



TRANSITIONS
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JOURNAL

Call for Submissions

Deadline: 22nd April 2024

“Hexing the System: Casting Spells, Breaking Chains” (May 2024)

**Edited by Nicola Boccardi, Domenico Ianuale, Eleonora Martines and
Debora Nesi**

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- Witch:
1. historically, in mythology and fiction, a woman believed to practise magic or sorcery, esp black magic.
 2. a practitioner of a Nature-based religion founded on ancient beliefs, which honours both a male and female divine principle and includes the practice of magic, esp healing magic, and divination.
 3. (informal, derogatory) an ugly or wicked woman.
 4. a fascinating or enchanting woman.
 5. short for water witch.
(Collins Dictionary)

Trying to define what a witch is proves to be a task more difficult than expected. The numerous meanings leave no fixed grounds: even the most reliable association, the one between witches and female gender identity, is at times faulty. It is thus clear how the notion of “witch” is deeply context and culture-dependent, so much so that it has been and still is multifaceted and contradictory: as the Italian historian Alessandro Barbero pointed out, every age has its witches, even ours.

Since the beginning of the history of humanity, magic and superstition have always been present in various forms, in every age. For contemporary Western culture, the emblematic societal response to witches and witchcraft lies in the infamous witch-hunts. This cultural phenomenon had great emotional repercussions, easily

leading to periods of paranoia, moral panic and mass hysteria; a feeling that developed throughout an impressive time span, starting in the Middle-Ages and officially ending in the 18th century, thus challenging the formal claims of the so-called “Age of Enlightenment”.

It is hard to explain the persecution of witches only through the dim intellect of the masses, too bigoted, ignorant, naive or easily scared by the idea of magical powers; it is especially hard when one considers that many of the earliest witches were women harmoniously integrated in the villages and communities that they inhabited. The discrimination that led to their elimination from society came instead from above: those in power could maintain the status-quo simply by marking any kind of opposition or deviation as heretical. The accusations of witchcraft during the years were frequently aimed at individuals who dared to deviate from established societal norms. The accused were often individuals with unconventional beliefs; practitioners of alternative healing methods; women who challenged traditional gender roles. The mere act of questioning the religious and social order was enough to mark one as a threat to the established power structures, transforming one into a dangerous and blasphemous *enemy of faith*.

Women were exceptionally vulnerable to this kind of accusations, and witchcraft became inextricably linked to women. One notable example of this can be found in the 1487 treatise *Malleus Maleficarum*, written by Heinrich Kramer in order to provide a suitable guide for the identification and prosecution of alleged witches. In the title we can find a grammatically feminine word, “maleficarum” and, moreover, the author provided an erroneous etymology of the term “femina” (woman), making it deriving from “fe + minus” (less faith) (Kramer and Sprenger, 44): a clear manipulation and distortion of language aimed at reinforcing gender biases and discrimination.

Scholars like Silvia Federici have explored witchcraft as a form of resistance to the status quo; for example, she argues that “[...] what [was] persecuted under the name of “Witchcraft”, was a different relationship between human being and between human beings and nature, including the animal world” (Federici, 2019). In one of her most known works, *Caliban and the Witch*, she elucidates the intricate ties between capitalism, patriarchy, and the persecution of witches during the early modern period. Her perspective unveils how accusations of witchcraft targeted women in vital communal roles, portraying the witch-hunts as deliberate strategies to control and exploit female labor. Federici’s analysis extends beyond the trials, delving into broader themes of resistance, the commons, and women challenging oppressive systems.

In her book *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*, the well-known American historian Anne L. Barstow complements this narrative by meticulously examining the societal and cultural factors fueling the persecution of witches, stressing the impact of religious, political, and economic forces. Barstow emphasises the gendered nature of the trials, debunks prevailing myths, and illustrates how accusations were rooted in misogynistic beliefs. Her work shows the complicity of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities in perpetuating witch-hunts, offering a nuanced understanding of their social, cultural, and political contexts.

