women, met in the dark in isolated places, in caves or deserted fields, where they tore apart and devoured black lambs and clawed the ground with their taloned fingers, evoking spirits of the underworld. Usually, they were led by a male priest and the image of a horned goat. Their rituals included wine drinking, ecstatic dancing, and animal sacrifice.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.1.1 Devil's Mark**

A significant feature of seventeenth-century witchcraft trials in many parts of the Continent and Scotland was the custom of searching suspects for a scar or mark, reputedly made when the Devil sealed his pact with the witch. In England, the term "Devil's marks" was unknown; instead, the British preferred "witch's mark," which referred to an extra teat or nipple on a woman's body that was reputedly used to suckle her diabolical familiars. Unlike the rest of Europe, where the Devil's mark could be found on both men and women, in England, it took the shape of an extra nipple used to suckle familiars.<sup>6</sup>

Local courts in various regions of western Europe, from Belgium to Italy, shaved all body hair from suspected witches in order to discover concealed diabolical charms. It was a relatively short step to have professional surgeons shave and search suspected witches in order to discover the place where the Devil had marked them at the time they had made their pact. According to the Catholic demonologist Henri Boguet, Devil's marks were very difficult to find as the Devil usually erased them as soon as the witch was captured.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Le Beau, *The Story*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Richard M. Golden, *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: the Western Tradition*. vol. 1, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 257.

<sup>7</sup> Golden, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 257.

## 1.2 Malleus Maleficarum

One of the most important books published about witches is the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or the *Hammer of Witches*, published by the Catholic Church in 1486. *Malleus maleficarum* is a detailed legal and theological document considered the standard handbook on witchcraft. Its appearance did much to spur on and support some two centuries of witch-hunting hysteria in Europe. *Malleus maleficarum* was the work of two Dominicans: Johann Sprenger, dean of the University of Cologne in Germany, and Heinrich Kraemer, professor of theology at the University of Salzburg, Austria, and inquisitor in the Tirol region of Austria. It codified the folklore and beliefs of the Alpine peasants. The work is divided into three parts. In the first part, witches' reality and depravity are emphasised, and any disbelief in demonology is condemned as heresy. The second part is a collection of fabulous stories about the activities of witches—e.g., diabolic compacts, sexual relations with devils, and metamorphosis. The third part is a discussion of the legal procedures to be followed in witch trials.<sup>8</sup>

The *Malleus* explains the Church's beliefs about witches at the time. According to *Malleus*, witches were people who renounced the Catholic faith and devoted themselves, body and soul, to the service of evil. Witches offered unbaptised children to the Devil and took part in orgies, including having intercourse with the Devil himself. People also believed that witches were able to shift shapes, fly through the air, and make magical ointments. The *Malleus* explained that all witches must be arrested, convicted, and executed. Even people who spoke out against the Witchcraze did not challenge the actual existence of witches. At that time, it would have meant to declare oneself an atheist.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.3 Witches as Women

During the Witchcraze, both men and women were convicted and executed as witches, but women were killed in far greater numbers than males. There are many reasons for this. *Malleus Maleficarum*, for example, says that women are more likely to

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<sup>8</sup> Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Malleus Maleficarum*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca L. Stein, and Philip L. Stein, *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*, (Routledge, 2017), 241.



be witches. According to the *Malleus*, women are stupider, weaker, more superstitious, and more sensual than men.<sup>10</sup> The *Malleus* says:

“All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman ... What else is a woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted in fair colour... There are more superstitious women found than men. And the first is that they are more credulous than men; and since the chief aim of the Devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks them ... Women are naturally more impressionable, and more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit... They are feebler both in mind and body... Women are intellectually like children... She is more carnal than a man as is clear from her many carnal abominations... She is an imperfect animal; she always deceives... And indeed, just as through the first defect in their intelligence, they are more prone to abjure the faith; so through their second defect of inordinate affections and passions, they search for, brood over, and inflict various vengeance, either by witchcraft or by some other means. Wherefore it is no wonder that so great a number of witches exist in this sex.”<sup>11</sup>

Many historians agree that poor, middle-aged, widowed, or single women were most likely accused of witchcraft. However, young women charged with sexual crimes (fornication, adultery, abortion, infanticide) were also targeted. In New England, female heiresses without male relatives were prominent among the accused. However, in some parts of Europe, such as Estonia, Iceland, and Russia, most indicted and executed witches were men.<sup>12</sup>

By 1977 there was a significant change in witchcraft studies. Most historians considered gender and gender conflict as essential factors in witch hunts. Some concluded that witch accusations were sex-linked and part of a campaign to control women's bodies and sexuality. A number of historians argued that because of their

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<sup>10</sup> R. Stein and P. Stein, *The Anthropology*, 241.

<sup>11</sup> *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger*, unabridged online reproduction of the 1928 edn, Part I, Question VI, [www.malleusmaleficarum.org](http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org)

<sup>12</sup> Richard M. Golden, *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: the Western Tradition*. vol. 2, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 356.

close connection with folk magic, folk medicine, and popular religion, women were particularly prone to witchcraft accusations.<sup>13</sup>

Newly emerging political regimes and religious authorities brought a high level of control and conformity. Fear of disorder was a prevailing theme in early modern thought, and historians have recognised the special place that “disorderly” women (prostitutes or women without male supervision) played in witch hunts. For male authorities, chaste, obedient, and, most importantly, married women represented a solid and well-ordered state, while disobedient, rebellious women were suspected of witchcraft.<sup>14</sup>

It is evident that most witch hunts can be attributed to the patriarchal society. Documented evidence of the witch hunts from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century demonstrates a connection between a woman’s social status and her portrayal as evil. Accusations of witchcraft appear to have increased in direct response to times of social, political, economic, and sexual instability among women, stemming from irrational concerns and social anxieties. Any woman who was thought to be deviant in any way—assertive, “too” successful—in short, any woman who challenged the patriarchal order could be accused of witchcraft.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.4 Cunning Folk

Cunning men (“wise men”) and cunning women (“wise women”) worked beneficent magic, notably healing and fortune-telling. They practised herbal, humoral, and magical medicine, helped people select future spouses, locate buried treasure, identify thieves, and, through countermagic, protect against or undo the evil magic of witches. Cunning folk differed considerably in social background and status, techniques, reputation, and the quality and origin of their talents. Cunning folk expected their clients to come to them. Most sedentary cunning folk carefully avoided public exposure, as it could inspire the authorities to start an investigation into their activities.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Golden, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 356.

<sup>14</sup> Golden, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 356.

<sup>15</sup> Anne-Marie Bird, *Women Behaving Badly: Dahl’s Witches Meet the Women of the Eighties*. (Children’s Literature in Education, 1998), 127.

<sup>16</sup> Golden, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 237.

