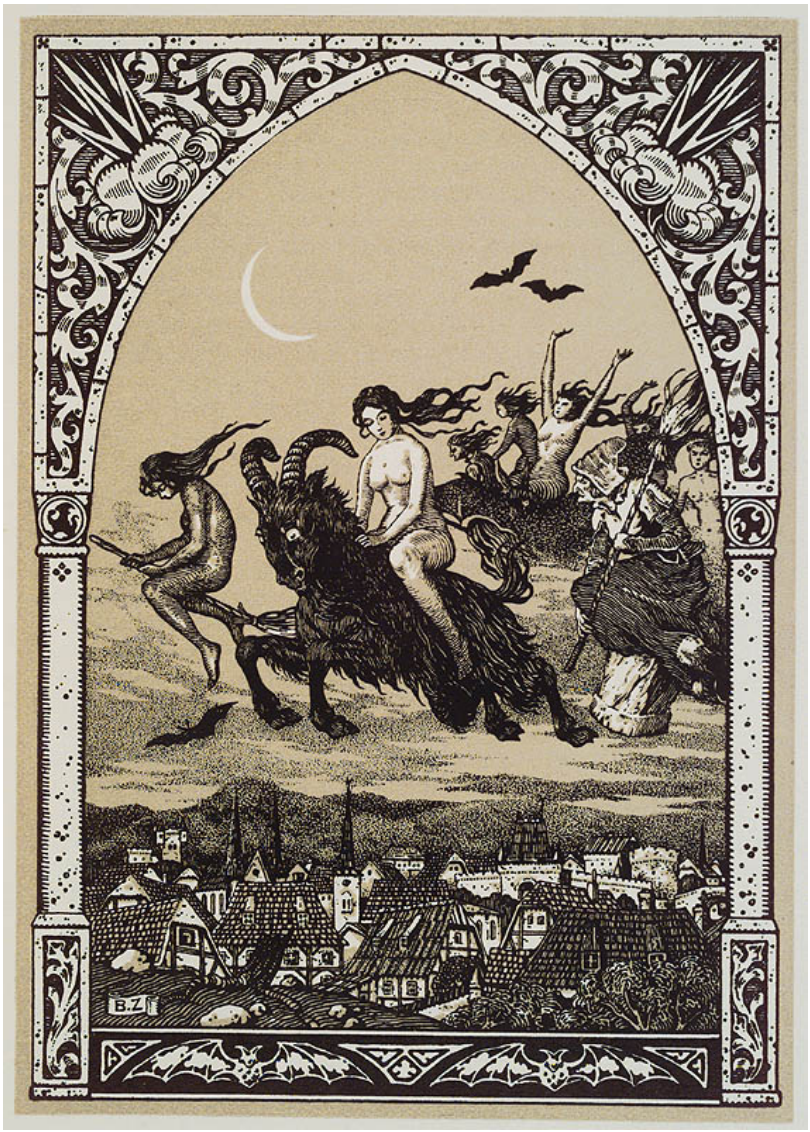
Witches and the Devil in *The Master and Margarita* (1966), *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) and *Good Omens* (1990): The Supernatural Other as a Vehicle for Satire of Social Power, Moral Standards and Religious Beliefs



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INTRODUCTION

Witchcraft and the supernatural have always been a part of the horror genre. Witches, vampires and other fantastic creatures – ghosts, demons, or the devil himself – all represent the mysterious and irrational part of common reality. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen explains, "the monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy […], giving them life and an uncanny independence" (4). Most of the time witches and devils work either as the agents of the unseen supernatural realm, or as antagonists in a story concerning good versus evil. Rosemary Jackson explains that the concept of evil is usually associated with the unfamiliar and weird, and closely attached to cultural fears: "Any social structure tends to exclude as 'evil' anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction […] the other is defined as evil precisely because his/her difference and a possible power to disturb the familiar and the known" (53). These fears of the other are closely tied to human political or religious beliefs, social norms and traditions that have formed through the ages to structure a particular society. Rather than exploring witches and devils as embodiments of evil, this thesis investigates how these supernatural elements are used by authors from different cultures and periods as devices with which to satirize the established beliefs about what is normal and desirable within a culture. As such, these authors turn the tables on the usual function of witches and demons within horror literature, as now the supposedly supernatural Other is no longer a symbol of evil, but satirizes the flaws within the hegemonic culture.

As a literary mode, satire has existed since ancient times, with some of the major forms of satire still recognized today originating in Roman culture. According to Sharon Hamilton, "satire is a genre of comedy that is directed at ridiculing human foibles and vices, such as vanity, hypocrisy, stupidity, and greed," but "the target of the satire may vary" (21). Satire uses irony, humor, exaggeration, parody, caricature, and other tropes in order to mock social traditions or certain figures, institutions, or humanity in general. Its purpose is to draw attention to blind spots in individual or collective morality. Satire is a literary genre but also a device, which, according

to Jonathan Greenberg, "combines, inhabits, or transforms other genres" (10). Greenberg distinguishes between "satire as a *genre* and satire as a *mode* – or between the *form* and *tone* of satire" (9). In the classical period, the term "satire" generally referred to poetic forms. There were three main types: Horatian, Juvenalian, and Menippean satire. Horatian satire was generally light and comedic, while Juvenalian was rather dark and often punitive. Menippean satire combined traits of both in order to satirize particular attitudes and beliefs, but was characterized by "a much looser approach to form than the traditions of verse satire used by Horace and Juvenal" (Gilmore 85). Greenberg explains that ancient satire "is recognized as an important precursor to contemporary satiric fiction" (10). Indeed, Hamilton defines various prose satires in classical terms: defining Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* as Horatian and his *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as Juvenalian satire (22).

This thesis examines witchcraft and other aspects of the supernatural, like the devil, as satirical devices in modern prose fiction. I will investigate how the witches and devils are presented as the protagonists in satirical (horror) fiction and analyze how these supernatural Others highlight various flaws and blind-spots in social power, moral standards and religious beliefs within the cultures in which they appeared. One challenge of this research is that the object of satire in these fictions is not always obvious; even when it is, the implementation of it is not always successful. However, it is significant to explore the possibilities of these supernatural Others as satirical devices, and to see how these figures, usually defined as evil, can be used in fact to mock the powers that have excluded them from the hegemonic culture and its social norms.

This thesis will include close-textual analysis of three famous satirical (horror) novels: *The Master and Margarita* (1966) by the Russian author Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) by the American author John Updike and *Good Omens* (1990) by the British authors Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman. I chose these three novels because they display different types of satire; also the socio-political contexts in which they were written and

published vary, which allows for an investigation into the scope of satirical horror. The three novels were not only written in different eras and cultures, they are also set in different periods and satirically address aspects of the authors' specific cultures at the time, which provides an insight into Russian, American, and British perspectives on satirical horror fiction.

For the satirical purpose of a horror novel to function properly, it is important that an author does not set the story in a full-blown fantasy world. Instead, the witches and devil figures should be placed within the context of the normal reality of the reader; their powers should add some magical and supernatural elements to the story that allow for a contrast between the normal and the supposedly abnormal events. Each of the novels studied has its own satirical aim, which reflects on the current socio-political context of its place and time. *The Master and Margarita*, analyzed in chapter 1, was written in Stalinist Russia and satirizes the social and political regime during the 1930s. It is a multi-layered novel, which includes a historical plot, a love story, and a fantasy story. *The Witches of Eastwick*, analyzed in chapter 2, presents a critique of the 1960s American counterculture and its radical feminist tendencies, as well as the reception of the occult in American puritan society. This novel in fact expresses a rather bitter, Juvenalian satirical commentary on modern American culture in general, grotesquely displaying what Updike believes to be the dark and unpleasant aspects of modern American life. By contrast, *Good Omens*, analyzed in chapter 3, is a hilarious British comedy-novel in the tradition of Monty Python's *Life of Brian* (1979). It reflects satirically on what it perceives to be the outmoded Christian beliefs concerning the Apocalypse, and the stereotypes of saint and sinner, angel and demon, the saved and the damned, in the present time, as well as four hundred years ago, during the witch trials. The novel demonstrates a light and comedic approach to serious theological topics. Despite the differences in their plots, all three novels use witches and witchcraft, and include the devil, as central satirical devices to mock social norms, beliefs, and stereotypes of the culture in which they appeared.

CHAPTER 1: Witchcraft Against Totalitarianism in *The Master and Margarita*

Satire was Mikhail Bulgakov's favorite form of reflection on Soviet society, which he extensively expressed in his literary work. Bulgakov wrote many short stories, which often belonged to the genres of science-fiction or satirical fantasy. However, they were rarely published. In his work he often critiqued bureaucracy, the regime and its people. One of his most famous satirical novellas, *Heart of a Dog* (1925), tells the story of a stray dog who undergoes a human gland transplantation; as a consequence, he gains some human characteristics and abilities. Barbara E. Laudon describes this character as follows: "He is a low, crude, bestial *person* who quickly finds a place for himself in the new Soviet society" (2). This work, as many others, remained unpublished until 1968. During his life, Bulgakov was known mainly by his work in the theatre, as he wrote numerous plays. Most of the short stories related to the Devil, or other demonic themes, were rejected by publishers and sent back to the writer.

The Master and Margarita (1966) expresses a satire on life in Stalinist Russia. In his novel Bulgakov invites the Devil to Moscow and demonstrates what would happen to this overly-rationalized society with the interruption of the supernatural in its organized structure. Bulgakov criticizes the political regime, its social mentality, and the lack of spirituality of its citizens. He uses supernatural elements and witchcraft as the representation of the idealistic spiritual realm, as opposed to the struggle and strife of normal reality.

1.1 Mikhail Bulgakov and Life in Soviet Russia

Bulgakov started working on *The Master and Margarita* in 1928. He kept revising it until his death in 1940. From the beginning it was planned as a novel about the devil; the first versions had such names as *Engineer's Hoof* and *The Black Magician.* The first manuscript of *The Master and Margarita* with its final name and the heroes was burned by the author himself; the actual novel is composed of the restored notes, completed by Bulgakov's wife, after the writer's death.

The Master and Margarita was first published in 1966-1967 and made Mikhail Bulgakov world famous. It reflects deeply on the time in which it was written and on the life of its author.

Bulgakov struggled as a creative and sharp-minded individualist in the USSR. Amy de la Cour describes various interpretations of the novel and connects these to the story of the writer's life:

> *The Master and Margarita* evolved from its beginnings as a novel 'about the devil' to include a wealth of biographical detail from the author's increasing frustration at the difficulties he experienced as a writer in Stalinist Russia (including his burning of the original manuscript and its being rewritten effectively in secret with no hope of publication), his renewed faith in love after his marriage to his third wife, and a sense of resignation in the face of the death that he knew, at the end, was imminent. (180)

In order to understand why the novel was banned, and many of Bulgakov's other literary works were censored, it is important to realize how strict the totalitarian regime was in the years of Stalinism. The media, such as music, radio, magazines, theatre, art, cinema and literature had been under the government's control. Any ideas, considered "dangerous" or just undesirable for the Russian audience were eliminated. Any forms of foreign media, art, technology and even import products were strictly suppressed. However, the censorship was mainly ideological, so it did not ban the violence, as long as it did not contradict Soviet ideology.

Works of national art were allowed publication if they carried "right" ideas, such as collectivism, hard work, praise to the Communist party and to Stalin. Atheism and religious intolerance was one of the main goals of censorship, along with anti-Westernization and the suppression of any revolutionary ideas. The main purpose was to completely restrict people's knowledge of democracy, bourgeoisie, freedom of speech and any other different life standards, so that they would not rebel. Jana M. Domanico has studied the background and preconditions of the Soviet regime and argues that: "the years in which Bulgakov wrote *The Master and Margarita* – 1928 to 1940 – were marked by great unrest and disorientation among Soviet

civilians" (14). She adds that people lived in the state of "fear and isolation from the continuous threat of impending war" and developed "a cynical and negative view of both international affairs as well as of the official press" (16).

Obviously, this time was not the best for Russian artists and intellectualists; this sense of frustration is present in *The Master and Margarita.* Peter Petro states that Bulgakov "became a satirist just at the time when real satire (satire that penetrates forbidden zones) became absolutely inconceivable" (47). Petro has studied various interpretations of the novel and defines *The Master and Margarita* as "metaphysical satire" (49). Bulgakov's novel is a complex philosophical work, incorporating historical, religious and supernatural aspects. The novel is structured as two parallel plots: the modern world in 1930's Moscow, where live the Master and his beloved Margarita; and the time of Christ's Crucifixion, with a focus on the figure of Pontius Pilate. Also, the novel includes a "book in the book," as the story of Pilate is the Master's manuscript that he wrote and later burned; this in turn reflects Bulgakov's creative process on *The Master and Margarita*. However, despite such a complex structure and eventful plot, Bulgakov chose the figures of Margarita and the Master as the main focus of the story, even though "these characters are not highly visible in the novel" (4), as Laudon explains. However, this focus adds another important feature to the novel, creating a love story.

The Master and Margarita combines multiple genres into a hybrid text, in order to satirize the conservative ways of the Russian literary tradition. Domanico points out: "Within the novel, one finds aspects of historical fiction, folklore and magical realism" (22). In this way the novel presents multiple perspectives of the story during the reading experience, such as religious, gnostic and apocalyptic perspectives, as well as the potential to understand the story following psychological archetypes, or as political satire. As de la Cour states, Bulgakov included many symbolic and occult motif in his novel, and borrowed from various sources: "…Goethe, freemasonry, Boehme, alchemy, and the Kabbalah that point to a deeper understanding of

Bulgakov's vision of a spiritual quest for inner development and rebirth" (180). The novel is as multilayered and rich, as it is often widely misunderstood.

Petro explains that placing the novel in the context of metaphysical satire provides the reader with some helpful concepts for the better understanding of the text: "[t]he concept of *poetic justice* and Pushkin's concept of *secret freedom*" (49). According to Petro, "Bulgakov's satire attacks the *new* Soviet mentality" provides such examples in the novel (52). The target of his satire is very broad: from everyday problems, like queues or the lack of goods in Soviet society, to dull bureaucracy, restrictive government, harsh policing, difficult writer's organizations, and moral double standards and other weaknesses in human nature (53). Yet the aim of Bulgakov's satire is the irony of historical events in relation to the sense of progress celebrated in Soviet Russia.

Bulgakov sympathizes with the outcasts, like the characters who do not belong to the Soviet reality. The supernatural elements in the novel are presented in opposition to the normal reality of Soviet Moscow. While in the novel the mentality of the citizens is very conservative, and focused on materialism, the demons and witches represent the irrational and spiritual realm. The purpose of the supernatural creatures and witchcraft in the novel is to create chaos in the organized system of the city, to mock the human characters' narrow beliefs, and to bring justice upon those who deserve it. The following sections will analyze the figure of the Devil, the demons and witches. I will observe what role they play as the protagonists and how the author uses these characters as the satirical devices in the novel.