Together, these works enrich our understanding of witchcraft as a historical resistance against deeply ingrained oppressive structures. Where there is a status-quo there is rebellion, and the hegemonic system will try anything to stop the resistance: from repression to castration, from appropriation to re-signification. *Transitions: A Postgraduate Journal* invites scholars and writers to contribute to our upcoming issue, “Hexing the System: Casting Spells, Breaking Chains”, by exploring the multifaceted ways in which witchcraft practices served as a form of resistance – both individual

and collective – against patriarchy and societal norms throughout history. It would be furthermore interesting to analyse accusations of witchcraft alleged especially to women from the 20th century onwards: this could be a fruitful way to reinterpret these accusations as attempts to suppress thorny voices by contemporary dictatorships and extremist political parties.

References:

www.collinsdictionary.com/it/dizionario/inglese/witch

Barbero, Alessandro. “Ogni Epoca Ha Le Sue Streghe: Anche La Nostra.” YouTube, 4 Mar. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=2u3CHO4D34I. Accessed 18 February 2024.

Barstow, Anne Llewellyn. *Witchcraze: A new history of the European witch hunts*. San Francisco, CA: Pandora, 1995.

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the body and primitive accumulation*. London: Penguin Books, 2021.

Federici, Silvia. “Silvia Federici on Witch Hunts, Body Politics and Rituals of Resistance”. Interview with Sarah Lyons. Brooklyn, February 15, 2019.

Kramer, Heinrich and Sprenger, James. *Malleus Maleficarum*. New York: Dover, 1971. Accessed February 18th, 2024 <https://archive.org/details/malleusmaleficar00inst/page/n7/mode/2up>.

Scope

Transitions: A Postgraduate Journal is a student-based, open-access journal that covers the literary and linguistic disciplines taught in the MA programme in English and Anglo-American Studies at Sapienza University of Rome.

We, therefore, welcome contributions to such areas of study as literary theory and criticism, linguistics, and translation studies. We particularly value interdisciplinary, international, and intercultural perspectives. In addition to short academic essays, we consider not only reviews of a large variety of recent texts (e.g., literary, verbal-visual, and audio-visual texts as well as academic essays and books) but also original pieces of creative writing. Prospective authors need not be enrolled in the MA program in English and Anglo-American Studies at Sapienza University of Rome, but they are expected to write in good English. Before submitting their proposals, prospective authors might want to examine the contributions published in the pilot issue of our journal to get a clearer picture of the kind of academic essays, creative writings and reviews previously published in *Transitions: A Postgraduate Journal*:

<https://transitionspostgradjournal.wordpress.com/issues>.

The next issue of Transitions will consist of three sections: “Academic Writings”, “Reviews” and “Creative Writings”. For each of these, we seek original contributions engaging with the topic of witchcraft. We encourage submissions that delve into the historical, cultural, and literary aspects of witchcraft, examining how it has been utilised, especially by women, as a tool for empowerment and defiance.

1. Academic Writings

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- **Witchcraft as Resistance:** Analysing how witchcraft practices challenge patriarchal, imperialist, and colonialist structures and norms.
- **Gender Dynamics and Intersectionality:** Exploring the intersection of witchcraft with gender identity, race, sexuality, and other aspects of identity and its role in dismantling oppressive gender hierarchies.
- **Literary Representations:** Investigating how literature portrays witchcraft as a means of individual and collective resistance.
- **Historical Perspectives:** Examining instances in history where witchcraft was employed as a tool for liberation and social change.
- **Cultural Significance:** Analysing the cultural and symbolic dimensions of witchcraft in diverse societies.

Academic essays should be between 1000 and 1500 words in length (with a $\pm 10\%$ tolerance). This limit includes in-text citations and footnotes, but it does not include any translation from non-English texts, appendices, tables, or the mandatory list of references.

Proposals for longer essays might also be considered, but they should first be discussed with an editor (eastransitions@gmail.com).

They might also discuss texts that did not originally appear in English on the condition that they do so from a comparative perspective or on condition that they deal with methodological issues in their papers. An English translation of all quotations from such non-English texts should also be provided.

Before submitting their proposals, prospective authors are required to check that they have followed the style sheet available at <https://transitionspostgradjournal.wordpress.com/announcements>.

Proposals for the academic writings section should also include:

- A provisional title;
- A short biography of the author;

- A 200-word abstract, including a clear thesis statement, insights into the methodology adopted and remarks on the reasons to investigate the research topic identified;
- A provisional list of references, including both primary and secondary sources.