According to legal theory and theology, the activities of cunning folk were tantamount to witchcraft. However, because practitioners of beneficial magic were usually prosecuted less ardently than suspects of malicious sorcery, details about practices generally cannot be found easily. It is, therefore, often difficult to assess their role and analyse their activities. Furthermore, in the early modern period, it was impossible to agree on a definition of illegal magic.<sup>17</sup>

The qualities of cunning folk were either innate or acquired after birth. People born in unusual circumstances were frequently considered to have supernatural powers. In northern Italy, for instance, people who had been born with a caul (meaning that they had been born still inside or partially wrapped in the amniotic sac) were expected to fight witches in night-time battles at certain seasons of the year. The outcome of these battles was regarded as crucial for the harvest's quality. Similar beliefs were discovered in other parts of Europe. In the northern Netherlands, several members of the cunning folk claimed to have been born with a caul, and as a result, they were able to see things that ordinary people could not.<sup>18</sup>

People would always make new rationalisations for their extraordinary abilities. For instance, a cunning woman from Hamburg claimed that she had been cut out of her dead mother's body. As a result, she was able to detect hidden treasures. She also cured victims of witchcraft. It is probably no coincidence that in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the tyrant could only be killed by Macduff, who was reputedly ripped from his mother's womb. Around 1800, people in France believed that the seventh son of a seventh son had unique gifts that enabled him to heal sick people.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.5 Witchcraft in Europe

Ideas about witchcraft and magic had long been present in European culture. It seems that some trials in Switzerland and adjacent territories around 1400 established the belief that witches were magical practitioners who owned their powers, which they used to do evil, to a pact they had made with the Devil. This idea developed and became more complex as the fifteenth century progressed, not least because it became entangled with impulses for reform within the Catholic Church. Thus, theologians started to

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<sup>17</sup> Golden, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 237.

<sup>18</sup> Golden, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 237.

<sup>19</sup> Golden, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 237.

believe that witches were not isolated individuals practising some occult magic but rather members of a demonic, anti-Christian sect. This formative period of the witch-hunts was symbolised by the publication of *Malleus Maleficarum*.<sup>20</sup>

Levels of trials and executions rose in many parts of Europe from the 1580s. From then, there were severe outbreaks of witch-hunting, notably in Calvinist Scotland in 1590-97 and some of the German Catholic episcopal states in the second and third decades of the seventeenth century. By around 1630, however, scepticism about witchcraft was already manifesting itself in educated circles. Over much of western Europe, trials and executions were heavily declining by the second half of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, there were still some significant outbreaks of witch-hunting. However, in more geographically peripheral areas: Sweden experienced its one big witch-hunt in the 1670s, for example, and large-scale burnings continued in Poland well into the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, by that date, witchcraft was becoming an increasingly marginalised phenomenon among Europe's educated elites.<sup>21</sup>

The witchcraft mania that swept Europe in the 16th century eventually made its way to England and Scotland. Witchcraft at that time was essentially a reliance on folk healing and hexes to solve disputes between neighbours, practised in villages by paupers, women for the most part. This local sorcery was tolerated for years until the middle of the 16th century. The trials and cases were reported in folio-sized publications, which had printing on both sides of the sheets. They were often illustrated with the likeness of the witch and other aspects of the case, which played significantly on the emotional quality of the trials and the opinions they reported. This fed an appetite for sensationalism in the average citizens, increasing the clamour for more trials in their locale.<sup>22</sup>

In Europe, the traditional form of the sentence was burning. Popular culture often portrays the execution of witches with the women being burned alive. However, most witches were usually strangled or garrotted (a brutal procedure during which a metal spike penetrated the throat). Other techniques included hanging before their bodies were

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<sup>20</sup> James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, (Routledge, 2019), 4.

<sup>21</sup> Sharpe, *Witchcraft*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Joseph O'Connor, *Witchcraft Pamphlets in Renaissance England: a Particular Case in Which the Tale Was Told*. (*The Midwest Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1996): 215.

burned or beheaded and burned afterwards. Burning witches also was a ritual of purification. It indicates that it was rather a symbolic procedure.<sup>23</sup>

Witchcraft as a crime was focused on when there was tension and chaos in society. In the persecution of witchcraft, there were three significant peaks. The first wave of persecution followed the Crusades. Norman expansion into the East brought Europe into contact with Eastern religions, which led to a reduction of traditional Christian beliefs and fear of heretic influences. The Black Death, which swept Europe in the fourteenth century, triggered the second wave of persecution. The third great wave of witch-hunting started in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sectarian rivalries accentuated this, and religious intolerance escalated.<sup>24</sup>

Those suspected of witchcraft were interrogated in order to gain a confession. The questions they were asked presumed their guilt. For example, questions often included where and when they met with the Devil. They were never asked whether or not they had done such a thing. Torture was a common means of getting a confession. In 1628, a man named Johannes Junius was executed as a witch. Before he died, he was able to smuggle a letter out of prison to his daughter.<sup>25</sup> The following is a part of that letter:

“... Innocent have I come into prison, innocent have I been tortured, innocent must I die. For whoever comes into the witch prison must be tortured until he invents something out of his head. When I was put to the torture for the first time, Dr. Braun, Dr. Kotzendorffer, and two strange doctors were there. Dr. Braun asks me, “Kinsman, how come you here?” I answer, “Through falsehood, through misfortune.” “Hear you,” he retorts, “you are a witch; will you confess it voluntarily? If not, we will bring in witnesses and the executioner for you.” I said, “I am no witch; I have a pure conscience in the matter; if there are a thousand witnesses, I am not anxious.” And then came the executioner, and put the thumbscrews on me, both hands bound together, so that the blood ran out at the nails and everywhere so that for four weeks I could not use my hands, as you can see from the writing. Thereafter, they first stripped me, bound my hands behind

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<sup>23</sup> Jana Buchtová, *The Lady's not for Burning: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Brno, 2013), 12.

<sup>24</sup> Anna Garland, *The Great Witch Hunt: The Persecution of Witches in England, 1550-1660*, (Te Mata Koi: Auckland University Law Review, 2003), 1152.

<sup>25</sup> R. Stein and P. Stein, *The Anthropology*, 241.

me, and drew me up in the strappado (an old form of punishment or torture in which the victim, with arms bound behind, was raised from the ground by a rope fastened to the wrists.) Then I thought heaven and earth were at an end; eight times did they draw me up and let me fall again, so that I suffered terrible agony... And so, I made my confession ... but it was all a lie.<sup>26</sup>

## 1.6 Witchcraft in England

English witchcraft has been primarily understood as a consequence of village tensions since Keith Thomas' book *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. It typically featured begging with menaces, festering feuds and conflicts between neighbours, with the elderly, poor, insecure and quarrelsome women being the most vulnerable. Witches were prosecuted through the conventional criminal justice system, usually singly, and sentenced to stand in the pillory or, at worst, hanged. The charges were usually brought by their wealthy neighbours.<sup>27</sup>

When analysing England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one can notice the overbearing presence of witchcraft over the people, courts, and rulers. Witchcraft was not a new belief. In fact, it found its basis in the bible in such verses as, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." These ideas were thus not new, but there was a drastic increase in the number of trials and convictions during this time. An increasing number of accusations and trials occurred because rulers legislated specific legislation, which made the practice of witchcraft a crime and eventually a capital offence. Witch trials were thus prevailing under rulers, such as Elizabeth I and James I, who found witchcraft dangerous to their monarchies.<sup>28</sup>

Witchcraft appeared in England for the first time at the beginning of the thirteenth century in 1209. In medieval England, it was possible to prove innocence by a trial by ordeal, which in that case meant that the accused had to grasp a red-hot iron. Until the

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<sup>26</sup> George Lincoln Burr, ed., *The Witch Persecutions*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania History Department, 1897), 26-28.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Poole, *Polychronicon: Witchcraft History and Children: Interpreting England's Biggest Witch Trial, 1612* (Teaching history, Vol. 147, 2012): 36.

