The early nineteenth century’s portrayals of witches are under the spell of European Romanticism with the spectacular revival of spirituality, medieval inspiration and imagery of the powerful, unencumbered nature. Art and poetry (e.g. by Rosamund Marriot Watson, Sir Walter Scott, Mary Coleridge, Edgar Allan Poe or William Butler Yeats) is filled with images of twilight, horror, occult and various ecstatic enactments of altered states of consciousness and transgression. The witch figure is both, a femme fatale and a muse: the dark ‘other’ of the poet, the symbol of a spellbinding nature, and the embodiment of the suppressed, pagan soul, such as Scott’s *The Lady of the Lake* (1910). Shaped by these new aesthetic categories, literature elevates the figure from the dark ages of Christian persecution towards a new form of emotional intensity, a new form of desire to confront and experience the unknown aspects of humanity. Literary texts part from heavy, moral obligations to speak in the name of society or that of an institution be it the church or the monarchy. The limited iconography of malevolent witches (recorded mostly in fairy tales, particularly by Brothers Grimm) and powerless victims of witch hunts, promulgated by seventeenth-century witch hunters and eighteenth-century rationalist philosophers, is in the nineteenth-century literature replaced by mysterious temptresses, wise-women, fairy god-mothers, sorceresses, mythical immortals and enchantresses, shaping the conscious and subconscious witch imagery of the times. Generally, institutions condemning witchcraft had significantly diminished in influence across the nineteenth century when the majority of (educated) people no longer believed in the existence of witchcraft. Consequently, the witch figure becomes far more metaphorical, increasingly symbolizing areas of social dissonance and transgressive behaviour of women and men who rebel against the society. Bigamists, homosexuals, criminals, tricksters, prostitutes, madmen, and vampires appear in the nineteenth-century literature as boundary crossers, suspended between gender, class, sexuality and various other socio-economic areas of belonging. They offer an alternative discourse on human nature and initiate important processes in the cultural interrogation of existing representations of women and men.

Bodily and mental spontaneity of the witch-woman, characteristic especially of the nineteenth-century women’s literature, unsettles Victorian readers by pointing to the repressed desire to reach beyond rational behaviour. Women writers begin to
interrogate the concept of a ‘perfect lady/mother’, the guardian of ‘domestic bliss’, depicting heroines who question the confines of culture, society and home, who return to nature or join the supernatural. A spectacular example of such literary exploration is Catherine Earnshaw, a passionate, nature-bound woman-temptress in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Catherine is introduced to the reader after her death, through a discovery of her diary describing the all-consuming, almost demonic love between her and Heathcliff, a foundling adopted by Catherine’s father. Suspended between the worlds of what is proper and improper for a young lady, she is not only wanting but cannot truly exist without both dimensions. The evocative descriptions of the wild and lonely moorland emphasize Catherine’s unencumbered passions that juxtapose her final decision to surrender to culture, a choice with fatal consequences. It is the male hero, Heathcliff, humiliated by Catherine’s family and wrongly believing that Catherine has rejected him, that returns years later as a witch-like figure of subversion. Behind his noble posture of a wealthy gentleman, there hides a monstrous, revengeful soul that can only be comforted by post-mortal reunification with his beloved.

The nineteenth-century witch figures also embrace the exotic (colonial), the unfamiliar, and the distant, occurring mostly as marginal, underdeveloped characters harnessing readers’ imagination. Bertha Mason, a peripheral figure of Creole heritage in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), is portrayed as violently insane, first wife of Edward Rochester, kept by him in the attic of their gloomy mansion. Rochester, persuaded by his father to marry Bertha, but also initially entranced by her wealth and beauty, explains that he was not warned against the insanity present in her family for generations. Upon their arrival to England, Bertha’s mental health deteriorates, while years of confinement destroy her physical attractiveness. She becomes a frightening, culturally unacceptable creature, standing in the way of Rochester marrying Jane, his (mature) love. Once confronted with Jane, Bertha appears as a vampire-like primordial destroyer of life, the monstrous feminine, a witch-figure who eventually dies in the flames of fire.