1.2 The Foreign Devil as the Judge of Human Souls

Bulgakov was influenced by Goethe's *Faust,* which is visible in many symbols and images in the novel. In the opening epigraph, the writer refers to Goethe, taking Mephistopheles words: "Say as last – who art thou?" – "That Power I serve which wills forever evil yet does forever good" (Bulgakov 7). Alexandra Nicewicz Carroll has studied the image of the Devil in the novel and

concludes that the "Goethe connection" is present in the characters of Woland and Margarita (14). Bulgakov's story line of the relationship between the Devil and the witch protagonist is essential for the understanding of the novel as a satire, but it differs from its representation in *Faust.* Carroll refers to other scholars who read the novel from the Faustian perspective, and says: "Curtis states, while *The Master and Margarita* borrows from *Faust,* the novel itself is not Faustian" (14). As well, de la Cour calls this connections "superficial similarities" and claims that the direct allusion to *Faust* is not Bulgakov's purpose (181).

The epigraph provides one of the most significant themes in the novel: the relationship between the forces of Good and Evil; at the same time, it rejects the conservative black and white thinking. The novel starts with an argument about religion and the reality of the historical figure of Christ. Talking to the poet Bezdomny, the editor Berlioz says that the Christians "invented their Jesus" and adds: "In fact he never lived at all" (Bulgakov 16). Very soon after, the stranger appears in the avenue. Both the poet and the editor judge him as a foreigner by his outstanding looks. The stranger interferes in the conversation and asks again if they do not believe in Jesus and in God, and Berlioz replies: "Yes, neither of us believe in God" (18). "Oh, how delightful!"- reacts the foreigner (18). Then Berlioz adds that it is nothing special to be an atheist in their country; most of the people have given up believing in "fairy-tales." In response to this the stranger shakes his hand, exclaiming: "Allow me to thank you with all my heart!" (18). The stranger, Woland, is no other than the Devil himself, who is very interested in this position and is happy to hear that the whole country has given up believing in God. This short conversation is quite amusing, as Woland eventually states: "Jesus did exist, you know" (15), and begins to tell the story about Pontius Pilate.

Several scholars have noted that one of the most satirical aspects of Woland's character is that he is presented as a foreigner. Laudon says: "this term expresses everything there is to say about the stranger and it is ironic observation as well" (162). His appearance is described in the beginning of the novel:

> As to his teeth, he had platinum crowns on his left side and gold ones on his right. He wore an expensive grey suite and foreign shoes of the same color as his suit. His grey beret was stuck jauntily over one ear and under his arm he carried a walking-stick with a knob in a shape of a poodle's head. He looked slightly over forty. Crooked sort of mouth. Clean-shaven. Dark hair. Right eye black, left eye for some reason green. Eyebrows black, but one higher than the other. In short – a foreigner. (16)

Berlioz and Ivan immediately identify him as a "German," or an "Englishman," and later on "probably a Frenchman," or "a Pole" (16-17). His identity becomes more and more uncertain. As Laudon points out, "first clear indication" of Woland, being a "supernatural figure" comes with his statement about having breakfast with Kant (163). Furthermore, he predicts Berlioz's death and Ivan's nervous breakdown. The chapter "Never Talk to Strangers" reveals Woland's abilities to exist independently from the fictional characters' reality, time and dimensions, to read people's minds and to foresee the future.

Woland presents himself as a "professor of black magic," for which he was officially invited to Moscow. This can be seen as another satirical remark, as it is mentioned that he was invited to Moscow for a consultation on the topic. Maria Beville notes the ironic nature of the demonic visit and says: "It becomes apparent by the fourth chapter that the devil and his cohort have not just appeared randomly in Moscow, but are generally summoned unknowingly by citizens who use common expressions in colloquial Russian such as 'the devil knows' or invocations of hell and damnation" (153). Woland arrives to Moscow by his own words – out of the interest to see if the Muscovites have changed overtime. During his performance in the theatre, he comes to the conclusion that they are people like many others, "who love money," but "can be compassionate too" and then adds ironically that "the housing shortage soured them" (147). In this episode, Woland expresses the author's satirical voice. He acts as a judge of the human flaws, and this characteristic will remain one of his most significant personality traits through the novel.

Woland and his company's sojourn in the city lasts for a very short time; however, it causes a significant amount of stress to the well-organized and rationalized society of Soviet Moscow. Occupying Flat No.50, they exist in the fantastic fifth dimension. It becomes clear that they do not exactly exist in normal reality, as the place was searched and found to be "completely empty"; yet it was also "playing tricks" (381) on the neighbors and the police. Beville defines Woland and his mischievous crew as "the agent of the unconscious" (153). Within a few days they create total chaos by beheading a few people, sending a dozen of the officials into the asylum, causing trouble and disturbances at the Variety theatre, distributing fake money, disturbing the work of the government agencies, occupying and then burning down the flat, a store and the Griboedov's restaurant. However, most of these troubles are caused not by the devil himself, but with a help of his company: Koroviev, Behemoth, Azazello, and sometimes Hella. As de la Cour points out: "There is an awful lot of grotesque violence in the book, this is always the work of Woland's retinue" (180).

The figure of Woland remains quite ambiguous. Most of the time he acts as an observer and does not speak as much as his companions do. His role is to look into the human souls and to decide what each deserves. While absorbing some of the common features and fictional characteristics of Satan, Woland does not conform completely to the traditional concept of the devil. He is neither mischievous nor seductive. He is absolutely not interested in Margarita as a sexual object, as when she says: "I see now… I am to go to bed with him," Azazello reassures her, by saying: "I must disappoint you. He doesn't want you for that" (260). A significant point is that Woland, unlike Mephistopheles in *Faust*, is not portrayed as a tempter, whose purpose is to possess Master's or Margarita's soul. Finally, he is not in a battle with the forces of Good, on the contrary – he is very disappointed to hear that people do not believe in the existence of Jesus and in God.

Carroll's ideas on the Jungian concept of the Shadow archetype echo Beville's, as she also defines Woland as a literary representation of the shadow archetype, or "the negative

interior aspects an individual does not wish to confront, who invades the personality and functions as a numinous agent of transformation" (6). As much as he represents the darker sides of one's soul, he embodies the darkness that creates the balance in the world. In other words, Woland represents the dual nature of the world. Talking to Matthew the Levite, at the end of the novel, Woland says: "Think now: where would your good be if there were no evil and what would the world look like without shadow? Shadows are thrown by people and things […] Do you want to strip the whole globe by removing every tree and every creature to satisfy your fantasy of a bare world?" (405). According to Carroll, the Jungian concept of the shadow is responsible not only for the chaos in the novel, but for everything irrational and unknown as well. In this way, Woland's character is obviously opposed to the rationalism and logical world of the Soviet reality, as he is not bound by the rules and limitations of the real world. He expresses the satirical voice of the author, who criticizes people for their narrow beliefs and the lack of spirituality. His purpose in the novel is to examine human souls and to bear judgement.

1.3 Supernatural Forces as the Agents of Chaos

Beville studies *The Master and Margarita* as a postmodern Gothic novel, saying that the novel combines supernatural, satirical comedy and serious philosophical concerns (150). She says that Bulgakov blends the Gothic aesthetics "with political satire, supernatural fantasy and historical, mythological narrative," which makes the interpretations of the novel very diverse and "highly imaginative" (150). Many classic Gothic novels, such as Ann Radcliffe's late eighteenth-century romances, or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), were based on traditional Christian morality and a clear juxtaposition of Good and Evil, in which the supernatural and demonic elements are unambiguously representations of Evil. In order to subvert this Gothic tradition, Bulgakov includes the same Gothic tropes in his work. However, his Devil, as well as the members of his retinue, no longer represent the forces of evil and corruption as they do in traditional Gothic fiction. Bulgakov transforms these Gothic figures of sublime terror into figures representing

playful irony, which they embody through their mischievous acts, their mockery and tricks. In this way "the forces of evil" mentioned in the epigraph are represented by more than just one individual. However, they do not act as the typical demons, but more as the extensions of Woland's power, whose mission is to highlight human flaws and to serve justice.

All of the Woland's companions belong to the fantastic world and possess various supernatural abilities. The first one introduced is Koroviev. He appears on the Patriarch's Ponds before Woland, almost like an omen, predicting that something will happen, as Berlioz was horrified when he saw him (14). He looks like "a transparent man of the strangest appearance. On his small head was a jockey-cap and he wore a short check bum-freezer made of air. The man was seven feet tall but narrow in the shoulders, incredibly thin and with a face made of derision", - this vision is so unexpected for Berlioz that he takes it for hallucination (14-15). He is described later in repulsive detail with "ironic and half-drunk eyes," wearing a pince-nez with "one lens missing and the other rattled in its frame" and "dirty white socks" that are visible (61). Through the novel he acts very noisily and constantly chatters, making outrageous remarks in order to discourage individuals who are rude and intrusive themselves.

He presents himself as an "interpreter to a foreign professor" to all the visitors of Flat No. 50 (114). Besides, Koroviev is often referred to as an "assistant" and a former "choirmaster" (146-147). He uses his supernatural skills constantly to confuse people, completing Woland's mission in Moscow. When Koroviev talks about the barman Fokich: "He will die in nine months' time in February of next year of cancer of the liver, in Ward No.4 of the First Moscow City Hospital" (237), the reader learns that he can predict a person's fate in greater detail than Woland. Also, Koroviev forces things to appear and disappear by his own will, faking some official papers and making foreign currency look like Rubles. Laudon gives an example of the episode with Koroviev, "leaving the office staff with an uncontrollable urge to sing" and describes his methods as "harmless but annoying" (64). Of all of Woland's crew, Koroviev is probably the least actively harmful. Laudon points out that "it is possible that Koroviev is

intended to be a parody of a secretary who confounds and frustrates those seeking an audience with a higher power who remains undisturbed behind closed doors" (61). He represents a communicator between Woland and the mortals, or in some cases – a prosecutor. His function is to reveal people's secrets and vices to the Devil's judgment.

During most of Koroviev's tricks, Behemoth remains his constant companion. Appearing as a "black cat of revolting proportions" (100), Behemoth can transform himself into a cat-like man and back again, keeping the abilities to speak and walk on his hind legs, while disguised as an animal. He is the most comical character in the novel; every time the reader encounters him, he does something very unexpected and abnormal for a cat. First, Behemoth is seen by Ivan as "a cat the size of a pig, black as soot and with luxuriant cavalry officers' whiskers," when he is getting aboard of a tram, offering money for a ride to the conductress and leaving the passengers astonished (63). He shocks Stepa Likhodeev, sitting in his flat with "a glass of vodka in one paw and a fork, on which he had just speared a pickled mushroom" (100). In this scene the cat acts as a human being, in fact – as Stepa himself, who has just woken up after a night of drinking.

Behemoth serves mainly as a performer and amuser. This role is supported by his appearance in the end of the novel, during the flight: "[t]he creature who had been the pet of the Prince of Darkness was revealed as a slim youth, a page-demon, the greatest jester that there has ever been" (427). Laudon marks that "the jester's position, with the devil and royalty alike, allows him to criticize or say what others fear to say, within certain limits, with impunity" (60). During the novel Behemoth constantly interrupts Woland and, in contrast to Koroviev, does not need permission from his master to take action, which can be seen in the scene when he banishes Stepa from Moscow (101). Domanico notes that Behemoth's role is very ironic. In the scene with Poplavsky he is comically "stern and authoritative" (41). Behemoth is amusingly impatient: "Do you understand Russian? – said the cat severely […] Poplavsky was speechless. 'Passport!' barked the cat and stretched out a fat paw" (227). In this situation the cat has a higher power than the man: he does not explain himself and gives commands, imitating the government's

representatives in grotesque fashion, and a such highlighting the flaws within the governmental system.

Throughout the novel, Behemoth often mimics humans, enjoying such activities, as eating at the restaurant, drinking alcohol, wearing a bow-tie or shooting his gun. The fact that Bulgakov uses an animal as a character is very significant, as this satirical trope goes back to the folkloric traditions (Gilmore 18-31). Russian fairy-tales include supernatural creatures, but often also animals, like wolves, foxes, bears, giving them human characteristics and abilities. Domanico refers to the studies of Russian folklore and says that the purpose of this art form is to "mock the vices and false virtues of the man's world" and concludes that "Bulgakov uses Behemoth as a vehicle for his satirical goals to destroy social hierarchies" (40). Besides the comical side, Behemoth bears an undoubted demonic nature, as black cats are commonly believed to accompany the Devil and to be a witch's familiar. By his color, size and name, his origins refer directly to the Bible, as Laudon notes: "The Biblical Behemoth is generally assumed to be a hippopotamus; the Russian word for the animal is *begemot*" (91).

The darker and more violent side of Behemoth reveals itself in the company of Azazello. Azazello's behavior differs from Koroviev and Behemoth, as he remains quite reserved and short-spoken. He obeys Woland's commands and can be seen most of the time in his master's company, or alone, serving mainly as a hitman. His appearance is terrifying, and Stepa "collapsed entirely," when "straight from the full-length mirror stepped short but unusually broad-shouldered man with a bowler hat on his head. A fang protruding from his mouth disfigured an already hideous physiognomy that was topped with fiery red hair" (101). Also he is described with some bandit's features like "empty black eyes" and with "a knife stuck into a leather belt" (228) and he keeps a "gnawed chicken bone" in his breast pocket at the meeting with Margarita (257). Azazello' s nature is repulsive, dark, and demonic, as his role is mainly to terrify people.

Laudon describes a few different Biblical sources for Azazello's character. She names the demon Azazel, who appears "in the form of scapegoat" (127), and who is transformed into the demon of "desert or wilderness" (128), or as a "fallen angel responsible for criminal and violent acts" (129). Throughout the novel, Azazello demonstrates such abilities as teleportation and mind reading; also he can hit a man's heart in "auricle or the ventricle" (317). In the scene on the Patriarchy's Ponds, where the reader sees Woland, Koroviev and Behemoth together, Azazello is there as well, even though he is not mentioned. Laudon notes his unseen presence and connects it with Azazello's ability to stab at the heart and cause pain which several characters feel during the novel (135). Azazello's role is not lightly-ironical, but can be seen as the representation of the invisible evil out in the world that strikes invisibly without warning. His character complements the lighter satirical vision, by contrasting with the more comedic members of the retinue and acting as the extension of Woland's power of judgement. He and the other members of the retinue complete their mission by bringing chaos in Moscow and disturbing the predictable, mundane everyday lives of its citizens.