<sup>28</sup> Lauren De Angelis, *Witch Hunting in 16th and 17th Century England*, (The Histories: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 3, 2019): 2.

fourteenth century, the witchcraft investigation was in the hands of the ecclesiastical courts, but at that time, witchcraft trials were extremely rare. The actual prosecutions came in the sixteenth century.<sup>29</sup>

While the punishment for witchcraft was hanging in England, Scotland followed Europe's example, though the witch was sometimes mercifully strangled first. Torture was not allowed in England though Scotland sanctioned it. Other physical and mental discomfort methods were employed to assure confessions, including forced walking or running, starvation, and sleep deprivation.<sup>30</sup> This also points out the differences in witch trials in England, where unlike in continental Europe, witchcraft was not viewed as heretical activity. At that time, hanging was usually the punishment of felonious sorts of crimes, while burning was connected to heresy.<sup>31</sup>

Although witchcraft in England held a prominent role in legislation, trials, and persecutions of many individuals, this role declined because of political instability and increased scepticism.<sup>32</sup>

### **1.6.1 The Tudors and Witches**

In 1542, a monarch, Henry VIII, issued the first English statute concerning witchcraft. It was called *The Witchcraft Act of 1542*, and it declared that the practice of witchcraft could not be used and exercised to hurt someone, get money, or misbehave towards Christianity. By specifying the crimes caused by witchcraft, Henry VIII was able to define witchcraft as a crime and punishable by death definitively.<sup>33</sup>

During the reign of Mary I, England had an English Inquisition and allowed torture. The accused of witchcraft were frequently Protestants, homosexuals or sorcerers, who were charged with heresy. After the trial, they would be burned at the stake, as was the common practice with the Spanish Inquisition, which was an inspiration for the English Inquisition. During the reign of Mary I, the burning at the

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<sup>29</sup> Buchtová, *The Lady's*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> O'Connor, *Witchcraft*: 215.

<sup>31</sup> Buchtová, *The Lady's*, 12.

<sup>32</sup> De Angelis, *Witch*: 2.

<sup>33</sup> De Angelis, *Witch*: 2.

stake was quite usual, but otherwise, hanging was the most traditional way of punishment in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries in England.<sup>34</sup>

When Elizabeth I succeeded the throne, she began to enforce the laws enacted by Henry VIII heavily. Elizabeth appointed an Anglican minister named John Jewel as the Bishop of Salisbury, who believed in the evilness of witchcraft. In one particular sermon, he emphasised that the number of witches and sorcerers in England marvellously increased within the last few years. This sermon caused that Elizabeth started to fear for the safety of her Kingdom. Moreover, Elizabeth feared being murdered by those who practised witchcraft against her. She nullified Henry's statute and issued a new one. This statute enforced a death sentence and also encouraged more individuals to bring charges against each other.<sup>35</sup>

Interestingly, the queen herself was reputedly biased towards several witches if they helped her during her reign. One of them was John Dee, who was believed to have revealed to the queen those who were her enemies at a foreign court. When he was under attack for suspicion of practising witchcraft, Elizabeth offered protection and aid until the time of her death.<sup>36</sup>

## **1.7 Witchcraft in New England**

For the practical part of this bachelor thesis, I have chosen a short story dealing with the Salem witch trials. For this reason, I would like to provide a brief historical description of these witch hunts.

The connection between American and British witch trials might derive from times of the Industrial Revolution. After the Industrial Revolution, people saw investment, profit, and economic growth everywhere. Even the puritan colonists in New England were encouraged to seek what the new land could provide. After 1540, the population nearly doubled, which strained the economic infrastructure. Many people found it harder to work and earned less to buy more expensive food. Parish aid saved the poor from starving but commodified their relationship with wealthier neighbours.

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<sup>34</sup> Buchtová, *The Lady's*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> De Angelis, *Witch*: 3.

<sup>36</sup> De Angelis, *Witch*: 3.



The following cultural rifts resulted in anger between inhabitants.<sup>37</sup> The anger and rifts might have been one of the reasons for witchcraft accusations.

### 1.7.1 The Salem Witch Trials

The Salem witch trials occurred in colonial Massachusetts between 1692 and 1693. It all started when William and Mary, the English monarchs, declared war on France in the American colonies. The war, known to colonists as King William's War, destroyed regions of upstate New York, Nova Scotia and Quebec, forcing refugees into Essex county and, specifically, Salem Village in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The displaced people strained Salem's resources. This exacerbated the already-existing rivalry between families with ties to the wealth of the port of Salem and those who still depended on agriculture. Puritan villagers believed that the feud between families was the Devil's work. In 1692, Reverend Parris' nine-year-old daughter Elizabeth and eleven-year-old niece Abigail started having "fits". They screamed, made peculiar sounds, threw things and contorted themselves into strange positions. Their local doctor blamed the supernatural. The young girls blamed three women for their suffering under pressure from magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne. All three women were arrested and examined for many days by local authorities. Eventually, one of them confessed. She claimed: "The Devil came to me and bid me serve him." She described detailed images of red cats, black dogs, yellow birds and a man who made her sign his book. She said that several other witches planned to destroy the Puritans. All three women were put in jail.<sup>38</sup>

This case set the ground for the witch hunts. Twenty men and women, ranging in age from 20 to 80, were killed in Massachusetts in January and February 1692 under the imprimatur of the highest officials in Massachusetts. No one was, however, burned alive, contrary to popular belief. Nineteen individuals were hung, and in a failed attempt to extract a confession, one man was pressed to death with large stones. More than 165 people had been publicly accused of sorcery in two dozen villages and towns, ranging from American Indian slaves to one of the colony's wealthiest merchants.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction*, Vol. 228, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 43.

<sup>38</sup> Jess Blumberg, *A Brief History of the Salem Witch Trials*, Smithsonian.com, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Adam Goodheart, *How Satan Came to Salem: the True Story of the Witch Trials*, (The Atlantic, Vol. 316, Iss. 4., 2015): 46.