The theme of the unfamiliar and the monstrous is most famously explored in *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), a novel by Mary Shelley. Depicting a scientist, Victor Frankenstein, who creates a monstrous man, the story tackles a dilemma of human desires, choices and responsibility for the other. Facilitated by the growth of liberal individualism, the novel focuses on the tragic rejection of the creature by Frankenstein himself. Abandoned, it becomes a (symbolic) outcast from society but, in fact, it embodies innocence, good-naturedness and faith. The rejection leads into deeper, philosophical inquiries about the complexity of the nineteenth century social transformations, resulting in the increasing diversification of the witch imagery towards the monstrous, gothic and inhuman.

Gothic literature, with Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) as one of its most popular representations, begins, in fact, much earlier in the century with John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), a novella, which made an immense impact on contemporary sensibilities, and multiplied in numerous editions and adaptations. *Carmilla*, one of such Gothic narratives, by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, published in 1871, and thus predating Dracula, narrates the story of a young woman’s susceptibility to a female vampire. Carmilla, the title character, appears as a prototype of a lesbian (vampire-witch) in the form of a beautiful, nocturnal temptress who crosses the forbidden border...
towards illicit acts of sexuality. Her exclusively female victims succumb to perverse temptations, as Carmilla resurrects from her coffin, teases, transforms and passes through walls of her mansion. Her calculative mind rejects emotional involvement, suggesting a cultural collapse of female warmth and attachment, the very symbols of domesticity inscribed within heterosexual and class ideology.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the witch-like characters are increasingly delineated as women dissatisfied with their cultural roles and obligations, who, often through diaries, manifest various desires to abandon their unhappy lives and make their own independent decisions. Anne Brontë’s novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) portrays a young widow who mysteriously arrives with her son at an abandoned Elizabethan mansion. She lives there in seclusion under the assumed name of Helen Graham but soon becomes a victim of gossip. Gilbert Markham, a farmer who refuses to participate in this local slander, discovers Helen’s diary, in which she identifies herself as a married woman and describes her husband’s physical and moral decline and cruelty, which she has decided to leave behind. Lucy Snowe, Charlotte Brontë’s other strikingly modern heroine in *Villette* (1853), flees from her miserable past in England to begin a new life as a teacher at a French boarding school. Her independence, soon challenged by her male encounters, is underscored by profound loneliness and a realization that in the society there are no men with whom she can live and remain free.

In a similar vein, Hester Prynne, the protagonist in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel depicting the seventeenth-century Puritan Boston, conceives a daughter through an adulterous affair, and attempts to begin a new life based on dignity and independence. Despite the penalty, (she is forced to wear a scarlet ‘A’ on her dress, symbolizing adultery, and to stand daily on the scaffold, exposed to public humiliation), Hester refuses to name the father of her child, even under severe pressure from the church and her long-lost but re-appearing husband. Following her release from prison, Hester settles (with her unruly daughter, Pearl) in a cottage at the edge of town, earning a living with her needlework. Reverend Dimmesdale, tormented by his guilty conscience of being Pearl’s father, eventually falls in severe illness, admits his guilt and dies in Hester’s arms. Hester returns to her cottage, resumes wearing the scarlet letter, and offers solace to women in similar positions. Upon her death, she is buried near Dimmesdale; their graves share a tombstone with an engraved scarlet “A”, a romantic symbol of freedom and transgression from societal constrains.

Over the century, readers become increasingly attracted to the theme of human madness as a suspension between the good (reasonable and culturally proper) and the evil (insane and the tabooed). Split personality, a theme explored directly in connection with these anxieties, appears in Robert L. Stevenson 1886’s novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Dr Jekyll, the protagonist, is a respectable scientist and a diabolical magician, who suffers from a dissociative identity disorder. Suspended in desperate attempts to control the switches of his personality, he lives in (as) two identities excluding each other on the levels of class and morality, and eventually succumbs to the abyss of Mr Hyde, his dark state of consciousness. Still, fascination with madness is particularly interwoven with the imagery of female villains.

In *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), Elisabeth Braddon’s novel based on real-life events, the source of madness derives directly from within the domestic sphere. The seemingly immaculate Lady Audley turns out to have been a violent criminal, bigamist...
and a cold-blooded mother who abandons her child in the name of financial luxury. It is the increasingly urban, anonymous city surroundings that allow Lady Audley to falsify her identity and destroy various hints to her past. In such rebellious circumstances, her upward mobility suggests a serious threat to the nineteenth century paradigm of class, a threat, which expands the meanings of insanity towards a conscious manipulation and an escape from distress. Moreover, anxieties about Lady Audley’s unstable identity are mirrored throughout the novel in other characters and relationships. Homosexuality, questions about the upper and lower classes, proper and improper love are constantly explored in various conversations. The figure of the ‘witch’ amounts here to the negative otherness of a woman as an ‘abysmal sex’, an association spectacularly accomplished in the enigmatic figure of Lydia Gwilt, a flame-haired temptress, bigamist, laudanum addict and husband-poisoner, the heroine of Wilkie Collins’ mystery novel, *Armadale* (1866).