2. Reviews

Texts of interest include but are not limited to:

- Single poems and poetry collections;
- Plays;
- Fiction (e.g., novels, short stories);
- Graphic novels and comics;
- Audiovisuals (e.g., films, TV series);
- Academic essays and books.

Prospective authors might also discuss recent texts that did not originally appear in English. An English translation of all quotations from such non-English texts should also be provided.

Reviews should not exceed 1000 words in length. This limit includes in-text citations and footnotes, but it does not include any translation from non-English texts. Proposals for longer reviews might also be considered, but they should first be discussed with an editor (eaastransitions@gmail.com). It should be pointed out that, although the editorial board does not discourage the use of a critical perspective when writing a review, prospective authors should consider whether their work better qualifies as a piece of academic writing or as a review.

Before submitting their proposals, prospective authors are required to check that they have followed the style sheet available at <https://transitionspostgradjournal.wordpress.com/announcements>.

Editors' suggestions:

Books

- Adichie Chimamanda Ngozi – The Danger of a Single Story (2009); We should all be feminists (2014).
- Barstow, Anne - Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts (1994).
- Blakemore A. K. – The Manningtree Witches (2021).
- Devi Mahasweta – The Hunt (1990).
- Doyle Sady – Dead Blondes and Bad Mothers (2019).
- Ehrenreich Barbara, English Deirdre – Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers (1972).
- Federici Silvia – Caliban and the Witch (2004).
- Johanne Lykke Holm – Strega (2022).
- Ward Martha – Voodoo Queen: The Spirited Lives of Marie Laveau (2004).

TV series and movies

- American Horror Story (TV series, 2011-ongoing)
- Kiki's Delivery Service (Movie, 1989)
- Medea (Movie, 1969)
- Salem (TV series, 2014-2017)

Characters of interest

Here are a few examples of figures that have been identified as witches and accused of witchcraft in the 21st century. This demonstrates how the issue is somehow and somewhere still particularly relevant, being connected to left-wing political and social activism.

- **Marie Laveau**

She was born a free woman of color and was a Creole practitioner of Voodoo, herbalist and midwife who was renowned in New Orleans. Her daughter, Marie Laveau II (1827 – c. 1862), also practiced rootwork, conjure, Native American and African spiritualism as well as Louisiana Voodoo and traditional Roman Catholicism.

- **Tituba**

She was an enslaved Native American woman who was one of the first to be accused of witchcraft during the Salem witch trials of 1692–1693. She was enslaved by the minister of Salem Village, in the Province of Massachusetts Bay. She was pivotal in the trials because she confessed to witchcraft when examined by the authorities, giving credence to the accusations.

Furthermore, she accused two other women, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne, of the same crime. She was imprisoned for over a year, but never tried. What happened to her after a grand jury dismissed the case against her in May 1693 is unknown.

- **Giulia Tofana**

She was an Italian professional poisoner. She used to sell a poison called Aqua Tofana, supposedly invented by her mother, to women who wanted to murder their abusive husbands.

Other interesting figures in the perspective of this study could be also more renowned ones, such as Circe, Morgana, Ecuba, Medea, Lilith, etc.

Proposals for the reviews section should include:

- A provisional title (optional);
- A short biography of the author
- A 150/200-word abstract;
- A provisional list of references (if any).

3. Creative Writings

Only original pieces of creative writing that have not been published elsewhere can be submitted.

Creative writing pieces should not exceed 1200 words in length.

Proposals for longer pieces might also be considered, but they should first be discussed with an editor (eaastransitions@gmail.com).

Proposals for the “Creative Writings” section should include:

- A provisional title;
- A short biography of the author
- An original piece of creative writing.

Submission guidelines:

Before submitting their proposals, prospective authors should carefully read our ethical statement and editorial policies available at <https://transitionspostgradjournal.wordpress.com/ethical-statement>.

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Prospective authors are required to follow the style sheet available [here](#) before submitting their proposals. All submissions should be sent as a PDF attachment to eastransitions@gmail.com, with the subject line: “Proposal 22-04-2024”

The **deadline** for submissions is **Monday, 22nd April 2024**.

We look forward to receiving your insightful contributions that unravel the enchanting world of witchcraft as a potent force for individual and collective resistance.