## 1.7.2 Native Americans and Their Connection to Witchcraft

In Puritan New England, people believed that the wilderness was the natural habitat of the Devil. Since American Indians lived in nature, their familiarity with the ways of the Devil seemed evident to the settlers. Settlers saw it as their duty to rid the wilderness of “savages” and “witches.” The Salem Witch Trials were a series of hearings and prosecutions of people accused of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts. Indians were considered witches, and so they became part of the hunt.<sup>40</sup>

European colonists and Native Americans competed for the same thing: the American landscape. Nevertheless, they shared a belief in witchcraft. Indian supernaturalism, particularly claims of direct, personal revelation, made Natives suspect in the eyes of colonists and helped persuade English settlers that Indians liberally practised the dark magic. Hostile colonists characterised the Natives’ homeland as a “devil’s den.” They saw the Indians’ natural religion as diabolical, understood Native shamans as witches, and demeaned Native practitioners as slaves of Satan.<sup>41</sup> In 1652, the missionary Thomas Mayhew Jr. visited the Wampanoag Tribe of Martha’s Vineyard (an island located south of Cape Cod in Massachusetts). He described his visit the following way:

“When the Lord first brought me to these poor Indians on the Vineyard, they were mighty zealous and earnest in the Worship of False Gods and Devils; The Devil also with his Angels had his Kingdom among them; ... by him they were often hurt in their Bodies, distracted in their Minds, wherefore they had many meetings with their Pawwaws (shaman or chief), to practice the Devil by their sacrifice.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Julianne Jennings, *Witches and Indians and a Feathered Serpent in Salem, Mass.* (Indian Country Today, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Dennis, *American Indians, Witchcraft, and Witch-Hunting*, (OAH Magazine of History, Vol. 17 Iss. 4, 2003): 21.

<sup>42</sup> Dennis, *American*: 21.

## 2 Witches in Fairy Tales

The popular contemporary culture portrays a witch as an unpleasant and ugly woman, usually with a long nose, facial warts, and wrinkled face. She has scraggly hair, a pointed hat and flies around on a broom. This image is probably derived from the former portrayal of witches as isolated older women and uncanny behaving women.<sup>43</sup>

Storytelling goes back to the earliest times, with stories that incorporate human beliefs, fears, hopes, and memories. The world of fairy tales is filled with myths and legends, strange and wondrous creatures, fairies and witches. Many of these characters descend from the old witches from Greek and Roman mythology. All people seem to recognise the role of witches or wise individuals in society and reflect them in their legends, myths, folk tales and fairy stories.<sup>44</sup>

In this chapter, dealing with fairy tales, it is essential to mention the Brothers Grimm. Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm were collectors and editors of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. The most memorable witches are those who appear in Hansel and Gretel and Snow White and Sleeping Beauty.<sup>45</sup>

The Hansel and Gretel story is an excellent example of a fairy tale witch. It is related to the tales of Russian Baba Yaga, a female witch who lived in a hut in a forest beyond a river of fire. The hut stood on the chicken's legs and was spinning around. It was surrounded by a fence filled with human skulls. Baba Yaga liked to steal young children, cook them, and eat them. She was a friend with death, who provided human souls for her. On these souls, she also feasted. She flew through the air in an iron cauldron. Baba Yaga was also a guardian of the fountains of the water of life, and sometimes she is presented with two sisters.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Antonina Kuras, *Witches Now and Then: The Image of a Witch and Differences in the Perception of Female Witches During Sixteenth, Seventeenth Centuries and Nowadays*. Women's Space and Men's Space. (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2017), 125.

<sup>44</sup> *Witches in Myth, Legends and Fairy Tales*, (n.d.) The Witch Book: The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft, Wicca, and Neo-paganism, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> *Witches in Myth, Legends and Fairy Tales*.

<sup>46</sup> *Witches in Myth, Legends and Fairy Tales*.

### 3 Lois the Witch by Elizabeth Gaskell

Elizabeth Gaskell, the Victorian “Sheherezade” in Dickens’ words, was particularly appreciated during her lifetime for her inborn storytelling talent, which she equally exploited in her realist and Gothic shorter fiction (short stories or novellas). She was born into a Unitarian family and married to a Unitarian minister, author of several social novels. Her Unitarian liberal education and outlook determined her to speak out against the dangers of religious fanaticism, especially since the religious confession to which she belonged, despite its 19th-century strength and status, had often been the target of various attacks, mainly directed to the Unitarians rejection of the holy trinity. More than any other horror tale, Lois’ story demonstrates Gaskell’s awareness of the existence of extreme religious attitudes not only in the New World but also in Old England. Her novella *Lois the Witch* is an excellent way to learn about the mechanisms of popular delusion.<sup>47</sup>

Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Lois the Witch* was first published in three installments in October 1859 in the weekly *All the Year Round*, edited by Charles Dickens. It was eventually published in a collection of five stories, titled *Lois the Witch and Other Tales*, in 1861.

Lois Barclay, an 18-year-old girl, is the protagonist of the novel. Lois is raised in a parsonage in Warwickshire, where she lives until the death of her parents. She is a young woman who holds a marriage proposal secret because her lover’s (Hugh Lucy) parents “looked higher for him than the penniless daughter of Parson Barclay” (Gaskell, 3). As her parents wished, Lois travels across the Atlantic Ocean to live with her uncle, Ralph Hickson, in Salem, Massachusetts. Unfortunately for Lois, her uncle is on his deathbed by the time she arrives. When he dies, Lois is taken in by her Aunt Grace Hickson (who instantly dislikes Lois and her addition to the family) and raised with Grace’s children: the only son Manasseh, and two daughters, Faith and Prudence. One day, Prudence accuses Lois of practising witchcraft. The backdrop of Lois’s story includes the beginning of the Salem witch trials, which, in the case of this story, begins

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<sup>47</sup> Irina Raluca Ciobanu, *The Gothic as Mass Hysteria: the Threat of the Foreign Other in Gaskell’s Lois the Witch*. Supplement, Vol. 10, (Philologica Jassyensia, 2014): 139.

with the conviction and execution of Hota, the Indian woman and servant accused of being a witch.

Faith, who feels Lois stole Mr Nolan's affections away from herself, jealously confirms Prudence's accusations. Grace does not believe that Lois is a witch until she realises Manasseh's position in the local community: he is known to have moments of madness, and he claims to hear godly voices pushing him to marry Lois. If the town believes that Lois bewitched him into loving her and cursed him with moments of madness, then he could improve his reputation. Lois is imprisoned and given time to confess, which she refuses to do, and she "chooses death with a quiet conscience, rather than life to be gained by a lie" (Gaskell, 112). Lois is executed several months before Hugh Lucy arrives from England to bring her back home.

Another significant aspect of the work is the connection of Native Americans to witchcraft. As I already mentioned earlier, in Puritan New England, people believed that Native Americans practice witchcraft. Their explanation for this assumption was the belief that the Devil's natural habitat is the wilderness, and since Indians live in nature, they must have had some relationship with the Devil.

In *Lois the Witch*, this assumption about Native Americans is represented as well. From the beginning of the short story, a reader can notice hateful conversations between characters. For some reason, characters are scared of Native Americans, and they spread this fear to every newcomer. According to the book, it was typical to have Native American people working at people's houses. Even the main protagonists of *Lois the Witch* have a Native American working for them. They usually took care of the household, cooked and took care of the kids. According to the short story, these working people lived in good conditions; they were paid for their work and had good relationships with the whole family.