In the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, literature, influenced by fundamental socio-political transformations is no longer preoccupied with romantic human transgression. The witch imagery moves away from the sublime, increasingly addressing the social and economic concerns, and relying on fact-based portrayals of contemporary life. Naturalism, Marxism and Modernism alike, focus on the villains’ bodies, which are to be medicated, hospitalized, and, if necessary, made extinct. Evoking both medical and sexual implications, the vampire, the criminal and the homosexual are now posited as tropes for cultural incompatibility and deviance, which, “if excessive, will be vomited into protected spaces – hospitals, asylums, prisons”.

There, the witch, especially the witch-woman, is ‘veiled’, hidden and kept under restraint. Such attitudes toward women’s mental health is illustrated in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892), a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, regarded as a significant early feminist work and exploring the nineteenth century sociological projection of ‘woman’ as deficient and biologically inferior, conceived to assist and support a masculine ‘consciousness to itself’. The narrative is in form of journal entries written by Jane, imprisoned by her husband (a physician) in the upstairs bedroom of a house rented for the summer. Confined, controlled and forbidden to write, Jane is supposed to recuperate from what he diagnoses as a temporary nervous breakdown – a slight hysteria. This should be seen as a reference to Freud’s famous studies of his female patients, 1926 and the parallel between the hysterical woman and the witch or demonica in Charcot’s work. In a rebellious gesture, which evokes association with Catherine Earnshaw’s destiny, Jane slips into insanity, asserting a type of freedom in her entrapment in marriage. Another early feminist protagonist, Edna Pontellier, in Kate Chopin’s novel, *The Awakening* (1899), goes a step further and, by ending her own life, turns her emotional despair into a cultural refusal of marital confines. The novel, most probably influenced by Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (by then translated into English), is set in New Orleans, and centres on Edna’s struggle to reconcile her controversial views on femininity and motherhood with the prevailing social attitudes of the turn-of-the-century American South. It is one of the earliest American novels opening doors for women’s emancipatory twentieth century writing, with the central figure of a witch as a symbol of female liberty, feminine power and subversion to patriarchal order.

Indeed, post-World War I literature brings such works by women authors as Colette’s *Claudine* series (1900–1922), Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929),
and finally, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), each following a different agenda towards women’s emancipation. Following the controversial publication of Colette’s *Chéri* (1920), various figures of women-artists and women-philosophers, courtesans, lesbians and unmarried women appear in literature as heroines who reject the confinement of women to the mysterious and secondary human ‘other’, voiceless muses, dutiful daughters and proper lady-mothers. It is yet, in the post-World War II literature, under profound influences of postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial and feminist philosophies, that the witch imagery unfolds as an unquestionable, political symbol of female liberation. From the 1960s onwards, we witness the birth of various cults of pagan goddesses, such as the White Goddess and Wicca that cherish male and female powers, subdued by patriarchal religions. Drawing on these, predominantly re-imagined, meanings and practices of witchcraft, popular literature (such as Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld* and Anne Bishop’s fantasy novels) portrays and re-invents witches as essentially positive, magical characters, good-natured and powerful sorceresses.

Following the proliferation of witch characters across literature beyond popular productions, we can distinguish several literary trends, which clearly complicate the mass-oriented, one-dimensional approaches. Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953) takes on a political approach to the history of witchcraft. A re-telling of the Salem witch trials, it is a dramatized allegory of McCarthyism with its persistent, hysterical persecution of Communist thinkers. The central theme explored is the empowerment of previously marginalized female inhabitants of Salem. The orphan girl Abigail, having few options in her life (servantry, marriage, prostitution), aligns herself with God’s will and gains power over the courtroom as her narrative of accusations becomes unsailable. Tituba, the black servant, knowledgeable of witchcraft practices, and whose status is lower than that of anyone else, similarly manages to deflect blame by accusing others. The entire witch trial thrives on accusations, the only way that witches can be identified, and confessions, which provide the proof of justice (on which the court proceedings operate). Proctor, a male hero and a counterpart to Abigail, attempts to break this cycle of madness with a confession of his own (he admits to the affair with Abigail), however this confession is trumped by the accusation of witchcraft against him as well as his wife. Proctor’s courageous decision to die rather than confess to a sin that he did not commit, finally breaks the vicious circle. The court collapses, undone by the refusal of its victims to participate in the hysterical reproduction of falsehood.