1.4 Margarita: The Witch as a Symbol of Freedom and Spirituality

Margarita is introduced to the reader for the first time only from the words of the Master, who is telling his story to Ivan in the asylum. He saw her for the first time on the street and was struck "less by her beauty than by the extraordinary loneliness in her eyes" (161). As a protagonist with her own perspective of events, Margarita is introduced only in the second half of the book, in the chapter "Margarita." Here, the reader learns about her background. Margarita is obviously beautiful, clever and rich. She is married to a kind man, who adores her. She is childless, and lives in a comfort in a Gothic house near the Arbat: "Margarita Nikolaevna was never short of money. She could buy whatever she liked. Her husband had a plenty of interesting friend. Margarita never had to cook […] was she happy? Not for a moment" (249). Margarita does not find any meaning in her life without a "real, true, eternal love" (249) and a real purpose. The

Master reveals to Ivan that Margarita "would have committed suicide because her life was empty," had she not met the Master and fallen in love with him that day (163). She finds love when she first meets the Master; after his disappearance, she is dedicated to finding him.

There are a few early signs that indicate Margarita's later transformation into a witch. Firstly, when the Master meets her, she wears a black dress, which belongs to a classic image of the witch. She also has prophetic dreams and trusts her intuition (251), by which Bulgakov gives Margarita access to the spiritual and irrational realm. Another important detail is her eyes. They are sad, by the Master's description, and "glow with a strange fire" (249). The narrator mentions that Margarita has "a very slight squint in one eye" when he calls her a witch for the first time (250). The symbolism of eyes plays a significant role in the novel. Woland has one black and one green eye and Azazello has one walleye, and both represent the "evil" side of the supernatural. As Laudon notes: "Margarita may not wholly belong in the natural world. Her demands may be met only in the supernatural" (207). Therefore, Margarita remains frustrated and self-unrealized in normal Soviet reality, until her transformation into a witch.

Margarita is introduced as a quite sympathetic protagonist and represents one of "the good characters," who are not mocked, but stand in opposition to the Soviet society satirized in the novel. She shows compassion and kindness to those she loves, as when she gives a present to her maid Natasha (254). But at the same time, she can be cruel and vengeful, when she destroys Latunsky's flat (273). However, as Domanico specifies: "Bulgakov does not villainize Margarita for her actions. Instead, he strategically follows the scene of violence with one of motherly kindness" (47). In this scene, Margarita calms the scared child, telling him a fairy tale to make him fall asleep (275). This moment demonstrates Margarita's ties to folklore and old Russia, which contrasts with the Soviet reality and provides her with an even stronger bond to the supernatural.

Anna Chudzinska-Parkosadze has studied the novel's connection with *Faust* and its supernatural aspect. She explains that Bulgakov's image of the witch is almost sacral: "the image

of the witch is evolved by Bulgakov from the level of fairytale Baba-Yaga to the role of the Priestess" (97). This development can be traced in Margarita's actions from flying on a broom and frightening people to becoming a worshipped Queen at Satan's ball. Margarita undoubtedly stands outside of the novel's satire, being one of the characters with whom Bulgakov seems to sympathize the most, and with whom the reader is also invited to sympathize as an Other.

Chudzinska-Parkosadze states that the idea of salvation through love is a fundamental moral principle upheld in Bulgakov's novel (106). It is also essential for the understanding of Margarita's nature and her supernatural transformation from witch to queen. Margarita wants to live with the Master as his wife and she feels guilty about lying to her husband. She loves the Master with a deep and true love; when he leaves, she does everything to discover where he might be. Her passionate, brave and sincere nature reveals itself in full in the second half of the novel. Right before Azazello's appearance, she thinks: "I'd sell my soul to the devil to know whether he's alive or not," and then she agrees straightforward on the demon's mysterious proposal just out of the hope to hear anything about her lover (256-260). Beville states that it is significant that Margarita, and not the Master, decides to bargain with the devil. When she takes Woland's invitation, and later becomes a Queen at Satan's Ball, she plays an important role in the celebration of the springtime full moon. The Ball "is concerned with divine justice instead of worshipping the powers of darkness" (157). In this sense, according to Beville, "Margarita is a parody of the Gothic heroine, saving her knight from tyranny by making alliances with supernatural forces" (157). She joins the Devil's league and becomes one of his devoted companions during this night.

From being unhappy, despaired and helpless in her normal existence, Margarita becomes powerful and strong in the supernatural realm. She is attracted by the idea of death before the meeting with the Master and becomes depressed when he is gone. Her transformation into a witch grants her freedom from her misery. When Margarita applies the magical "swamp mud" cream on her face, she begins to change. Her wrinkles disappear, her face starts to glow and her

headache is gone. Her body turns more firm; more importantly, the signs of artificial beauty, like plucked eyebrows and fizzy wavy hair, are erased and she becomes more naturally beautiful (264). It is significant that Bulgakov connects her appearance with her inner beauty: "Joy surged through every part of her body […] Margarita felt free, free of everything" (264). She leaves a message to her husband, saying: "Misery and unhappiness have turned me into the witch" and leaves her past life forever (265). This moment can be seen as her rebirth and transition into a new stage of life. She abandons her wealthy life and all her possessions in order to follow her true love, though chooses the sublime feelings over the materialistic and trivial existence.

The cultural history of witches is often studied in the context of feminism. In the scene mentioned above, Margarita applies cream to her face and body, while naked; when she climbs on the broom she turns "invisible and free!" (269). Domanico notes that "Margarita's flight is an embodiment of her societal freedom" (48). Sarah Beth Rapson's work on magical feminism reveals the problem of women under the male gaze. The primordial image of the witch indicates a wise woman, someone who owes a spiritual intelligence just by nature due to her gender. These women have always threatened patriarchy "by living outside the bonds of male influence" (Rapson 5). This marginality has turned witches into the victims of masculine fear and aggression, leading to the witch hunts and trials of centuries past, which have had lasting effects on women's position in society.

Ronald Holmes's chapter "The Advent of the Witch Trials" reveals that the Church has always designated witches as a target for persecution, accusing them of conspiracy "with the devil, the obscene kiss, the use of potions and ointments, flying and so on" (71). Witches, as women with knowledge and power, have always been the subject of false, misogynistic stereotypes, as reflected in many works of literature and the popular media. Often witches are portrayed as ugly, old and evil, and a threat to the status quo, as presented in this story. Rapson states that "there is very little scholarship on the way Witches evolve through literature" and "social narratives of Witches have been dominated by male gaze" (7). *The Master and Margarita*

is a unique example of a novel in which the male writer grants his female protagonist witch power, beauty, kindness and invisibility, freeing her from the patriarchal standards that represented the dominant gender ideology within Russia at the time of writing, and consequently satirizing the Soviet status quo.

Margarita's neighbor, Nikolai Ivanovich, sees her naked body on the balcony for a moment, which leaves him astonished (268). Besides Margarita, the witches are represented by her maid Natasha and by Woland's maid Hella. Bulgakov presents a very ironic image of female power when the maid Natasha uses the magical cream and turns into a witch as well. Nikolai Ivanovich falls under her charm; while she uses him as a flying transport, he calls her "Goddess," even "Venus," the goddess of love (278). By characterizing Natasha, a simple maid, as a goddess of love, the novel directly reverses the traditional connotation readers would have of a powerful, independent witch as a threat to the social order.

After the ball, Natasha decides to stay in the supernatural realm. She begs Margarita to ask Woland's permission to keep her as a witch. Hella is both witch and a vampire; she permanently belongs to Woland's retinue. Although she does not cause as much trouble as the other members do, she demonstrates superiority and freedom from men. When Fokich comes to the flat, she opens the door while naked, shocking the barman and referring to him as "a little man" (232). Hella, Natasha and Margarita all demonstrate power and freedom, related to their witch's nature. Their actions and behavior demonstrate their freedom of the repressive Soviet social norms, where women had a submissive role, despite the supposed equal rights of all people. While Bulgakov purposefully presented all three witches' nakedness as natural, the novel was primarily banned because of its representation of female nudity.

During her journey, Margarita encounters many supernatural creatures. During the Sabbath on the lake, Margarita meets a goat-legged man, other witches, mermaids and singing frogs (282). Carroll highlights this fantastic aspect of the novel and stresses its spiritual symbolism: "[t]he deeper Margarita moves into the unconscious, the more symbols that surround

her reflect purification, transformation, rebirth, and regeneration" (286). Margarita's flight and baptism can be seen as a spiritual quest and a return to nature. Bulgakov noticeably contrasts this realm to the reality of Moscow. According to Domanico, in this scene Margarita "feels a connection to the universe that did not exist from her home in Soviet Russia" (50). Later Margarita meets Woland and his retinue, and all the guests at the Ball who do not belong to normal reality. Bulgakov's image of the ball is quite infernal and filled with supernatural elements. Beville describes Gothic elements of the scene, like "Woland's undead guests being walking corpses", witches, vampires, and the rituals bathing and drinking human blood (158). During the ball the boundaries between the two worlds are erased, and the supernatural realm merges with normal Soviet reality.

Margarita has gone through a spiritual death and, according to Beville, begins a new "supernatural existence" after "bargaining her soul to the devil" (167). According to Domanico, "Margarita is transformed into a symbol of a female demon" when she is washed in blood, and "seems to feel at home in the satanic realm of Woland's world" (50). Margarita is treated noticeably different than the others by the retinue and by Woland himself. Koroviev becomes very polite, Azazello sympathetic, Behemoth turns shy in her presence. Her position as the Queen of the Ball presents a witch as a sacred figure, and all the guests and the demons treat her with great respect. Margarita stands outside of the satire, and even though Woland examines her soul just like any other character, he rewards her, instead of punishing her for her flaws. By his justice she deserves all her wishes to be granted.

It is noticeable as well that everyone in the novel has suffered mentally or physically after the encounter with the Devil's retinue. Margarita turns back home "in a perfect form," while "her mind was clear" and this night "caused her no distress" (374). She says to the Master: "the devil does know […] and the devil will arrange everything! […] I'm so happy that I made that bargain with him! Hurrah for the devil! I'm afraid, me, dear, that you're doomed to live with a witch!" (411). Margarita shows no regret about leaving her past life. On the contrary, she is very happy

and grateful, praising Woland's powers. With help from the Devil, the Master comes back to Margarita. In this sense Woland and his retinue are represented as positive and sympathetic figures, eager to help the sympathetic protagonists to find happiness.

The relationship between Woland and Margarita is very important, as it contradicts the stereotype about witches being the devil's servants, or lovers. Margarita is presented as neither: she is asked to be a hostess at the ball and is promised a reward. Chudzinska-Parkosadze states that that the union of the Devil and the witch "demonstrates that they are the two parts of the dark forces," accompanying each other, like "the eternal union of male and female in world order" (97). Just like Woland, Margarita cannot be characterized as either absolutely good or evil. Domanico notes that "without Margarita, Woland, as the devil, would seem cruel" (43). However, he demonstrates a great generosity towards her and the Master. It is he who gives Margarita supernatural abilities, power, and sets her free. As well, it is also he who takes Margarita and the Master with him to the "eternal peace." By rejecting rigid categorizations of "good" and "evil," Bulgakov presents a new and controversial way of thinking about Soviet reality. The end of the novel can be seen as the escape of the Master and Margarita from the Soviet world, where they did not belong. Setting them free, Bulgakov expresses his unfulfilled dream of leaving Russia and his aspiration to the different, more spiritual, way of living.

Conclusion

At the end of the novel, after the departure of Woland and his demons, "cultured people" explained the strange events as the result of mass hypnosis (433). Bulgakov satirizes not just the Soviet social ideology. According to Beville, "the universal will of man to renounce the supernatural in favor of an arrogant view of the world as controllable by human forces" (155). The novel demonstrates that people are always ready to find a rational explanation for extraordinary events, rather than to admit the existence and experience of the extraordinary, including the supernatural, as an integral part of the human imagination and experience.

The Master and Margarita aims its satire firmly at a rigidly rationalist Soviet society and those citizens who subscribe to the regime's narrowly rationalized socio-political ideology, in which there is no room for spiritual values. Bulgakov demonstrates that the atheist Soviet Russia is, by de la Cour's definition, "corrupt and decaying without any acknowledgement of the power of the spiritual, unseen world" (180). In the novel, Bulgakov highlights his culture's cynicism, its limited scope for spiritual values and beliefs and its pathetic vices. Through the figure of Woland and his retinue, he brings judgement upon those who subscribe to the dominant ideology. He gives women power and sets them free, turning Margarita into a witch. While sympathizing with the irrational, creative and free supernatural forces, he mocks those working-class people who hold firmly to the ideologically prescribed social standards and taboos within Soviet culture. The whole novel is filled with astute critical commentary and heavy irony. It is often very humorous, yet reveals very serious flaws within Soviet reality.

Bulgakov's focus on the spiritual, as opposed to the material conditions of existence, contradicts the Soviet's materialistic ideology. For him, the role of imagination can be seen as a tool for the development of the human spirit. De la Cour defines the novel as a "a very simple reminder that there are signs all around us that point to an existence that goes beyond the visible, if we are open to this different way of seeing" (185). Domanico says that magical realism, as a literary direction, was a natural response of some artists to the totalitarian regime (24). Bulgakov uses the themes of witchcraft and supernatural as a metaphorical tool to express his commentary on mainstream Soviet life. According to Domanico, "by juxtaposing magical and supernatural elements with that of the realities of totalitarianism, Bulgakov is able to satirize the injustices that citizens faced under Stalin's rule […] Woland and his cronies serve to show that when examined from a different perspective, totalitarianism is just as terrifying and confounding as witchcraft" (24). The *Master and Margarita* is a great work of a satire which critically reflects on the Soviet reality, seeking the answers for its issues in metaphysical and mysterious aspects.

CHAPTER 2: The Failure of Feminism and Occultism in *The Witches of Eastwick*

John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick (*1984) represents a typical New England small town, with a Puritan heritage, at the end of the 1960s. This was a time of major socio-political changes and great scientific discoveries, not just in USA, but in a whole world. The Vietnam War, and the protests against it across American society, played an important part in shaping this era of American history and they are reflected in Updike's novel. Also, it was a time for radical changes in media and society. The rise of rock music, the new wave of cinema, the sexual revolution and the hippie subculture drastically changed the life of many everyday Americans. In many of his works, Updike focuses on the themes of religion, sex and death. In his satirical works, he tends to explore the flaws of "puritan" American society and to reveal the darkness behind the façade of mundane affluent American life. His stories often focus on middle-class people living in apparently idyllic small American towns, which reflects the writer's own background. One of the most famous of Updike's works, *Rabbit, Run* (1960), represents "the main currents of American history and culture," according to Frederic Svoboda, and criticizes what living the American dream supposedly looked like at the end of the 1950s (14).