However, at the beginning of the short story, one of the main characters claims that: "In the county of Essex the folk are ordered to keep four scouts, or companies of minutemen; six persons in each company; to be on the look-out for the wild Indians, who are forever stirring about in the woods" (Gaskell, 11). Inhabitants of that county were afraid of "painted Indians, with their shaven scalps and their war-streaks, lurking behind the trees, and coming nearer and nearer with their noiseless steps" (Gaskell, 11). Widow Smith says a story about her friend Hannah Benson, whose husband cut down

every tree near his house at Deerbrook so that no one might come near him undercover. He and his wife were so afraid of the hypothetical attack of Indian people that they kept a gun in their house in order to kill anybody who came out of the woods towards their house.

One of the conversations between Widow Smith and Lois include that: “Red Indians are indeed the evil creatures of whom we read in Holy Scripture and that there is no doubt that they are in league with the French people in Canada. The French supposedly pay the Indians so much gold for every dozen scalps of Englishmen’s heads” (Gaskell, 14). From this excerpt, it is clear that Native Americans were used as a political weapon. Widow Smith claims that it is not safe to go far into the woods or build a dwelling far from a settlement. She says that “it takes a brave heart to make a journey from one town to another, and folk do say the Indian creatures rise out of the very ground to waylay the English people” (Gaskell, 15). Characters in this short story have been listening to terrifying stories about Native Americans since they were children. The fear only gets worse when someone comes up with a superstition that “Indians are in league with Satan to affright the Christians out of the heathen country” (Gaskell, 15). It is not surprising that the first persecuted witch of Salem is a Native American woman.

Soon after Lois starts to live with her aunt and cousins, Nattee, the family’s old Indian servant, occasionally terrifies Lois with her stories about witchcraft. Nattee tells her wild stories about wizards of her race. In her narration, she always includes human sacrifice being needed to complete the success of an incantation to the Evil One. Lois later also admits that she was scared of Nattee because her look and colour seemed strange to her when she first came and also found it suspicious that Nattee as an Indian woman, is not a christened person.

The first person persecuted and accused of witchcraft in Salem is Hota, an Indian servant of pastor Tappau. Lois immediately gets terrifying thoughts that Nattee might have had some evil powers as well. “Once I met her in the dusk”, said Lois to her cousin, “just close by Pastor Tappau’s house, in company with Hota, his servant, and I have wondered if Nattee had something to do with it” (Gaskell, 68). She tries to calm herself with a thought that if Nattee has some supernatural powers, she will not use them for evil; at least not evil to those she loves” (Gaskell, 69).

“It was well to make an example of the first-discovered witch, and it was also well that she was an Indian, a heathen, whose life would be no great loss to the community” (Gaskell, 76). It is evident that Indian people had very low social status in colonial America, and in *Lois the Witch*, this issue is represented very extensively. After all, when Hota is accused and hung, Salem’s people are delighted that the first executed witch was an Indian woman and not a member of their “white” community.

The killing of Hota was the very beginning of the executions in Salem. One day, Reverend Mr Tappau says that “last night he heard a sound as of a heavy body dragged all through his house by some strong power; once it was thrown against his bedroom door, and would, doubtless, have broken it in if he had not prayed fervently and aloud at that very time” (Gaskell, 63). In the morning, he found all the crockery in the house broken and piled up in the middle of the kitchen floor. That day, everyone in Salem found out that the Devil had possessed Mr Tappau’s daughters Hester and Abigail. People started to search for a witch who cursed these girls. In the end, the family’s servant Hota, an Indian woman, was accused and later executed for cursing the Reverend’s daughters. These daughters were the first supposed to be bewitched. However, since then, accounts of sufferers by witchcraft came from every quarter of the town. “There was hardly a family without one of these supposed victims” (Gaskell, 70). It spread like an echo, and it seems that accusing someone of practising witchcraft was a brilliant way to settle the score. When neighbours had some sort of conflict, they simply accused one another of practising witchcraft and hoped they would be imprisoned or executed.

During witch hunts, in every country, the accusation and then execution of the witches followed the same process. Someone accuses a woman or man of witchcraft, then they are either tortured into confessing or promised that they will be set free if they confess. However, most of the times, they are not set free. This technique is also portrayed in *Lois the Witch*. When Mr Tappau’s daughter accuses Hota, the Indian servant, of witchcraft, she is promised freedom if she confesses: “One brought the news that Hota had confessed all – had owned to signing a certain little red book, which Satan had presented to her – had been present at impious sacraments – had ridden through the air to Newbury Falls, and in fact, had assented to all the questions, which the elders and magistrates had asked of her” (Gaskell, 75). Then the narrator ends by saying that Hota is to be hung the following day. Despite her confession, even though her life has been

promised to her if she acknowledges her sin. Allegedly, it is well to make an example of the first-discovered witch.

When Lois is accused and imprisoned, she refuses to confess. She claims that she is innocent and never did any harm to that child. It might be proof of her bravery. However, it also might be caused by the story of Hota – Lois does not believe any promises, and she is sure that her false confession will not save her life. She knows that once she is accused, she will be executed no matter what she says. The testimony borne against her says: “Considering the godly family to which she belonged, the magistrates and ministers of Salem had decided that she should have her life spared if she would own her guilt, make reparation and submit to penance; but that if not, she and others convicted of witchcraft along with her, were to be hung in Salem market-place” (Gaskell, 112).

After these events, witchcraft and accusations in Salem began to spread with incredible speed: “The dire statistics of this time tell us that fifty-five escaped death by confessing themselves guilty; one hundred and fifty were in prison; more than two hundred accused; and upwards of twenty suffered death, among whom was the minister Nolan, who was traditionally esteemed to have suffered through hatred of his co-pastor. One older man, refusing to plead at his trial, was pressed to death” (Gaskell, 113). According to the book, even dogs were accused of witchcraft. They suffered the legal penalties and are recorded among the subjects of capital punishment.

The book ends with an accusation of Lois of practising witchcraft. Lois’s recollection of one moment in her childhood introduces the theme of witchcraft. That moment foretells Lois’ own violent death under the accusation of witchcraft. Back in her father’s parish, Lois had witnessed the drowning of a witch, an old woman who had cursed her because her father had not tried to save her: “Parson’s wench, parson’s wench, yonder, in thy nurse’s arms, thy dad hath never tried for to save me, and none shall save thee, when thou art brought up for a witch” (Gaskell, 16). Her name was Hannah, and Lois recalls seeing her drowning: “I saw old Hannah in the water, her grey hair all streaming down her shoulders, and her face bloody and black with the stones and mud they had been throwing at her, and her cat tied around her neck” (Gaskell, 16). From that moment, Lois would dream that one day, all men would hate her because she is a witch.



Lois has different religious beliefs, which might be one of the reasons for her accusation. She is an Anglican, yet she has a strong sense of religious independence. After the death of her parents and her move to Salem to live with her relatives, Lois demonstrates her independence of mind, finding out the truth for herself. Above all, she supports a rational approach to religion, based on the belief that God, or the Devil, might intervene by supernatural means.<sup>48</sup>

One of the occasions Lois takes a stand for such rational religion is when she rejects a marriage proposal from her cousin Manesseh.<sup>49</sup> Manesseh believes that he has a supernatural direction to marry her: “It is borne in upon me – that thou must be my spouse... It is the Lord’s will, Lois, and thou canst not escape from it” (Gaskell, 170). However, Lois insists on naturalistic criteria: “I do not acknowledge it to be the Lord’s will, Manesseh. It is not “borne in upon me”, as you Puritans call it, that I am to be your wife” (Gaskell, 170).

From the beginning, class prejudice also operates against the English girl Lois, daughter of the poor Anglican clergyman Reverend Barclay. The prejudice begins in England when the wealthy Hugh Lucy is thwarted by his father from providing refuge for the orphaned Lois. Apparently, the parents’ only reason for not providing Lois with shelter was her class.<sup>50</sup> “So low were the clergymen and their family esteemed in those days” (Gaskell, 3).

It is her family who eventually accuses Lois of bewitching people and sends her to death. Lois suffers from Prudence’s desire to attract as much attention as the Tappau children and from Faith’s vengeful tendencies at the thought of having lost pastor Nolan’s love to Lois<sup>51</sup>: “he cares not for me’ said Faith. ‘He cares more for Lois’s little finger than for my whole body, the girl moaned out” (Gaskell, 60). She declares her ‘hate’ for anyone who, even unwittingly, stands in her path. Mistakenly regarding Lois as a romantic rival, she colludes in her conviction.<sup>52</sup>

Faith and Prudence are not the only members of Lois’s family who confirms that Lois is a witch. Grace Hickson is ashamed of her son’s behaviour and afraid that his

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<sup>48</sup> Rebecca Styler, *Lois the Witch: A Unitarian Tale*. (The Gaskell Society Journal, vol. 21, 2007): 74.

<sup>49</sup> Styler, *Lois*: 74.

<sup>50</sup> Deborah Denenholz Morse, *Haunting Memories of the English Civil War in Elizabeth Gaskell’s ‘Morton Hall’ and ‘Lois the Witch*, (The Gaskell Journal, Vol. 24, 2010): 93.

<sup>51</sup> Ciobanu, *The Gothic*: 146.

<sup>52</sup> Styler, *Lois*: 77.

mental illness might be revealed. Rather than admit her son is afflicted, she convinces even herself that Lois is a witch who bewitched her son. Human motives are essential here, but Gaskell implies that the community's theological system allows such motives to thrive and even legitimates them.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Styler, *Lois*: 77.

## 4 The Witches by Roald Dahl

The second book I chose for this practical part is a fairy tale called *The Witches* by the British author of children's books, Roald Dahl. *The Witches* provide the contrary perception of witches.

*The Witches* tells the story of a young orphan boy left in the care of his grandmother after a tragic car accident that leaves the young boy injured and his mother and father dead. From his grandmother, the young boy learns of the existence of witches—"the most dangerous of all the living creatures on earth" (Dahl, 6). These witches are hideous, malevolent creatures who love nothing more than the destruction of children. After some time, the boy and his grandmother are removed to an English hotel for the sake of preserving the grandmother's health. In this hotel, the boy and his grandmother discover a group of all witches of England attending an annual meeting headed by the Grand High Witch of All the World. By the end of the boy's adventures in the hotel—during which he is transformed into a mouse by the Grand High Witch herself—he and his grandmother eventually get rid of every witch in the hotel by turning them into mice with the witches' own potion. The book then concludes with the boy and his grandmother formulating plans to ultimately destroy every witch in the world by turning them into mice and setting cats upon them.

The hate for children is present in every chapter of the book. In the preface, the narrator explains that "a real witch hates children with a red-hot sizzling hatred that is more sizzling and red-hot than any hatred you could possibly imagine" (Dahl, 2). Perhaps this explains why Dahl chose witches, whose existence is tied to the history of cruelty to children. During witch trials, the accused witches were often connected to sacrificing infants and children during ceremonies with the Devil. They were also accused of eating unbaptised babies. This fact might be the reason why Dahl represented witches in his book as women who hates children to death and who are determined to kill all children from every country by turning them into mice and catching them in mouse traps. However, not every witch included in witch trials had negative connotations. Some of the accused witches were the so-called "good witches" who healed people. A considerable part of this group of good witches were midwives. These women did everything they could to make sure that a pregnant woman and her baby remain alive and healthy even though the authors of *Malleus* stated that "no one is

doing more peril to the Catholic Church than the midwives”. *The Witches* by Dahl is, however, a fairy tale and a fairy-tale witch is usually portrayed negatively and evilly.

The hate for the children is emphasised in every chapter of the book. The narrator claims that: “A 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, 2). According to the book, all a witch can think about the whole day is getting rid of children. Her mind is “always plotting and scheming and churning and burning and whizzing and phizzing with murderous, bloodthirsty thoughts” (Dahl, 2). In the witches’ meeting, the witches show their hatred of children through chanting, clapping and cheering, “Wipe them away! Scrub them off the face of the earth! Flush them down the drain!” (Dahl, 110).

The mass gathering of the witches, directed by a figurehead whose every command is obeyed by the lesser members, is similar to religious practices. Of course, not every religious culture practices sacrifice, but the witches’ pointedly child-hating status seems to locate them directly within the child-sacrificing societies that pervade history. It was, for example, practised by the Irish Celts, the Gauls, the Scandinavians or the Egyptians.<sup>54</sup>

The portrayal of a witch in this fairy tale is particular and unusual. Witches portrayed in this book are always women. “There is no such thing as a male witch” (Dahl, 6). They represent evil, death, destruction, damnation, coldness and sterility. Incapable of creating life like ordinary mothers, the witches hate children. They all share a satanic hobby – murdering babies, children and young teens.<sup>55</sup>

Firstly, the Grand High Witch is portrayed as a beautiful woman who looks very kind and friendly. However, later in the chapter dealing with the annual meeting, the Grand High Witch takes off her mask. After removing this life-like mask covering her natural face, a reader is told that the Grand High Witch resembles: “something foul, putrid and decayed. Her face seemed quite literally to be rotting away at the edges, and

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<sup>54</sup> James M. Curtis, “*We Have a Great Task Ahead of Us!*”: *Child-Hate in Roald Dahl’s The Witches*. (Children’s literature in education, Vol. 45 Iss. 2, 2014): 171.

<sup>55</sup> Anna Wing Bo Tso, *Representations of the Monstrous-Feminine in Selected Works of CS Lewis, Roald Dahl and Philip Pullman*, (Libri & Liberi: časopis za istraživanje dječje književnosti i kulture, Vol. 1 Iss. 2, 2012): 218.

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, 94).

In fairy tales, witches usually wear silly black hats and black cloaks and ride on broomsticks. However, none of the witches in this book is portrayed like that. The narrator in the preface states that this fairy tale is about “real witches”. So, the story does not include any ugly witch flying around on a broomstick. Instead, the narrator says that: “these witches dress in ordinary clothes and look very much like ordinary women. They live in ordinary houses and work in ordinary jobs” (Dahl, 1).