Svoboda argues that Updike's satire is never obvious: "Updike is a realist whose fiction is so well observed as sometimes to move almost imperceptibly into satire even in his more serious work" (14). *The Witches of Eastwick* includes all of Updike's favorite themes mentioned above; but it was mainly inspired by American society's interest in witchcraft during the counter-culture era. Updike explores how this occult interest affected gender identities and gender roles within mainstream middle-class New England. The novel satirizes the reception of the occult in traditional Puritan society, but at the same time expresses a critique of the radical feminist movement at the end of 60s. In the novel, the Devil and three witches are the protagonists, and witchcraft appears in a dark, repulsive way. Updike does not sympathize with the characters and takes a superior position as the author, which turns his satire into a failure.

2.1 Interest in the Occult in 1960s America

The end of 1960s in America is often associated with a growth of the interest in the occult and the rise of a New Age spiritualism. According to Asbjorn Dyrendal and others, the aesthetics of Gothic, "satanic" and "esoteric readings of religion and society impressed by Romantic heritage" became popular in art and culture around this time (47). As the young people found themselves revolting against the contemporary political status quo and the social climate in the country, they were moving towards a different counter-cultural mentality. Walking away from mainstream policy, many young people were forming communities in an attempt to follow a lifestyle that took them away from mainstream society. Others rejected mainstream religion, as presented by protestant Christianity in America, which drew them into the search of alternative belief systems and forms of spiritual experience. During this time, the ideas of "individual liberty, including freedom of sexual expression," presented by earlier occultists such as Aleister Crowley, became topical again (40). According to Dyrendal and others, "satanic discourse was reinvented" and reformed by the influence of current politics, sociological theories, and the counterculture (48). In the context of the 60s reality, Satanism acquired a more positive, liberating, and even human connotation within certain strands of the counter culture.

In 1966, the Church of Satan was founded in San Francisco; in 1972 it received much coverage in the press. This community shared some of its core values with the counterculture, such as freedom from the state, freedom from the church, and free love. However, Satanists tended not to support the use of drugs and did not embrace the concepts of peace and love touted by the hippie communities. Lily Rothman explains that "the existence of Satanists as an organized, public group in the United States […] can be largely traced to one man": Anton Szandor La vey, author of The *Satanic Bible* (1969). This movement adopted Satan more as a symbol of rebellion against established authority. According to Dyrendal, this interpretation of Satan as a rebel was influenced by the Romantic poets' understanding of Satan's role in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (28). This "romantic" Satan, the arch rebel, became a widespread figure

in post-Romantic popular culture, and its appropriation can be found in various contemporary art forms, such as DC comics' *Lucifer* (2001-2007). Even though the Church of Satan's beliefs were not centered around worshiping the Christian Devil, or advocating senseless violence, its rise to popularity was considered a very disturbing social development from the perspective of mainstream American society.

One of the key historical events that created widespread fear of antichristian cults, and which eventually developed into the "satanic panic" of the 1980s, was the murder of Sharon Tate by the members of the Manson Family, in 1969. In the same year, the Manson cult committed a few other horrific crimes, breaking into people's houses and creating a real panic in Los Angeles. There is no direct connection between Charles Manson's cult and LaVey's Church of Satan. However, according to Dyrendal, one of the participants in the Tate-La Bianca murder was also an attendant of the Church of Satan. This attracted widespread rumors in the media about the Mansonite's real motivations and their connection with "Satanism." The idea that the Manson cult was also "an evil conspiracy of devil worshipers, was one of many" explanations for the atrocities (Dyrendal 57). The sum of the events planted a fear of ritualistic killing and demonic cults into many people's minds.

The satanic phenomenon in American culture can be traced from here up to its peak in the early 1980s, when Updike wrote his satirical horror novel. Aja Romano summarizes the phenomenon of the "satanic panic" and argues that it is still part of modern American culture today. Looking at the past, she explains: "the media, too, played an outsize role in stoking the public's fear and fueling misconceptions surrounding occult practices" (Romano). She names many other events and traits, connected to American society's unrest and notes that many people were alarmed over "stranger danger" and "the fear that evil could always be lurking right around the corner" (Romano).

Playing around with the Devil and occult symbols, such as pentagrams, inverted crosses, the number *666*, demonic attributes like horns, and magical symbols, became quite popular in the

early 1980s. They were quickly absorbed into the youth horror culture that spanned paperback novels, comics, cartoons and role-playing games; but there was still a stigma of obscenity and terror around these popular cultural practices. The long-lasting influence on American popular culture of the rise in occultism during the 1960s can also be seen in Hollywood, with the release of major films such as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968)*, The Exorcist* (1973), *The Omen* (1976), and *The Devil's Advocate* (1997). It is also present in the artistic design concepts of rock and metal albums created by bands such as Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden, KISS, Mötley Crüe, Slayer, and many others during this era.

Significantly, *The Master and Margarita* was published at the end of the 60s, gaining great popularity in the West, when popular interest in the occult also saw a peak. The 1968 Rolling Stones song "Sympathy for the Devil" was inspired in part by *The Master and Margarita*. Mick Jagger can be heard singing: "Pleased to meet you, hope you guessed my name / What's puzzling you is a nature of my game" (9-10). Obviously, he is singing from Lucifer's perspective, as he recalls some terrifying historical events. However, the song is light and joyful in tone and became very popular. It has been covered multiple times by many different artists since its first release. This song is an example of how the satanic theme provided a great source of inspiration for many artists and had become so popular in 60s and 70s culture.

Alongside the demonic aspect, the occult became widely associated with nature and spirituality in the 60s, which influenced the rise of the new-age religion of Wicca. Contrary to the social view of occultism in that time, it represented a peaceful and harmless practice of magic(k), based on the close ties with the nature. Around the same time the feminist movement took a new turn, as women fought for more personal freedom and direction over their lives. It is not surprising that feminism and the occult overlapped at this time. Sarah Beth Rapson points out that witches have often symbolized freedom and liberation for women (7). She refers to the famous woman-suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage, who argued that women have been oppressed by Church and patriarchy through the centuries. Rapson argues that "during the first wave of

feminism, Matilda Joslyn Gage's 1893 treatise, *Woman, Church, and State* embraces the iconography of witches as manifestation of patriarchal fear of intelligent women" (23). In his novel, Updike also connects feminism with witches and creates a dark and ambiguous satire reflecting the problems that arose in relation to the many choices individual Americans, and especially women, were given about their identities, social positions, gender roles and spiritual beliefs during the counter-cultural era.

Updike published *The Witches of Eastwick* in 1984, which means that the previous decades had given him much inspiration for the novel. In the novel, Updike displays the puritanical mentality of the small town and opposes it to the "spiritual" path of the counterculture. According to Svoboda, Updike is as skeptical about "modern versions of Christianity" as he is of the alternative spirituality offered by counter-cultural occultism and witchcraft (102). On the one hand, *The Witches of Eastwick* mocks the outdated religious fears of demons, dark rituals, and secret Sabbaths, which are still present in the village of Eastwick. On the other hand, Updike criticizes the new occult and feminist movements, presenting his witches as failed housewives and unsympathetic protagonists. The following sections will examine the reasons why the satirical aspects of *The Witches of Eastwick* are not entirely successful.

2.2 Feminism and Witchcraft: A Wrong Path to Liberation

The Witches of Eastwick is primarily a story about women, as it takes the perspective of the three witches on the events in Eastwick, after the Devil arrives in town. Kathleen Verduin has explored the relation between women and mythology in Updike's novels; she claims that *The Witches of Eastwick* "represents Updike's most concentrated attention to the feminist movement" (68). She specifies that the writer was aware that feminists claimed "both witch and Mother Earth as totems" and says that he based his novel on the personal experience with "witchy women" (68). Various scholars have noted the fact that Updike always wondered what it would be like to be a woman, which he expresses through the figure of Darryl Van Horne, in the novel.

However, while Updike the writer has been praised much for his immaculate style, his attempt to present the story from a female perspective has never been considered successful. Kim A. Loudermilk also notes Updike's "superior craft," but emphasizes that *The Witches of Eastwick* cannot be taken seriously on the subject of gender politics, as it is "just a joke" (95). The representation of the devil is overtly comical. However, the novel does not seem to mock Darryl's character as much as it does the witches. Instead, Van Horne acts as a trickster, who takes advantage of the witches for his own purposes. His purpose is merely to create chaos in a supposedly idyllic small New England town, after which he leaves, as if his job is done. In this way, the "joke" is on the witches, as they abandon their family duties in order to follow the path of the occult and magic, which leaves them with nothing in the end but regret.

The critical reception of the novel was diverse. In her work on nature and dualism in *The Witches of Eastwick*, Verduin discusses some reviewers who find the satire to be a smart critique of a conservative social mentality in small-town New England, whilst others consider the novel to consist mainly of an outrageous portrait of the women (293). Many critics have defined Updike's novel as an attack on the radical feminist movement of the 70s, as exemplified, for instance, by Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), which moves beyond a discourse of gender equality toward a full-frontal attack on patriarchal ideology and the misogynistic practices that structured mainstream American culture at the time.

Loudermilk notes the critical controversy surrounding the book as well. She argues that "the treatment of women" in the novel is "basically antifeminist" (94), which is what my analysis will also underscore. Loudermilk argues that the protagonists who are supposed to be strong and independent are clearly unsympathetic and even vulgar and mean (94). Significantly, in her review of Updike's novel, Margaret Atwood claimed that the witches are as far from "womanpower" as they are from healing nature and seeking spirituality (Atwood). Atwood describes them as "spiritual descendants of the 17th century New England strain and go in for sabbats, sticking pins in wax images, kissing the Devil's backside and phallus worship; this latter

though – since it is Updike – is qualified worship" (Atwood). Updike does not seem to take witchcraft seriously as an occult discourse that can be utilized to express a dissident perspective of mainstream society. The protagonists of the novel use magic in their selfish needs and they are interested only in love charms and selfish hexes. He criticizes the idea of magic as a way towards liberation for women; the witches in the novel approach magic as a trivial hobby. In this way he satirizes the occult as a means for women to gain freedom from male dominance and power over their own lives.

Updike presents his witches as women who try to be independent. Each of them is divorced and has to raise children alone and provide money for the family. However, these "feminists" are constantly searching for unhappily married men around town. Each of them has multiple lovers, which they switch and share with a sense of secretive competition. While feminists were fighting for equal rights and liberation in America during the 60s and70s, Updike's witches dream about another husband. In the novel, Updike criticizes both the marriage institution – there are no happy families in Eastwick – and the idea of free love as presented by the counterculture. In the end, Updike's witches are never independent and merely self-deceived about their powers and freedoms.

Summarizing other scholars and critics, Loudermilk explains that "Updike trivializes the feminist issues he fictionalizes, including ideas of sisterhood, female independence and reproductive rights" (94). Atwood further develops this critique of Updike's treatment of feminism by specifying that the novel is set purposefully in late 60's Rhode Island: "[t]he women's movement has been around just long enough for some of its phrases to have seeped from New York to the outer darkness of provincial towns like Eastwick, and the witches toss around words like 'chauvinist' in light social repartee" (Atwood). By Updike's definition, witches are meant to be free women; but he does not seem to approve of it. Loudermilk also claims that the writer tried to explore "contemporary feminism," using the theme of witchcraft as a metaphor (95). However, many scholars regard Updike's work as a misogynist novel and as a

satire of the very type of women that are its protagonists: those who believed that a turn towards the occult and magic would grant them freedom from male oppression and more power over their own lives. At the same time, Loudermilk argues: "he really did try to investigate both women and feminism, not with malice, but with genuine interest and curiosity" (97). Nevertheless, she concludes that, despite his supposed genuine interest, Updike failed in both of his intensions. It seems as if Updike was interested in exploring writing from the female perspective, but as a male author, form within a privileged cultural position in American society, he takes a superior, elitist position towards his subject matter and lacks the necessary sympathy with the plight of women under patriarchy to portray his protagonists as heroines. This ultimately turns the novel into a satire of 60's occultism in relation to feminism rather than a sensitive exploration.

From the outset, the three witches Alexandra, Sukie and Jane meet as a coven; their group is formed as some sort of sisterhood. Their friendship provides support and Alexandra "loved her two friends, and they her" (24). When Darryl Van Horne comes to town, Jane is very excited. Van Horne is all she wants to talk about: "Doesn't anybody want to hear about this new man?" (35). Alexandra says: "Men aren't the answer, isn't that what we've decided?" (35). Among her friends, Alexandra is often described as the woman closest to nature, and the most powerful of the three witches. She is also the last to visit Van Horne's house and she feels jealous that "the very shadow of this man should so excite her two friends," who has always been excited just by her presence and powers (37). From the moment when Jane first visits Van Horne, then Sukie, and later on Alexandra, their coven falls apart. They do not have their "Thursday meetings" anymore and each one of them is absorbed by her personal relationship with Darryl and the perspectives for the marriage. Updike presents women's friendship as a very fragile bond once the presence of an attractive man interferes with their daily routines.

The witches also have characteristics meant to demonstrate their independence and self-confidence. However, these qualities are presented as repulsive. Alexandra embraces her body

for what it is: “she was somewhere around one hundred sixty pounds now. One of the liberations of becoming a witch had been that she had ceased constantly weighing herself” (19). The narrator’s sarcasm here suggests that Alexandra is in fact unattractive, because she has stopped caring about the way she looks and even starts to wear men’s clothes. Through Alexandra’s characterization, Updike satirizes the idea of witchcraft as a road to women’s liberation. When she comes to the Lenox mansion, Van Horne invites Alexandra to play tennis. She responds by saying that she is not in shape. In response, Van Horne exclaims: “then get in shape. Move around, get rid of that flub. Hell, thirty-eight is young” (92). Van Horne’s idea of the proper woman clearly dovetails with hegemonic beauty ideals. His comment about her age suggests that he deems Alexandra too large for a woman her age.

Still, Alexandra feels relief that Van Horne knows her age. She is constantly bothered by the aging of her body, and though she pretends not to care about her size, she cannot embrace it. As a real witch, Alexandra would feel the connection with natural processes and would not be afraid to grow old or be bothered by the superficial beauty standards of an androcentric culture. However, Updike presents Alexandra as a miserable person and satirizes her laziness by allowing the narrator to make sarcastic remarks about the way she treats her body. Later on, Alexandra gains even more weight. Every time she feels depressed she finds joy in food. Eventually, even the preparation of a sandwich makes her feel exhausted: “[t]he many laborious steps lunch involved nearly overwhelmed her” (75). Because Alexandra’s nature cannot embrace household duties, her house is described as a big mess, where all around was “silting of dirt.” She defends herself by explaining she is not a robot, and complains: “why was there nothing to sleep in but beds that had to be remade, nothing to eat from but dishes that had to be washed?” (76). She refuses to take on the role of a housewife, as well as the role of a mother, leaving her children to handle everything on their own. Updike criticizes this attitude, presenting “liberated” women as irresponsible, lazy and chaotic. The narrator’s “voice of reason,” in the novel, suggests only one proper way for women to be useful members to society: to be a good

housewife and mother.