These women have supernatural powers and can do any spell and bewitch anyone. From a story that the grandmother is telling her grandson, she has experienced a witch turning people from her area into chickens. Another witch has made one young girl disappear by imprisoning her in a painting on the wall of her parents. Moreover, two of her friends has been turned to stone and porpoise. In America, as grandmother says, witches are used to making the parents eat their own children by turning them into hot-dogs.

As for the physical appearance of the witches, Dahl spends more than a chapter describing the witches’ hidden and abnormal body parts. He portrays them in a very humorous way. The aim of this part is probably to entertain the reader, primarily children. When the grandson asks his grandma how to recognise witches, she replies with a detailed description of their physical aspects. “In the first place,” she said, “a real witch is certain always to be wearing gloves” (Dahl, 29). As a reason for this, she claims that witches do not have fingernails but thin curvy claws, like a cat, and they wear gloves to hide them. “They only take them off when they go to bed” (Dahl, 29). Later, in chapter seven, the protagonist sees the abnormality with his own eyes, “I could see the brown claws curving over the tips of the fingers! They were about two inches long, those claws and sharp at the ends!” (Dahl, 97).

The following ridiculous physical aspect is that witches in this book are permanently bald. “Not a single hair grows on a witch’s head” (Dahl, 30). However, all the witches wear a “first-class” wig to hide their baldness. Grandmother also states that witches have “slightly larger nose-holes than ordinary people. The rim of each nose-hole is pink and curvy” (Dahl, 33), and they have larger nose-holes for smelling children. The cleaner a child is, the smellier they are to a witch. Supposedly, a witch can

smell a child from across the street, so the best way to hide from a witch is not to have a bath for a long time. “Once a month is quite enough for a sensible child” (Dahl, 35). When the child is clean, they smell like “dogs’ droppings” to every witch.

Another unusual physical aspect of the witch’s body is her eyes. According to the narrator, the eyes of a witch are different from a regular human. “The black dot in the middle of each eye keeps changing colour” (Dahl, 37). Another funny detail about the witch’s body is her feet. According to the narrator, “witches never have toes – the feet have square ends with no toes on them at all” (Dahl, 38). This abnormality gives them a problem with their shoes. Because of their wide and square feet, it is painful for them to walk all day in regular little pointed shoes, which every woman likes to wear. Lastly, the narrator claims that a witch’s spit is blue as bilberry. “It is like an ink – they even use it to write with. They use those old-fashioned pens with nibs, and they simply lick the nib” (Dahl, 40). So, if a child wants to recognise a witch, he must look carefully into a witch’s mouth. There the child would probably see a slight bluish tinge on her teeth.

Apparently, none of the physical aspects is based on the actual historical evidence about witches. The chapter “How to Recognise a Witch” in Dahl’s fairy tale has no connection to actual witch trials and the appearance of accused and executed women during historical witch hunts. As it is known, women executed for practising witchcraft were regular, mostly older women but with no physical abnormality. This aspect differs from the previous analysis of *Lois the Witch*, in which the accused witch is portrayed as a beautiful young woman who is friendly and kind to everyone she meets. Also, as I mentioned earlier, the author’s aim with this chapter was probably to entertain children. Presumably, children would laugh when reading this description of witches’ bodies. This aspect also differs from the previous analysis of *Lois the Witch*. In *Lois the Witch*, the accused witches had no abnormal body parts. They had no weird looking hair or face. No one was able to recognise a witch by her physical appearance, and thus, it was possible to accuse almost everyone.

## Conclusion

This bachelor thesis deals with two distinct portrayals of witches in British literature. The first portrayal represents a witch as a regular human being, primarily female, during witch hunts from the 15th to 17th century. At that time, hundreds of thousands of people were tortured or killed. These executions included burning at the stake, strangling or hanging in a public place. These people were killed because they were suspected of having supernatural powers, used against members of their neighbourhoods. The accusations ranged from attending ceremonies with the Devil, flying on animals or broomsticks, to offering bodies of infants to the Devil.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, people strongly believed that a witch could be recognised by a “Devil’s mark” or “Witch’s mark”. This mark was reputedly a particular scar on the witch’s body, made when the Devil sealed his pact with her. From then, every accused witch had to get her whole body shaved before the execution. In England, the witches were searched for an extra nipple on a woman’s body. There were many reasons why women were killed during witch hunts more than men. As the *Malleus Maleficarum* says, women were weak in mind and body and intellectually like children. Thus, they were more prone to link up with the Devil.

This specific portrayal of witches is represented in the first book I analysed, called *Lois the Witch* by Elizabeth Gaskell. The book tells a story about the first witch trials in New England. Lois, the protagonist, is killed after her cousin’s accusation of having supernatural powers. The whole town suddenly blindly believes that Lois is dangerous and needs to be executed for the good of all. According to the research I have made while writing this thesis, it was not difficult to accuse someone of witchcraft and get him killed.

Lastly, I provided a completely different portrayal of witches. In *The Witches*, Roald Dahl pictures witches in an amusing way. In his story, the witches have abnormal and funny physical aspects, e.g., baldness, ink instead of saliva, feet without toes and others. This fairy tale is an excellent representation of the image witches have these days. They are no longer connected to tragic human failure and the massive killing of innocent people. Nowadays, children dress like witches on Halloween. In books and films, witches are portrayed as ugly old women with big noses, warts, pointed hats, and flying on a broomstick. That is how the perception of witches has changed. Children

nowadays know witches as these cartoon characters, and fewer and fewer people imagine a witch as an ordinary young woman who did not have the chance to live her life because she was faultily accused of witchcraft and publicly hanged or burned at the stake in a town square.

The change in the portrayal of witches can be seen in literature as well. *Lois the Witch* was written in 1859, and it deals with the seriousness of witch hunts. In contrast, the modern book by Roald Dahl takes the portrayal of witches less seriously and pictures them in an amusing way. I regard *Lois the Witch* and *The Witches* as proper representations of the change of perception of witches – from terrifying witch trials to fairy tales for children.



## Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na dvě různá vyobrazení čarodějnic v britské literatuře. První z nich ukazuje zcela běžnou osobu, většinou ženu, během čarodějnických procesů od patnáctého do sedmnáctého století. V těchto dobách byly popraveny stovky tisíc mužů a žen. Mezi hlavní způsoby poprav patřilo zejména upalování, uškrcení nebo oběšení na veřejném místě. Tito lidé byli popravováni především proto, že je někdo z jejich okolí obvinil z ovládnutí nadpřirozených schopností. Mezi nejčastější obvinění patřilo konání ceremonií za přítomnosti ďábla, létání na koštěti a zvířatech nebo obětování nemluvňat.