Jane and Sukie also live in messy houses and treat their children irresponsibly and sometimes cruelly. Jane is "no gardener" and her house is practically falling apart: "Everywhere in the newish little house, built of green pine and cheap material […] were marks of its fragility, scars in the paint and holes in the plasterboard and missing tiles on the kitchen floor […] Doberman pinscher had chewed chair rungs and had clawed at doors until troughs were worn in the wood" (260). Jane lives in "some unsolid world part music, part spite" (260), as she often acts quite rude and cold even with her friends. Because Updike's narrator is unsympathetic towards the female characters' plight, the witches themselves are not capable of expressing empathy and kindness.

Verduin states that all three of the witches fear the aging process and the loss of fertility that comes with it. They are weak in the face of nature, despite their magical powers. Because of the witches' self-obsessions and anxieties, their children remain almost invisible to them. According to Verduin: "the development of children toward maturity implies the inevitable decline of their parents toward old age and death" (301). At the end of the novel, when the three witches are making a wax doll to curse their one-time friend Jenny, Jane's children come into the room. The boy is obese and the girl has a dirty face. This scene represents an unhappy family life and neglected, mistreated children. Jane's son says: "I'm starving. And we don't want hamburgers from *Nemo* again, we want a home-cooked meal like other kids get" (277). The girl, after studying Jane's face, says: "Mother, are you drunk?" In response, Jane slaps her daughter with "magical quickness" (278). Updike uses the word "magical" sarcastically to describe Jane's abusive behavior in order to present the witch figure as the opposite of a good, caring mother.

In the beginning, Sukie is the only witch who is generally friendly and sympathetic towards men, sometimes her children, and Jenny. Because of Sukie's social character, and her desire to fit into society, Jane considers Sukie to be a "weak sister." Sukie's sense of freedom is ironically defined by wearing very short skirts and by flaunting her seductive nature, which no

man can resist. Yet she also refuses to shave her body hair, as a protest against the female beauty ideals imposed on women by the dominant gender ideology. A key tenet of feminism is the idea that women have a right to do what they want with their own body. However, while Sukie apparently rejects prescribed beauty ideals, she also lives and thrives under the male gaze. In this way, she seems to be following a feminist trend, rather than to demonstrate an actual desire for freedom from male dominance.

Significantly, the novel supports the concept of the "male gaze" and the witches are almost constantly being watched. Rapson states that "from the Bible to Shakespeare" witches appear only through the male gaze, thereby only inside "the bounds of patriarchal society" (19). Loudermilk notes that the sex scenes in the novel always shift the perspective from the protagonist to the narrator: "It is as thought the reader is looking over the shoulder of a voyeur who hides his pleasure behind a mountain of words […] The witches themselves seem aware of voyeuristic eyes" (103). Keeping his witches under the constant gaze of a patriarchal society, Updike gives them not freedom, but judgement of their every step.

Considering these characteristics, the image of Updike's witches comes down to a caricature: in order to embrace their "witchy" side, they are denied even their mainstream roles as mother, wife, or housewife. Being seductive, unsympathetic and jealous, these women live in an atmosphere of chaos and decay and have fun by cursing other people, even those who were recently their friends. Updike's representation of strong women with magical powers is a failure; and Loudermilk claims his mistake was to choose the witch as the symbol of the liberated woman (97), even though feminism was to some extent associated with this symbol during the counterculture era. The stereotypical image of the witch is that of an evil, ugly and dangerous woman, feared, followed and tortured by Church authorities as well as Monarchs (Holmes 16). Loudermilk noted that Updike did not get far from this image: "[w]ith the use of the witch figure, Updike portrays a fictional feminism that is fearful, yet trivial; sexual, yet male-identified; powerful, yet ultimately ineffective" (97). Updike's witches are very similar to the

weird trio from the Walt Disney comedy *Hocus Pocus* (1993): ugly hags who boil children alive and bring terror into the town, who are still seen as comical figures.

However, Updike's novel is not entirely misogynist on purpose. Verduin claims that the story is much more than an attempt to irritate women. She says that the novel's themes are "metaphysical as well as social and topical" (294). In his work, Updike highlights the theme of duality between good and evil, and between men and women, and especially between nature and the supernatural. The next section will explore the supernatural aspect of the novel in more detail: the characteristics of the witches and the devil, their relationships and the connection between nature and death.

2.3 John Updike's Vision of Nature, Death, and Sex

Nature has always been an essential element in witchcraft. It represents natural cycles of life, death and rebirth. Nature is the Mother Goddess in Wiccan beliefs. The figure of the Goddess was closely associated with the concept of fertility and land in many pre-Christian religions. Monica Germana states: "the Celtic goddess's commanding status, possibly bearing positive associations with female fertility, stems from the distinctive link between the female divine principle and earth"; she adds that the figure of the goddess represented "all political power" (63). Pioneering eco-feminist Carolyn Merchant has claimed that, traditionally, nature has been defined as female, a feminine power that has been dominated by an androcentric rationalist worldview defined by science, technology and capitalist production (514). Merchant compares the present ecological crisis to the witch-trials, when men tried to withdraw the secrets from women with brute force. She connects nature's female gender with its reproductive capabilities of growth and rebirth and says: "as woman's womb had symbolically yielded to the forceps, so nature's womb harbored secrets that through technology could be wrested from her grasp for use in the improvement of the human condition" (515). Updike, while far from being an eco-feminist, similarly connects women's nature, witchcraft and fertility in his novel. Atwood notes

that Updike's vision of witchcraft is "closely tied to both carnality and mortality" and describes nature in the novel as "red in tooth, claw and cancer cell" and cruel (Atwood). Updike sees nature not from a spiritual, or ecological, but from a rational perspective: incapable of empathy with humankind, and as inseparable from death and decay as it is from life and growth.

Updike's novel is a satire, but a terrifying one, the purpose of which is to demonstrate the darkest side to human biological and moral life. All three witches are attracted by death, but also terrified by the idea of it. Sukie is moved by the beauty of the ocean; but she feels "frightened that her own beauty and vitality would not always be part of it, that some day she would be gone" (84). Jane hears the "male voice of the death," playing Bach's music on the piano (305). Alexandra is paranoid about cancer; she "saw its emblem everywhere in the nature" (26). She is constantly worried about her menstrual pains, to which Jane responds: "You have too much magic to have cancer" (59). The witches believe that they possess super powers; however, the Wiccan concept of magic is to be in touch with nature, not to dominate and exploit it.

Later, this terrible fear of cancer transforms into the curse that the witches put on Jenny, as Alexandra says: "[a]ny death is your death in a way" (294). Verduin notes that the witches' magical power in the novel becomes equal to the "male power of killing people" (308). It turns into a tool of dominance and exploitation and can no longer be seen as "white" magic. Feeling guilty about the curse, the witches still enjoy the powers that they possess: "A certain pride of craft infected Alexandra […] It felt wonderful, administering that horrible power!" (296). Jenny becomes a victim sacrificed to the Devil, as the witches learn eventually that Darryl knew everything and they were "doing his will" (331). Updike mocks women's search for freedom and power, as they have all along been under the control of one man. When Sukie first meets Jenny, she confesses that men are not very interested in her, which probably means that she is still a virgin (190). After her death, Alexandra describes her as follows: "she was one of those perfectly lovely people the world for some reason never finds any use for," so "nature in her wisdom puts them to sleep" (332). Jenny's innocent nature makes her prefect for the role of sacrificial victim,

which Alexandra mentions, crushing the crabs on the beach, is necessary: “There must always be a sacrifice. It was one of the nature’s rules” (18). Nevertheless, it appears in the end that the witches did not cast the curse out of their own free will, as they were controlled by Van Horne’s dominant satanic powers.

The destructive and repulsive side of nature is fully expressed through Van Horne’s monologue at the end of the novel, in which he talks about poisonous creatures, parasites and infections (319-324). However, he starts his sermon by talking about the historical witch-trials: “You know what they used to do to witches in Germany?” He goes on to state that torture is a part of human nature (319). Many scholars note the stereotypical image of the witch, presented in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487), which describes a number of the characteristic that defines woman as evil: “Destroying the generative force in women, […] procuring abortions, […] offering children to devils” (47). Kimberly Ann Wells argues that by this description “any woman who does not have or want children is suspect of having a desire to destroy all natural life,” and probably “hate[s] men and want[s] to see them castrated and/or killed” (47). Besides, these features, stereotypical witches cast spells, bewitch normal people, summon storms and keep familiar pets. Updike’s witches possess many of the characteristics and powers attributed to witches in historical sources such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Van Horne’s historical reference underscores the novel’s depiction of them as the object of satire, rather than sympathy.

In the beginning of the novel, Alexandra takes a stroll on the beach with her dog and feels annoyed by the young people around her, having fun. She decides to “clear the beach for herself and Coal by willing a thunderstorm” (15). Later, her dog Coal acts as a familiar, licking her face and hand and suckling at her “supernumerary pap” (79). Loudermilk notes that the witches use Christian prayers backwards for their dark magic and “one symptom of bewitchment according to folklore is the vomiting of bones, nails, needles, feathers, or other bits of garbage” (100). This is exactly the kind of curse that Sukie and Jane cast on the women in Eastwick whom they do not like. This can be interpreted as Updike’s critique of female empowerment leading

only to that power being used by women against each other. Having dinner with Van Horne, Sukie thinks about the curse, "how for fun she and Jane Smart had been casting spells on Clyde's awful wife," using a book they stole from the church, "they had solemnly baptized a cookie jar Felicia and would toss things into it – feathers, pins…" (150). Later, Felicia Clyde dies because of the curse and her husband kills himself in response. Jane defends the incident by stating that Felicia was "full of hate" and had "lost touch with her womanhood" (177). However, it is obvious that all three witches act out of hate for the other women in Eastwick. One reason why Alexandra thinks Jane is the "weak sister" is because she realizes that "magic is filled with love, not hate" (273). By contrast, Jane seems to use her powers out of spite, rather than for the good of herself and the community. Sukie's power, however, is concentrated in love and care. She believes herself to be the one who heals and comforts men. Clyde becomes one of the men Sukie "heals." However, this affair with the witch drives him crazy and leads to the murder of his wife and his suicide. Sukie's character reflects on the notion about the witches being beautiful and overly sexual. She can be seen as a femme fatale; men die because of her interest in them.

Jane represents the "evil-witch" trope. She is the one who proposes to curse Jenny. She uses her powers to break into her room in search for personal belongings: "I rubbed myself all over with aconite and Noxema hand cream, with just a little bit of that fine gray ash you get after you put the oven on automatic cleaner, and flew to the Lenox palace" (265). Loudermilk states that Updike's witches cannot escape "the witchcraft patter" and they "more closely resemble the witches of history and myth than the feminist witches of today" (100). It becomes quite obvious in the novel that the appearance of the witches, their actions and behavior, reflects directly on the common stereotypes associated with witches in the historical Puritan culture of New England. In Updike's novel, as in seventeenth-century Salem, the witches are considered a threat to the status quo. By making the witches the butt of the novel's satire, Updike's text ends up supporting rather than subverting the male dominated society that the occult counterculture and the feminists of the 60s and 70s sought to overthrow.

Loudermilk argues that "perhaps the most significant feature of the witchcraft pattern is the relationship between witches and sexuality" (100). During the witch craze it was believed that witches gain their supernatural powers by copulating with the devil. In this way, the witches have always been seen as the Devil's lovers and the servant, doing his dark will. *The Witches of Eastwick* reflects directly on this stereotype. On the one hand, the novel satirizes the outdated Puritan mentality of a small-town in Rhode Island, where people still believe in the old stories about witches. On the other hand, Updike presents the witches as the Devil's lovers, and as such suggests that these old stories contain some truth. In relation to the novel's treatment of witchcraft, Atwood explains the satirical aspect of the novel as follows: "what a culture has to say about witchcraft, whether in jest or in earnest, has a lot to do with its views of sexuality and power, and especially with the apportioning of powers between the sexes. The witches were burned not because they were pitied but because they were feared" (Atwood). All three witches possess some powers at the outset of the novel, but their abilities develop and turn darker with the arrival of Darryl Van Horne, who corrupts their nature.

According to Verduin, "God's absence, presumably, opens the way for evil" in the novel (306). The three witches meet the new owner of the Lenox mansion for the first time at the chamber-music concert in the Unitarian Church. It is never stated directly in the novel that the stranger, who has arrived in Eastwick, is the Devil. However, his nature is obvious, according to many remarks in the novel. He possesses a power greater than the Eastwick's coven all together. His name is overtly symbolic; but in the beginning none of the town's citizens can remember it properly: "The three witches fell silent, realizing that, tongue-tied, they were themselves under a spell, of a greater" (38). Van Horne describes his new residence as cold and empty: "It's hell!" he exclaims (41). In the Church, he does not want to speak about things that matter, because "he is being watched" (50). He is purposefully drawn to Alexandra, Jane and Sukie, sensing their powers, and he invites them to his mansion. Their relationship quickly becomes sexual, and the witches do not mind sharing Darryl, each still hoping that he will marry one of them at some

point. Just as the historical witches, according to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, "sometimes collect[ed] male organs in great numbers" (121), Alexandra, Sukie and Jane collect lovers, but they remain unsatisfied. They seem like normal people, but still the citizens of Eastwick gossip and sense that "there was something else about them, something as monstrous and obscene as what went on in die bedroom" (234). Loudermilk highlights Updike's stereotypical representation of the witches: "in order to satisfy their extraordinary sexual appetite, the witches turn to a devil figure, Darryl Van Horne" (101). However, their orgies provide Darryl with pleasure and serve his will, which places the witches not in the position of power, but in the service of an evil man.

In the novel, the Devil, like the witches, is presented in cliché terms. He is a liar and a tempter, who is interested in his selfish needs, but prefers to use others for his purposes. Van Horne's scientific experiments that he is constantly working on are nothing more than "the archetypal Satanic envy of the Creator," according to Verduin (307). In this sense, he is more like the adversary from the Bible than the Romanticized figure of Satan as arch rebel. Interacting with each of the witches, Van Horne pushes them to be ambitious and to use their powers more directly on society, which results in the curse of their friend Jenny in the end, after Van Horne marries her. The Devil acts as a provocateur, who wants to teach the witches a lesson of what real supernatural power is and what are the consequences of playing with the occult. However, Darryl Van Horne cannot be taken seriously. He is a comic figure who brings some light irony in the overall dark mood of the novel; yet he is not the butt of the satire. Often presenting the author's perspective in the story, Van Horne plays the role of a trickster. His purpose is to reveal the town's people's moral flaws and to satirize women's interest in magic as a road towards freedom in the 60s. Updike's point is clear, as he reveals that Van Horne has always possessed a greater power than the three witches. While Alexandra, Sukie and Jane believed in their magical powers, they were all the time under the control of the Devil, and thus guided by a man.

While Van Horne turns out to be the puppet master, so to speak, his appearance is

comical, even grotesque. He is "pushy, coarse and a blabbermouth" (40), obviously not attractive, with "greasy curly hair half-hiding his ears," untidy clothes and "pointy black loafers" (38). Verduin notes his clumsy manners and the desire to be liked. She argues: "[w]e feel our cultural fascination with the devil being teased" (306). The supernatural elements turn very playful with his presence. Atwood says: "The widdershins dance, portrayed as a tennis game in which the ball turns into a bat, followed by the sabbat as a hot-tub- and-pot session, is particularly fetching" (Atwood). The end of the novel is quite ironic as well, as Darryl turns out to be a bisexual, or even homosexual, and apparently not that interested in the witches at all. He leaves the town with Jenny's brother, Chris Gabriel, whose first name associates him with Christ and whose last name associates him with the arch angel. But Chris is a "fallen angel," and the narrator reveals that they were both "swallowed by the Sodom of New York" (310). The end of the novel reveals Updike's future vision for the witches. They have learned their lesson after their encounter with the Devil. Soon after Darryl's departure, all three women remarry and one after another leave Eastwick. They abandon their occult hobbies in order to become wives and mothers again, displaying Updike's critique of the idea of "feminist witches."

Conclusion

It is clear that Updike's approach to witchcraft is obviously satirical; he uses many stereotypical images of the witches and the Devil to critique mainstream New England society's flaws. Alexandra's, Sukie's, and Jane's sexual relationship with Darryl, and their worshipping of the devil, as represented through the Sabbats and orgies, is a direct reference to the portrayal of witches in historical sources, as well as myths. Loudermilk notes that "the Thursday afternoon orgies contain many of the elements traditionally ascribed to the witches' sabbath: dancing around the cauldron (transformed into a hot tub in this context), eating and drinking, spell casting, even kissing the devil's glossy innocent unseeing ass" (105). She and the other scholars support the idea that the famous *Malleus Maleficarum* is nothing more than a male fantasy,

based on fear, and this source reveals more about its authors than about real witchcraft. According to Loudermilk, "all of the fears about women that psychoanalysis suggests men suffer—the fear of castration, the fear of the all-consuming mother— surface in witchcraft mythology" (104). Germana supports this idea and says that the witches "have always acted as tool for control and censorship of unacceptable human behavior" (65). This concept of the witch figure represents everything feared and denied by patriarchy.

The fascination with Satanism and the popularization of the interest in the occult in America since the late 60s had brought back the interest in witchcraft. *The Witches of Eastwick* represents a conservative puritan society of New England, where the fears of the strangers in the neighborhood, young hippies and ritualistic killing is very vividly portrayed. Updike's purpose is to satirize the flaws of this strand of American society. However, the object of the novel's satire remains unclear and seems often as much aimed at the witches as the double standards of "puritan" Eastwick. Either Updike wants his readers to laugh at the small-town's terror of witchcraft and the patriarchal fear of the women's liberation movement, or he aims to satirize feminism, and especially the radical feminist movement's interest in witches and witchcraft as a liberating force. According to Rapson, "Satan and evil are constructs of men, and - as they have inculcated over hundreds of years - the witch is a woman outside the bounds of male control. Men can keep their Christian doctrine, wickedness, fear, and Satan because Women are not - in any capacity - beholden to men and their constructs" (33). Updike grants his witches the powers but clearly states that the men's power is greater, and it is better for women embrace their roles as housewives than to play with magic.

Updike may have tried to present free and independent female protagonists; yet these women appear more as caricatures of women than real women struggling to free themselves from the yoke of patriarchy. These fictional "feminists" live continually under the male gaze, and in the novel the male's power in general is stronger than that of the women, even if it is revealed to be a corrupting force. The Devil's character is used as a device to satirize the witches

and to teach them a lesson that will bring them back on a "right path." Updike's witches fail to gain the reader's sympathy, and their connection with feminist notions of womanhood and feminist notions of Nature is weak. To borrow Loudermilk's phrase, they are "the weak sisters" (94). For Updike the counter-cultural witchcraft pattern represents not life and freedom, but death and chaos. *The Witches of Eastwick* appears to be a dark and sometimes even terrifying satire, in which the witchcraft and supernatural elements are described within a stereotypical Christian framework as overtly evil, whether associated with women or men. With Updike's unsuccessful attempt to represent the story from the female perspective, the novel's aim of the satire remains incomprehensible. The author acts as a superior figure, who does not express any sympathy to either side of the story and his attitude towards the characters seems to be almost punitive. In this way, Updike's satire appears as not a successful one.

CHAPTER 3: A Supernatural Response to the Apocalypse in *Good Omens*

Good Omens (1990) is the result of a collaboration between Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman. The literary works of both writers belong firmly to the fantasy genre and contain many supernatural elements. The main corpus of Pratchett's work – the *Discworld* series (1983-2015) – includes story-lines about witches, wizards, Death-personified and other fantastic figures. Characteristically, Pratchett's stories are light and cheerful, yet he expresses an ironic stance towards the various themes he explores. His novels often contain elements of parody and allusions to medieval times, classic literary works, historical figures and famous characters from popular culture. Pratchett's novels are deeply satirical, even though they have been generally defined as comedic fantasy. Neil Gaiman began as a creator of dark-fantasy/horror comics and graphic novels. He became famous as a writer of fiction only after the publication of *Good Omens*. Since then, he has become known especially for his dark fantasy novels, containing gothic elements, like *Neverwhere* (1996)*, Stardust* (1999), *Coraline* (2002)*, The Ocean at the end of the Lane* (2013)*,* and his mythology-inspired works *American Gods* (2001), *Anansi Boys* (2005) and *Norse Mythology* (2017).

While both Pratchett and Gaiman were raised in a religious environment, they have described themselves as atheists. While Pratchett was raised in a more traditional Christian family, Gaiman's family belonged to the less traditional Church of Scientology. Both writers had already included theological aspects in their work before *Good Omens.* The early collaboration between the two resulted in a satirical novel about the Biblical Apocalypse, as presented in the book of Revelation, featuring the Antichrist as the protagonist, and the constant opposition between Good and Evil as one of its major themes. The novel criticizes the idea of the inevitability of destiny and states that people are free to makes their own choices, which is a central aspect of human experience. The novel invites the audience to see witchcraft and other

supernatural aspects of human culture as a normal part of lived experience that should be accepted like other forms of imaginative and creative thought.

3.1 Pratchett's and Gaiman's Satirical Fantasy

Good Omens presents a humorous perspective on the Biblical notion of the Apocalypse. It involves aspects of the supernatural and witchcraft and satirizes outmoded aspects of Christian ethics, the uncritical belief in an unavoidable destiny, and the polarization of human personality and behavior into clear-cut categories of Good and Evil. Amy Lea Clemons describes the novel as "allusive" and claims that it "adapts an entire field of texts associated with John of Patmos's *Apokalypse*, also known as *The Book of Revelation*" (86). Besides The Book of Revelation, the authors create close intertextual relations between their novel and other books from the Bible: Genesis and the Gospels. Pratchett and Gaiman include some canonical supernatural Biblical figures, like The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, angels, demons and even the voice representing God, here called the Metatron.

However, Clemons states that the novel provides its own version of Revelation and says: "As its title suggests, it draws heavily on Richard Donner's 1976 film *The Omen* and the mass of films and books, both mainstream and from Christian media, that have adapted John's *Apokalypse*" (86). While the novel indeed borrows directly from the *Omen* film franchise, the authors switched the genre from horror to comic fantasy, adding the "Good" into the title of the novel. The novel in fact satirizes the Christian notion of the arrival of the Antichrist at the End Times. *The Omen*'s plot of a satanic baby swap, which plants the new-born Antichrist in the fold of an unwitting American diplomat family, is ridiculed by having Satanic nuns mistakenly give away the antichrist to a middle-class British family living in a small village in the countryside. The irony of the story is based on this initial mistake during the baby swap. The antichrist grows up to be a fine boy called Adam Young under the positive influence of his family and friends, while the angels and demons caught up in the process of ensuring the Apocalypse happens

constantly seek to interfere with village life. The same satirical approach to a Biblical story can be seen in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), where Brian is mistaken for Jesus at birth, and the story takes a comedic perspective on the absurd adventures of the unwitting savior of the human race, due to the many moments of confusion that arise out of the initial error by the three wise men who had entered the wrong stable in their search for the son of God.

The plot is not solely focused on the Antichrist, however, as he is completely unaware of his true identity. It includes various other story-lines revolving around different human and supernatural characters in some way caught up in the oncoming apocalypse. One subplot concerns the friendship between the not entirely good angel Aziraphale and the not purely evil demon Crowley. Another subplot follows the young witch Anathema Device, the descendant of Agnes Nutter, the witch who predicted the end of the world would occur in Lower Tadfield, Oxfordshire, England. The subtitle of the novel, *The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch,* underscores the ironic tone concerning the inevitability of events, as Agnes's predictions are chaotic and mostly misunderstood throughout the novel.

Clemons states that the plot of the novel is not unique, as the concept of the Biblical apocalypse has been used many times as the basis for works within the fantasy genre (86). However, Pratchett's and Gaiman's purpose is to show the absurdity of the blind faith in prophecy and the inevitability of destiny. Clemons argues:

> the novel takes on what Kenneth Burke calls a 'frame of rejection' – a 'comic' move that allows *Good Omens,* despite its otherwise stubborn refusal to obey genre conventions, to provide a critical response to a range of contemporary apocalyptic texts, while taking on an attitude that promotes the Biblical notion of humanity as worthy of redemption. (87)

In this way the novel represents not just a satire of the Christian beliefs in the Judgment Day, but also the perception of the apocalyptic theme in mainstream Western culture.

Another aim of the satire in the novel is the ineffable plan of God. By definition, ineffable means something beyond understanding and cannot be put into words. In the beginning of the novel, Aziraphale says that it is "best not to speculate" at all about the God's plan, and then expresses the didactic notion: "There is Right, and there is Wrong. If you do Wrong when you're told to do Right, you deserve to be punished" (4). The angel is not entirely sure about this attitude himself, however, because if the Plan is ineffable, then no one can actually know what it includes. At the same time, Heaven and Hell act as if they know exactly what the Great Plan is, and that the Apocalypse is inevitable. By the end of the novel, Crowley reveals that no one, not even the Metatron, can actually know what the Plan is; he says: "You can't be certain that what's happening right now isn't exactly right, from an ineffable point of view" (336). The novel satirizes this confusion and makes a clear point that people should seek the truth within themselves and not in the outer world.

Clemons states that the novel rejects a submissive attitude towards religious truths: "*Good Omens* is fundamentally dissatisfied with the notion of blind acceptance of the unknowable, and the majority of its work is aimed at forcing its audience to re-see the assumptions built into our texts about revelations" (88). Pratchett and Gaiman make a very clear statement that fate is not inevitable, and people can create their own future. When Heaven and Hell insist that Adam should play his prescribed role as the Antichrist in the Apocalypse, and should embrace his unavoidable destiny, he says: "I don't see why it matters what is written. Not when it's about people. It can always be crossed out" (337). The novel explores such serious philosophical problems as free will, individual choice and human destiny, but with great humor, satirizing a submissive reliance on dogma and unquestioning obedience to authority. As Pratchett has explained, people can mistake funny as meaning the opposite of serious: "[h]umour has its uses. Laughter can get through the keyhole while seriousness is still hammering on the door. New ideas can ride in on the back of a joke, old ideas can be given an added edge" (*The*

Guardian, 2017). Often, great wisdom can be found in works of satire, just as *Good Omens* explores complex philosophical ideas behind the laughter.

Even though *Good Omens* was received warmly in 1990, the recent TV adaptation of the novel has caused much disturbance in the American Christian community, just as *Life of Brian* did in 1979. Neil Gaiman worked as a screenwriter for the TV show, and the adaptation closely resembles the novel, transferring the main topics and the ironic perspective of the apocalyptic events successfully from the original text to the small screen. Gaiman created the show to honor his co-writer and friend Terry Pratchett, who passed away in 2015. In response to the show, more than 20,000 Christians signed a petition in 2019 calling for it to be cancelled. This Christian petition accused the show and the creators of making "Satanism appear normal, light and acceptable" and mocking "God's wisdom" (*The Guardian*, 2019).

Importantly, *Good Omens* was criticized exactly for its satirical perspective on the story of the Apocalypse, representing the Antichrist as a normal child and describing Armageddon in a humorous way. Ironically, the petition was mistakenly addressed to the wrong platform. Gaiman was very amused by the petition and the fact that the people who signed it did not know on which platform the show was running. In this way, much like *Life of Brian*, *Good Omens* can be seen as a religious satire that achieved its purpose not just in the text, but also in the real world. As Clemons explains, referring to Burke's notion of comedy: "the 'comedic' is always identified with a refusal of accepted norms" (96). So does Pratchett's and Gaiman's novel, rebelling against both the Christian and mainstream Western views of the Apocalypse, inviting the audience to see the humor in such serious matters, and simultaneously to reflect critically on current standards of normality and morality.

3.2 The Constant Opposition of Good and Evil

In the *Discworld* series, Pratchett created a new fantastic world, borrowing elements from normal reality, such as medieval and modern cities, universities and schools, film-making, rock-

n-roll music, trade unions, and others. Gaiman does the opposite in his work, setting most of his stories in the real world, and adding some magical and supernatural elements to this otherwise realistic setting. Within the genre of fantasy, both forms of engaging with the fantastic are possible; both approaches concern the combination of real and unreal, verisimilitude and imagination. According to Rosemary Jackson, the genre of fantasy has altered over the years the notion of reality: "modern fantasy is rooted in ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance" (4). Fantasy makes the impossible possible; yet most of the time fantasy novels do resemble reality, to a certain extent, by reflecting on various social problems. Mark A. Fabrizi describes fantasy literature as a "complex" genre that "ask[s] the big questions of life," such as "the nature of good and evil, universal morality, the afterlife, heroism and the quality of one's character, the role of the individual in society, and the importance of cultural diversity" (2). The narrative line of the fantasy genre is often created around the conflict of two sides: good and evil, using the opposition in order to reflect on the issues of morality, virtues and heroism. Sometimes it is very obvious juxtaposition, as in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) and the *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) series. Sometimes the heroes are more ambivalent and the opposition of the sides is less clear, as in *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996 -) and the *Witcher* (1986 – 2013) series. Fabrizi states: "By treating injustice, prejudice, inequality, power, and privilege overtly, fantasy writers require their readers to be open to understanding those issues in the world of consensus reality" (159). Fantasy makes all these ideas real and visible for the readers through its metaphorical structure.