Lidé během sedmnáctého století věřili, že lze čarodějnici poznat podle speciální skvrny na těle. Tato skvrna měla být údajně neobvykle vypadající jizva, kterou na těle oběti vytvořil ďábel v rámci zpečetění jejich dohody. Z tohoto důvodu muselo být všem čarodějnicím před popravou odstraněno veškeré ochlupení včetně vlasů. Když se vyšetřovatelům skvrnu nepodařilo najít, obvykle to odůvodnili tím, že ji ďábel před prohlídkou oběti odstranil, aby jejich dohoda nebyla prozrazena. V Anglii navíc musely obviněné ženy podstoupit tělesnou prohlídku také z důvodu pověry, že čarodějnice mají o jednu bradavku navíc.

Jednou z nejdůležitějších knih, která se zabývá čarodějnictvím, je *Malleus Maleficarum* neboli *Kladivo na čarodějnice* z roku 1486. Jedná se o detailně sepsaný teologický dokument vydaný katolickou církví. Právě tato kniha podnítila mnoho čarodějnických procesů v Evropě. Autoři *Kladiva na Čarodějnice* Johann Sprenger a Heinrich Kraemer ve svém díle uvádí podrobnosti z čarodějnické reality. V knize také stojí, že veškeré pochybnosti o existenci démonického světa jsou považovány za kacířství. Druhou část knihy tvoří bájně příběhy o aktivitách čarodějnic a třetí část knihy obsahuje návody, jak postupovat během čarodějnických procesů.

Důvodů, proč byly z čarodějnictví obviňovány hlavně ženy, bylo mnoho. *Malleus Maleficarum* uvádí, že žena je mentálně i fyzicky slabá a její intelekt se podobá intelektu dítěte. Z toho důvodu je žena údajně více náchylná ke spolčování se s ďáblem a uvalování kleteb na ostatní. Mnoho historiků se také shoduje, že nejvíce obvinění z čarodějnictví čelily chudé svobodné ženy středního věku. Za čarodějnice ale byly také velice často považovány ženy, které byly obviněny z cizoložství, interrupce nebo zabití novorozeněte.

V této práci jsem zpracovala kapitolu také o tzv. dobrých čarodějnicích. Tyto čarodějnice (většinou ženy) praktikovaly magii, která byla společností k užítku. Mezi jejich hlavní činnosti patřilo především léčení nemocných pomocí bylin. Podle encyklopedie čarodějnictví uměly tyto ženy také předpovídat budoucnost, identifikovat zloděje nebo odvrátit zlou magii a kletby.

V rámci kapitoly o historii amerických čarodějnických procesů jsem také uvedla původní obyvatelé a jejich vztah k čarodějnictví. Obyvatelé puritánské Nové Anglie věřili, že divoká příroda je útočištěm ďábla, a jelikož žili indiáni v lesích a odlehlé přírodě, byli s čarodějnictvím často spojováni. Evropští osidlovatelé považovali zabíjení „divochů“ a čarodějnic za svou povinnost. V knize *Čarodějnice Lois*<sup>56</sup> má jedna z postav indiánský původ a je popravena poté, co ji člen rodiny, ve které dlouhá léta sloužila, obviní z čarodějnických aktivit a také z prokletí dvou dětí, které léta vychovávala.

*Čarodějnice Lois* je povídka založena na salemských procesech. Hlavní postava Lois je obviněna a popravena poté, co ji její dvě sestřenice a teta obviní z čarodějnictví. Celé město najednou věří, že je Lois nebezpečná a je nutné ji pro dobro všech popravit. Od první popravené obyvatelky města se lidé začali vzájemně obviňovat a brzy přišlo o život několik nevinných lidí. V rámci mého výzkumu jsem dospěla k závěru, že tehdejší vzájemné obviňování spoluobčanů ve městech bylo velice snadné. Někteří z čarodějnic nařkli nevinné osoby pro slávu a pozornost, jiní se k tomu uchýlovali z důvodu nesympatií proti danému člověku. Tímto způsobem je to také vyobrazeno v *Čarodějnicích Lois*. Loisinina teta se nedovedla smířit s mentální poruchou jejího syna. Z tohoto důvodu využila čarodějnické situace ve městě a obvinila Lois z toho, že jejího syna proklela. Tím očistila jeho reputaci ve společnosti a zajistila mu o něco lepší postavení. Loisině sestřenice Faith se zase nelíbilo, že muž, o kterého měla zájem, se více zajímal o Lois. Z toho důvodu ji obvinila z praktikování magie a tím ji připravila o život.

Na závěr jsem provedla analýzu knihy, která vyobrazuje čarodějnice naprosto odlišným způsobem. V knize *Čarodějnice* od Roalda Dahla jsou čarodějnice vyobrazeny velice zábavně. Čarodějnice tohoto příběhu mají mnoho humorných fyzických abnormalit. Všechny jsou například plešaté, místo slin mají inkoust nebo mají chodidla bez prstů.

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<sup>56</sup> Kniha nebyla oficiálně přeložena do češtiny. Tento překlad jsem zvolila sama.

Tato pohádka je skvělým příkladem toho, jak je v dnešní době na čarodějnice pohlíženo. Mnohdy už nejsou spojovány s tragickým lidským pochybením a zabíjením nevinných lidí v minulých stoletích. Dnes se za ně např. děti převlékají na Halloween a v knihách a filmech jsou vyobrazeny jako staré ohavné ženy s bradavicemi a velkým nosem, které létají na koštěti. Lidé a zejména děti už dnes čarodějnice vnímají jako pohádkové bytosti a stále méně lidí si je představuje jako obyčejné nevinné ženy, které byly neprávem obviněny a popraveny uprostřed města před zraky obyvatel.

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## **Annotation**

**Name:** Aneta Křížová

**Faculty:** Faculty of Arts

**Department:** Department of English and American Studies

**Title of the thesis:** From Terrifying Witch Trials to Fairy Tales for Children: How the Portrayal of Witches Changed in English Literature

**Supervisor:** doc. Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D.

**Number of pages:** 40

This bachelor thesis deals with witches and the development of their portrayal in English literature. I will analyse the change of the perception of witches from scary witch trials to funny fairy tales for children. For the literary analysis, I will compare a short story by Elizabeth Gaskell called *Lois the Witch*, which is based on the Salem witch trials, with a fairy tale by Roald Dahl called *The Witches*.

**Keywords:** Witchcraft, Magic, Witches, Literature, Fairy tales, Witch trials

## **Anotace**

**Jméno:** Aneta Křížová

**Fakulta:** Filozofická fakulta

**Katedra:** Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

**Název práce:** Z děsivých čarodějnických procesů na pohádky pro děti: Jak se během doby změnil pohled na téma čarodějnic v anglické literatuře

**Vedoucí práce:** doc. Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D.

**Počet stran:** 40

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem čarodějnic a vývojem jejich zobrazování v anglické literatuře. Zanalyzuji, jak se vyobrazení čarodějnic změnilo z děsivých čarodějnických procesů na zábavné pohádky pro děti. V praktické části této práce rozeberu povídku s názvem *Čarodějnice Lois* od anglické spisovatelky Elizabeth Gaskell, která je založena na skutečném příběhu salemských procesů a pohádku od spisovatele Roalda Dahla s názvem *Čarodějnice*.

**Klíčová slova:** Čarodějnictví, Magie, Čarodějnice, Pohádky, Čarodějnické procesy