According to Clemons, even though *Good Omens* is defined as a fantasy, "the novel acts quite differently from the texts usually associated with those genres"; this provides "a rhetorically advantageous position for transformation" (88). In the novel, Pratchett and Gaiman utilize the fantasy trope of good versus evil by referring directly to the Christian ethical tradition in which the forces of good and evil are presented in a clear dichotomy: Heaven and Hell, Christ and Antichrist, angel and demon, and so on. Instead of following the traditional religious

representation of this moral conflict as a duality, the authors added a third side: human beings. From the perspective of ordinary people, the figures on both sides of the conflict between Heaven and Hell are antagonists. Therefore, the human protagonists of the novel are presented as the exceptions to the rule. Besides the mistaken Antichrist – a normal boy called Adam Young – there are the demon and the angel; both are supernatural creatures who do not follow the traditional image of their kind. Despite their fantastic nature, all three of them resemble humans and act as such, in addition to using their supernatural powers mostly to accomplish their everyday needs.

Crowley and Aziraphale met each other right after Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden. They seem to have played a key role in all human lives since the beginning of time. Crowley appears as a tempting snake and speculates on the ineffability of God's plan, speaking to the angel: "You've got to admit it's a bit of a pantomime, though […] I mean, pointing out the Tree and saying 'Don't Touch' in big letters. Not very subtle, is it?" (4). As a demon, Crowley does not take his task very seriously, as he admits he was just send "up there" to "make some trouble" (3). Aziraphale confesses to the demon that he gave away his flaming sword, because he felt too sympathetic towards the humans. Both of the them, the angel and the demon, do not think and act out of evil or righteousness. As well, they doubt and critically reflect on their actions, just like people do. Crowley says: "Funny if we both got it wrong, eh? Funny if I did the good thing and you did the bad one, eh?" Aziraphale then responds with "Not really" (5). According to Clemons, Aziraphale and Crowley's scenes "give readers a critical position from which to examine the genre" of the apocalypse (89). They also demonstrate from the outset their uncharacteristic image, which does not conform the typical religious representation and presents them more from their human side.

Crowley's appearance is specifically described: "Nothing about him looked particularly demonic, as least by classical standards. No horns, no wings" (14). He looks like a human being. However, his demonic nature comes to the surface in the details of his apparel: "He was wearing

snakeskin shows […] and he could do really weird things with his tongue. And, whenever he forgot himself, he had a tendency to hiss" (14). Crowley has spent a very long time on Earth, which has allowed him to adapt and enjoy human things. He likes expensive clothes and designer accessories; he owns an apartment in the center of London full of electronic devices. He does not actually need any of these things, but he likes to own them, like humans do, and to live comfortably and in luxury. He cares the most about his vintage Bentley car and it does not even require the fuel, as Crowley uses his superpowers to accomplish all his needs.

The other demons, Ligur and Hastur, do not particularly like Crowley. They judge him for spending too much time "up here," in human world, and suspect he has "gone native" (15). The crucial difference between Crowley and the other demons from Hell is that the former has an imagination, which makes him understand how to "think differently these days," in order to drag the new souls in hell. Crowley's best deeds are described with Pratchett's British humor: Welsh-language television, value-added tax, Manchester (17). The most ironic remark when it comes to Crowley's hellish deeds is the explanation that he designed the M25 London Orbital, which resembles the dread sigil Odegra and draws every day the millions of souls a bit closer to Hell: "Car horns, and engines, and sirens, and the bleep of cellular telephones, and the screaming of small children trapped by back-seat seat belts for ever. 'Hail the Great Beast, Devourer of Worlds', came the chanting…" (259). Crowley is undoubtedly mischievous, but as all the demons he "couldn't be a demon and have free will" (20).

Aziraphale is described as Crowley's opposite. But still he does not look like an angel or a supernatural creature: "Many people, meeting Aziraphale for the first time, formed three impressions: that he was English, that he was intelligent, and that he was gayer than a tree full of monkeys on nitrous oxide" (151). The authors ironically remark that two of these impressions are wrong, but still Aziraphale is very intelligent. His emotional intelligence is visible through the text as well, as he is very sympathetic towards people, including the demon Crowley. He owns an antique bookshop; just like Crowley, he enjoys good food, alcohol, music and the arts.

The angel's and demon's weaknesses can be seen as an ironic display of human sins, as listed in the Bible: Crowley represents greed, Aziraphale – gluttony. Most of the time the angel uses his supernatural powers to bring about miracles, as when he heals Anathema and restores her bike after the crash (83). However, at other times he uses his power just to satisfy his own simple needs, like freeing a table at a restaurant. In spite of his angelic righteousness, Aziraphale fails to follow his orders properly. His main flaw is becoming friends with "the enemy" – demon Crowley. Clemons states that the comedic "is always identified with a refusal of accepted norms" and both – Aziraphale and Crowley act "as stand-ins for all 'common' angels and demons" (96). Both of them are considered outcasts in their respective homes, Heaven and Hell, which attracts them to each other. After centuries the angel and the demon have built up a proper friendship.

Generally, Pratchett and Gaiman give Aziraphale and Crowley certain human characteristics in order to make them sympathetic for the reader as the protagonists. However, it is obvious that their behavior is not "normal," in comparison to the representation of angels and demons in biblical stories, as well as the artistic images of such supernatural figures derived from the Bible. Both of them, angel and demon, see the Apocalypse from a different perspective. They decide to work together to prevent the end of the world from happening. When the other demons entrust the new born Antichrist to Crowley, he hates to take his part: "No more world. Just endless Heaven or, depending who won, endless Hell. Crowley didn't know which was worse" (20). Both Hell and Heaven want to start the war. When Aziraphale tries to reach Heaven in order to prevent the battle, he receives a response: "The point is not to *avoid* the war, it is to *win* it. We have been waiting a long time, Aziraphale" (222). Also, Metatron suggests starting the war with "a multination nuclear exchange," leaving highly sensitive Aziraphale shocked (223). The narrative emphasizes this point more than once: Heaven and Hell are both not interested in peace and the wellbeing of humanity. In Crowley's opinion Heaven and Hell are "just sides in the great cosmic chess game" (77). Adam sees it from the perspective of a child:

"Everything had to be burned up […] just to see who's got the best gang" (334). Through the Adam's words and the figures of Crowley and Aziraphale, the novel states the failure of the system and the meaningless of the opposition between Good and Evil.

3.3 What if the Antichrist Was a Normal Child?

It is obvious that *Good Omens* is a satirical reference to *The Omen* films and other apocalyptic fictions that turned to biblical themes concerning the inevitability of Armageddon to create modern horror narratives. Neil Gerlach states that the figure of the Antichrist "continues to recur in American popular culture" (1027). The novel satirizes this image, as Aziraphale says: "Rather *showy* […] As if Armageddon was some sort of cinematographic show that you wish to sell in as many countries as possible" (40). Furthermore, Gerlach adds that *The Omen* itself represents a critique of mainstream American society in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Mainly, it demonstrates the failure of the institutions of family and addresses corporate corruption. Furthermore, it expresses a critique of "the American monomyth" and "the manifestation of the values of the civil religion in popular culture" (1032). Gerlach argues that the film displays the problems of family tension and demonic children and says: "Damien represents the repressed child unleashed, but also has a broader social connotation about the end of the bourgeois, capitalist, patriarchal establishment" (1030). Damien is an anti-hero protagonist. He has supernatural powers, but he has got no sense of responsibility and uses them only to reach his personal goals as he slowly learns about his destiny as the Antichrist. *The Omen* fulfills the audience's expectations of how the birth of the antichrist will lead to the eventual destruction of human civilization. As such, the films follow the horror-film paradigm of introducing a supernatural monster who wreaks havoc amongst mankind, endangering its survival.

Good Omens does the opposite in its characterization of Satan's son, approaching the same theme not as a human drama of a man-turned-monster going on a destructive rampage, but as a comedy in which a naïve protagonist fumbles about in ignorance of his true nature and

decides to do the good thing after all. According to Clemons, the novel adapts both *The Omen* and the Biblical book of Revelation and changes the perspective these stories present of the end of times: "This comedic rejection of both the genre of adaptations and the idea of prophecy that lets the novel's audience critically reread not just *Revelation*, but our dependence on sacred plans in general" (92). The novel debunks the idea of the ineffable plan, inevitability of Armageddon, and the necessary evilness of the Antichrist.

Adam Young is a protagonist of the novel. He is an eleven-year old Antichrist, who does not want to start Armageddon. Misplaced in the wrong family by careless Satanist nuns, Adam has grown up away from the surveillance of Heaven and Hell. As Aziraphale and Crowley spend their time caring for the American diplomat's son Warlock, Adam grows up without any "education" about his satanic mission in this world. Adam's name links him directly to the Biblical Adam, as well as his "angelic" appearance: "Something like a prepubescent Greek god. Or maybe a Biblical illustration […] It was a face that didn't belong in the twentieth century. It was thatched with golden curls which glowed. Michelangelo should have sculpted it" (129). The moment when Mr. Young and Sister Mary are choosing the name for a baby is a very important moment for the formation of his character. The two characters provide the future Antichrist with a wide range of possibilities: from dark names, like Wormwood, Saul, Cain, to names from the Bible, like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Alluding to *The Omen* films, Sister Mary says: "Or Damien. Damien's very popular" (31). The chosen name Adam affects the boy's nature the same way it does for his dog, as the name "gives it its purpose" (64). When the hell-hound is simply named Dog, his appearance and character shapes accordingly to the name: from the Beast of Hell to a simple and friendly dog. Similarly, Adam grows up as a normal boy, away from any supernatural influences.

Through the figure of Adam, Pratchett and Gaiman express their critique of specific Christian beliefs, especially, according to Clemons, of the "two-kingdom notion, believing that our souls and our real selves and our bodies […] are just preparations for the future" (90). The

turning point of the novel is when the representatives of Heaven and Hell try to persuade Adam to take his role as the destroyer of the world. With a childish but surprisingly wise attitude, which is a characteristic feature of Gaiman's work, Adam says: "I don't see what's so terrific about creating people as people and then gettin' upset 'cos they act like people […] Anyway, if you stopped tellin' people it's all sorted out after they're dead, they might try sorting it all out while they're alive" (335). According to Clemons, Adam's age and innocence allows him to make such claims (90). The reader is able to see events from Adam's perspective, to be sympathetic and to agree with his position. Adam is presented as a somewhat mischievous child, causing minor disturbance in the little town with his best friends. But he is not evil; moreover, he is very joyful, imaginative and he loves his home in Tadfield. Aziraphale senses the aura of the town in the air and says: "Someone really *loves* this place" (82). When Adam meets Anathema and she provides him with the magazines, he becomes very concerned about whales, rain forests, nuclear stations and environment of Earth in general. Unconsciously, but intentionally, he starts to use his powers to make all unbelievable things real.

At the end of the novel, Adam rejects his destiny and simply sends away The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, breaking the prophecy of the end of the world. Even though he claims that he is "not rebelling against anything" but only "pointing out things" (336), he expresses the idea of free will. He chooses to live a normal life and to enjoy it as well. In the final chapter, when Adam climbs a tree to steal the apples, the novel makes a reference to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. The novel starts with Adam and Eve's fall from Eden, after they had disobeyed God by eating the apple from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They "rebelled" against God, in order to gain the knowledge. Adam, thinking and acting out of his free will, disobeys Hell and Heaven to prevent the Apocalypse, just like Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit. This moment, when Adam steals the apples in the novel, demonstrates Adam's feelings about the matter: "He couldn't see why people made such a fuss about people eating their silly old fruit anyway, but life would be a lot less *fun* if they didn't.

And there never was an apple, in Adam's opinion, that wasn't worth the trouble you got into for eating it" (367). Despite the satirical approach to the apocalyptic plot, the end of the novel is very hopeful and inspiring. Through Adam's figure, Pratchett and Gaiman demonstrate the idea that there is always a choice and people are the masters of their own destiny.

3.4 Witches: Intelligent and Heroic Women

The novel features two witch characters: Agnes Nutter, a prophetess from the seventeenth century, and Anathema Device, her descendant in the present time of the story. Gaiman confirmed that he and Pratchett named the characters after the original Pendle witches. The trials that took place in Lancashire, around Pendle Hill, in 1612, are one of the most famous trials in English history. Few of the accused witches were the members of one family, bearing name Device. Among the other accused was Alice Nutter, who has inspired several literary works. Brian P. Levack argues that the beliefs in magical practices and personal characteristics of witches varied from place to place (4). He says: "[t]here was no one stereotype of the European witch, and even within specific localities witches did not conform to a single social profile. There was broad agreement that witches were individuals who could cause harm, misfortune, or evil by some sort of preternatural or occult means…" (4). Edward Bever claims that the social characteristics of those accused in witchcraft was one area where people reached an agreement, as "the great majority were female, a solid majority were over fifty" who "were often sharp-tongued, bad-tempered, and quarrelsome, and they tended to be from the lower levels of the settled community" (63).

In England, as in America and most of Europe, people had widely relied on the same concept, presented in *Malleus Maleficarum*, that witches gained their magical powers due to their relationship with the Devil. Levack says that "approximately 100,000 individuals in Europe and colonial America were prosecuted for witchcraft between 1400 and 1775," though "the number of executions did not greatly exceed 50,000" (6). Nevertheless, those witches whose

lives were spared "were not treated kindly," and were sometimes imprisoned or banished. Those who were set free were "shunned by their neighbors," or "lived in fear of physical assault and lynching by villager" (7). Thereby, people were widely put in a state of fear during the witch-craze but could not distinct clearly the guilty from the innocent. Among the Christians was always present the constant suspicion about anything abnormal, and the women, who committed a misdeed or behaved unsatisfactory, were always a target of accusations in witchcraft.

Good Omens makes an ironic comment on the witch trials through Agnes's story. The novel represents Agnes Nutter as "the Witchfinder Army's great failure," after the tests with the pin claiming that "it had miraculously cleared up the arthritis in her leg" (184). Agnes is a great prophetess, who has foreseen her own death and is thoroughly prepared for it. Before her execution, she used to be a healer in the village, which is a positive social role Holmes has also attributed to the "real" witches of the past (15). Agnes told people about the importance of washing hands, eating fiber and advocated physical activity for a prolonged living. All this "was extremely suspicious" for the people in her time, and "she was considered pretty mad even by the standards of the seventeenth-century Lancashire, where mad prophetesses were a growth industry" (197). Agnes's character can be a reference to Anna Trapnel, a prophetess in England during the 1650s. Debra Parish reveals that Trapnel was eventually accused of witchcraft because she gained a reputation as a prophetess and published several of her works (113). Parish claims that Trapnel was labelled as "mad" and accused to be a witch because "she not only pushed boundaries of gender, but also challenged the dominant political and religious institutions and authority" (113). It is possible that this historical case was an inspiration for Pratchett and Gaiman; there are definitely similarities between the figures of Anna Trapnel and Agnes Nutter.

In England most of the accused in witchcraft were sentenced to death by hanging, but in the novel Agnes is burned at the stake. When people come to her house, she awaits for them and then climbs herself onto the pyre, leaving the crowd and the witchfinder astonished. Filling in advance her petticoats with "eighty pounds of gunpowder and forty pounds of roofing nails," she

causes and explosion which kills nearly every villager and this marks "the end of the serious witch-hunting craze in England" (184-185). In the novel, Agnes is presented as a very intelligent and independent woman. It is obvious that she is far ahead of her time, promoting some healthy life-style ideas to the people of the seventeenth century. Bever refers to Levack and says: "Female healers were particularly vulnerable to accusations of 'using their magical arts for maleficent purposes'" (63). It is likely that through Agnes's plight Pratchett and Gaiman expressed their attitude towards the cruelty people are capable of through ignorance and fear, as so many innocent women were tortured and killed during the times of the witch-craze.

Significantly, Agnes is not an object of satire in the novel. Instead, through her story, the novel mocks pernicious beliefs in, and attitudes towards, the supernatural in general. It is the witchfinders who are the butt of the satire in the novel. Their names are very ironic, such as "Thou-Shalt-Not-Commit-Adultery Pulsifer," or "Covetousness Pulsifer, False-Witness Pulsifer," which used to be common names, according to Anathema (196), and satirically reflect the bizarre names associated with a specific Puritan sect in seventeenth-century Sussex (New England Historical Society). This aspect of the novel's satire, is especially expressed through Witchfinder Shadwell. Clemons argues that while Shadwell believes in witchcraft, he does not understand it very well: "His only real sense of the supernatural is from signs and portents – like someone having too many nipples – based in old superstitions" (89). Shadwell sends Newt to Tadfield, equipped with a thumbscrew, firelighters, pin, and most importantly "bells, book and candle" (179). He also believes that Aziraphale is a demon and he banishes him only with a power of his finger (226). Shadwell's character is absurd and, according to Clemons, "invites the readers to take a disbelieving attitude" (89). The aim of the satire in *Good Omens* is not the supernatural as it is, but what people do with their knowledge of and beliefs in it, and how they react to unexplainable and irrational events.

The only satirical remark about Agnes Nutter concerns the book she has left behind. It contains her puzzling and awkward predictions, starting from her own death until the end of the

world, and is called *Nice and Accurate Prophecies.* Agnes left it to the future generations of Devices. In the present time, the young witch Anathema continues the work her ancestor had begun. Kimberly Ann Wells describes an important aspect of the *Book of Shadows*, which many witches have in their possession. She says that, according to *Malleus Maleficarum*, "even deviant women must be under male-control" and the book with spells is given to women by the Devil (51). However, "the Magical Feminist version of the Book of Shadows is often more like a cookbook or recipe journal, or even history textbook as […] in *Practical Magic* (1998) and […] *Charmed* (1998-2006)" (52). Both popular TV series *Charmed* and *Practical Magic* present the "good" witches and strong female characters as the protagonists. This approach to the variations on the *Book of Shadows* demonstrates how the fictional witches rely not on the Devil's work but on "the feminine knowledge of generations of women" (53). The same applies to Anathema Device, whose family have possessed the *Nice and Accurate Prophecies* for generations. Anathema claims that she learned to read by studying this book. Agnes's work has shaped Anathema's personality and has formed her life path as a descendant.

Anathema belongs to the tradition of heroic, magical women characters created by Pratchett, like Granny Weatherwax, Magrat, Nanny Ogg, Tiffany Aching and Susan Sto Helit. Lian Sinclair argues that "by creating women heroes, Pratchett challenges the conventions of gender in fantasy genre" (7). Although he is not the only author who critically explores gender roles, he remains part of a minority of writers in the field who do so consistently. The female characters of the *Discworld* are very diverse. However, they always prove to be intelligent, brave and self-determined. The most outstanding of Pratchett's characters belong to the series about witches who interfere with "the patriarchal consensus fantasy universe, but also in our gendered historical imagination by opening up the possibility of women existing outside strict gender roles," Sinclair explains (8). In *Good Omens*, Anathema Device is presented as "not astonishingly beautiful," as "all her features, considered individually, were extremely pretty, but the entirety of her face gave the impression that it had been put together hurriedly from stock

without reference to any plan" (80). While she is a witch, she prefers to call herself "an occultist" (132). In light of the narrative's chronology, she cannot be more than nineteen or twenty years old. But she has already completed her Ph.D. The authors highlight her intelligence, instead of her beauty, nevertheless describing her as attractive. Sinclair argues that "the witches' power comes not from masculine bravado not feminine submission but from their psychological ingenuity and a stubborn Kantian ethic of not treating people as things" (9). Anathema's main powers prove to be both her intelligence and empathy. She is able to see people's auras and sense the energies, and she is very good at solving Agnes's predictions.

Pratchett and Gaiman create an ironic story twist, making Anathema a descendant of Agnes Nutter, while Newt Pulsifer is a descendant of the Witchfinder Major who had burned Agnes at the stake. Anathema supports the classical witch trait by seducing Newt. As well, she becomes friends with the Antichrist. However, the context of her actions only proves what Wells defines as "the full experience of being a human who is also a female, especially one who is trying to change things, seeking and using power" (10). She comes to Tadfield with a mission and plays an important role among the others in preventing the Apocalypse. At the end of the novel, Anathema and Newt's relationship is promising and will likely continue to flourish. Newt helps her to understand the beauty of not knowing everything about the future beforehand, and they burn the second book of Agnes's predictions together. According to Sinclair, "the witches are Pratchett's 'proof' that we need not let our lives be ruled by stories, historical constructions of what we should do based on the ways our bodies are coded by others" (17). Like Adam, Anathema is a key character who expresses the idea of free will and the ability to shape destiny. Multiple times the novel rejects the idea of prophecy and stresses that people are free to make their own choices and determine their own paths in life.

Conclusion

The main purpose of Pratchett's and Gaiman's satire is to change the reader's attitude towards the idea of inevitability, fate and destiny through their ironic apocalyptic story. In this way the authors take already existing topics and plot elements from both the Bible and popular horror culture, as well as canonical Biblical characters and horror film clichés, and present them all from a new comic perspective. In *The Master and Margarita,* Bulgakov erased the line between Good and Evil in a similar manner, by describing his characters as very ambivalent towards the conservative moralities of "right" and "wrong," and thereby more human and as such also more humane. *Good Omens* highlights the humaneness of humanity quite often; but the idea of it is displayed through the ethics concerned in the way in which the supernatural figures employ their powers for the right or wrong ends. Crowley and Aziraphale are the only demon and angel who have existed in the human realm since the beginning of time and it has made them more sympathetic towards ordinary people. They enjoy human things and they find normal life experience much more interesting than the constant opposition of Heaven and Hell. At the end of the novel, when Adam refuses to destroy the world, Crowley says: "He was left alone! He grew up human! He's not Evil Incarnate or Good Incarnate, he's just…a *human* incarnate" (338). The story does not just misplace the Antichrist, but makes him grow up into an absolutely normal English boy, enjoying life with friends. He is not raised with the duty of his destiny and the evil plans of the world destruction. In this way the novel is not about the triumph of the good side over the evil, but about the humanity's triumph over uncaring supernatural forces, willing to start the Apocalypse because it is part of an ineffable plan.

Good Omens turns to the fantasy tropes of witchcraft and the supernatural in order to demonstrate the narrow attitudes of prejudiced or overly rational people towards the mysterious and extraordinary events of life, and the things they just cannot understand. The authors present witches as independent and resourceful women, fallible angels, sensitive demons, absurd witchfinders, and loveable children, creating a rich and iconic set of characters for the fantasy

genre. The novel satirizes the outdated views on witchcraft, demons, Satanism and the Apocalypse and obviously mocks the idea of the male gaze, saying: "[t]he books on witchcraft will tell you that witches work naked. This is because most books on witchcraft are written by men" (80). The novel invites the readers to not take seriously the old stigma that has surrounded witches and witchcraft in general.

This approach has become quite popular in fiction and media in the last few decades. The TV series *Charmed* (1998-2006) created a new popular-culture role model of witches who protect the world from evil. The supernatural and mysterious has become attractive and widely accepted, especially among younger audiences, through TV series like *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Supernatural* (2005-2020) and *Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017). Such series as *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013) and *Apocalypse* (2018), and the latest horror remake *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020) demonstrate the same trope of the witches who save the world. In both *AHS: Apocalypse* and *Sabrina* the protagonists fight against the Antichrist or the Devil and prevent Armageddon. The latest screen-adaptation of *Good Omens* (2019) fits well in this trend, adapting similar traits. However, it shifts the Antichrist to the positive side as well. Through the comedic approach *Good Omens* make the supernatural even more acceptable to the wider audience, than does the genre of horror. The novel uses satire, which allows people to see familiar things from a new perspective and to be open-minded toward the weird and mysterious aspects of lived experience.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I will summarize the analysis of the three chapters and evaluate the potential of witchcraft and the supernatural in satirical fiction.

The Master and Margarita presents witchcraft as an irrational force, and magic as the power of imagination, which allows the human spirit to develop. The characteristics of witchcraft in the novel are closely tied to folklore and myths. The author sympathizes with the supernatural characters and with the outcasts who do not fit into the rationalized, materialistic world of Soviet Russia. Margarita is the protagonist of the novel, who is described as a brave, kind, and intelligent person, who deserves to join Woland's league and to be freed from the mundane world. Bulgakov grants Margarita freedom and power, and the image of the witch is described as sacred. Woland and his cronies represent a chaotic force, whose purpose is to disturb the organized structure of the city and to shake people's narrow materialistic beliefs. The Devil in the novel is the judge, who merely gives people what they deserve. The representations of the witch and the Devil in the novel stand far from the common notions about these archetypes. Bulgakov uses witchcraft and the supernatural forces metaphorically, to express his critique of Soviet reality and the Russian people's disbelief in the creative and spiritual powers of the supernatural. As such, the novel should be considered a successful Menippean satire.

The Witches of Eastwick contains a critique of the counterculture's and feminists' interest in the occult and witchcraft in the context of 60s America. The witches and their witchcraft are presented following the representational tradition in the historical sources that provided modern culture with the stereotypical patterns. Updike satirizes the double standards of a puritan society, in which people still fear witchcraft. At the same time, he expresses disapproval of the radical feminist movement that shows interest in the occult and witchcraft as a road towards freedom from male oppression for women. Alexandra, Jane, and Sukie are unsympathetic protagonists,

and Updike makes a clear point that a woman who is trying to gain power through magic stands in opposition to a good mother and a housewife. Darryl van Horne, the Devil in the novel, works as a trickster, whose goal is to provoke and seduce the witches into doing harm to their community. The male's power in the novel is stronger than the female's, as Darryl uses the witches for his own purposes. Witches appear to be only servants and lovers of the Devil. Updike mocks the women's devotion to magic, as well as the Puritan, patriarchal foundations of Eastwick. Updike takes a superior position and does not sympathizes with either side in the story. In its bitter satirical tone and overall pessimism concerning the human spirit, the novel follows the traits of Juvenalian satire; however, it does not appear to be a successful one as there is only ridicule and condemnation of the characters flaws and no clear alternative standpoint from which they are judged.

Good Omens uses a great number of supernatural elements in its satirical plot concerning the Apocalypse. Besides the witches, Gaiman and Pratchett represent demons and angels, the Antichrist, and the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse. The main butt of the satire in the novel is not what people believe in, but what they do with their beliefs. In this way, Pratchett and Gaiman criticize Christian beliefs in redemption as a way to absolve them from their wrongful acts, Heaven's and Hell's equal indifference to the plight of humanity, religious superstitions about witchcraft and witches, founded on willful ignorance, or political motivations, and the so-called inevitability of destiny. Through the figure of Agnes, the novel criticizes the cruelty of people who burned and hunted witches in the past, and presents a powerful and intelligent image of the modern witch through Agnes's descendant Anathema. The witches are shown not to have a connection with the devil in the novel, but to work for good. The supernatural protagonists, demon Crowley, angel Aziraphale, and Antichrist Adam, are presented as personalities that resemble normal human beings with all their flaws and qualities. Pratchett and Gaiman created a successful and smart satire, which invites people to look from a different perspective at many

common ideas about the supernatural, witchcraft and morality. The novel's light and comedic attitude places the novel into the category of Horatian satire.

All three novels use witchcraft and the supernatural in order to satirize specific social norms, tendencies, and stereotypes. The first novel turns to the supernatural and witchcraft to represent spirituality in a positive context, in contrast to the cold rationality of the Soviet regime. The second novel holds on to the notion of witchcraft and devil worship as destructive forms of occultism, resulting in a dark satire of both: the double standards of a superficially puritan community, and the counterculture's and feminists' interest in witchcraft as a road to freedom. In the third novel beliefs in witchcraft and other supernatural elements are shown to be just a part of normal human reality, which cannot be marked as either good or bad but only to be accepted as an aspect of the human condition. While each novel approaches these elements in a specific way, they all use satire as a mode to express a critique of established beliefs. It has also become clear that the topics of witchcraft and witches, as well the supernatural, are often connected to a religious context. On the one hand, occult practices require the same attitude to spirituality, which is present in any system of religious belief and ritual. To believe in magic is to believe in the unseen and a power that is higher than ordinary reality. On the other hand, witchcraft and the supernatural represent this "different force," as explained by Jackson (53), which threatens the authority of orderly and obedient foundations, established through Christian, as well as non-Christian, religion. To conclude, the supernatural elements and witchcraft have a rich potential as satirical devices in fiction, as they are often used to mock the social power, which has excluded them from the normal reality for being different, weird or evil.

However, it can be seen that the representation of these elements has gone through various transformations over the time. It is not so unusual anymore to sympathize with the supernatural characters, as it was when *The Master and Margarita* was first published. The perception of witchcraft has changed and its aspects can be widely seen in popular culture, media and fiction. From feared and excluded, witchcraft and witches, as well as the other supernatural

characters, has become attractive. The aesthetics of horror, the weird, grotesque and everything different from “normal” reality has switched from being repulsive to being appealing. It would be very fruitful to further investigate this phenomena, examples of which can be found everywhere in contemporary popular culture: in TV series, literature, movies, and games. In the same way the topic could we studied further through the literary examples in different genres and contexts, where witches, witchcraft, and the supernatural are used as the satirical devices.

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