John Updike’s novel *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) represents another literary direction: a satire, written by a male author, and targeting contemporary female-male relationship pressures. Portraying family issues and anxieties with respect to societal power, or the lack of it, across genders, the story is set in the fictional town of Eastwick in the late 1960s, and follows three women-witches Alexandra Spofford, Jane Smart, and Sukie Rougemont, who acquired their magical powers after leaving, or being left by their husbands. Unfortunately, their female coven becomes upset by the arrival of a demonic character, Darryl Van Horne, who seduces each of them separately and makes them play with their powers in ways that contradict their initial visions of independence. The three women soon share Darryl in a foursome at his extravagant mansion until he unexpectedly marries their much younger friend, Jenny. This marks the end of the witches’ admiration and tolerance for Darryl. They now resolve to have revenge by making Jenny die from cancer, an act, which they soon regret having realized that it was Darryl who betrayed them all. After Jenny’s death, Darryl
disappears with her brother, Chris, who appears to have been his actual lover and true object of sexual desire. Although Updike’s novel introduces some interesting pro-feminist concepts of female power, it is underscored by satirical approach that, in fact, ridicules the craft in the hands of (emotional) women. Feminist critique rendered the book misogynistic, that is, reinforcing homoerotic foundation of male cultural dominance as well as the patriarchal conceptions of women who take care of their children, but require a man for personal growth. Indeed, the novel ends with witches going separate ways, as each summons her ideal man and leaves.

In a way, the radical feminism in the late 1960s and onwards represents the opposite literary envisioning of the witch. Drawing on the historically documented medieval and early modern European witch-craze, the witch-woman becomes in these narratives a victim of phallogocentric hegemonies. This identity construction derives from mythologized sources invented (and invention is one of the key words here) at the point when the second wave feminist movement ‘began to turn away from rights-centred public-sphere issues towards crime-centred, private-sphere issues’.  

Sexuality was to be identified as the site of women’s oppression in the sense that property was for Marx the site of class oppression. Rape, sexual violence, pornography, wife-battering and (eventually) child sexual abuse became the central signifiers of patriarchy, replacing signifiers such as legal asymmetries and pay differentials.

Women writers from this period focus on rediscovering women’s history silenced by the previous centuries, revise stories about marginalized, witch-like characters from the literary past, and assign them new cultural significations. Jean Rhys in Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), for example, accounts for Bertha’s marginality in her (unwritten) story in Jane Eyre. In Rhys’ novel, Bertha appears as Antoinette Cosway and is portrayed from the time of her youth in the Caribbean towards her unhappy relocation to England. Brontë’s witch-like madwoman in the attic is thus re-imagined. In a similar vein, an array of female mythological figures, such as Innana, Kali-Ma, Pandora, Lilith, Eve or Jezebel are re-discovered as carriers of specifically female empowerment, subdued by male epistemology. These are so-called herstorical (in contrast to historical) narratives, understood as a resistance to a phallogocentric ‘woman’, with all her incompleteness, deficiency, and envy.

Sara Maitland’s re-writing of the figure of Cassandra in Women Fly When Men Aren’t Watching (1988) is a powerful example of such a narrative reconstruction of history in form of a fantasized biography of Cassandra. Maitland’s figure is a maybe not a witch but a female magician, a prophetic madwoman unable to recognize herself as an autonomous consciously speaking (and remembering) subject. Alluding to Ovid’s account in the Metamorphoses, Maitland describes Cassandra’s initial fascination with Apollo, but emphasizes her lack of experience in sexual matters and the ease with which Apollo has seduced her. Maitland’s narrative focuses on Cassandra’s refusal to submit her body to Apollo’s sexual force that is incompatible and incommensurable with her desire. Her pain originates in the encounter with phallic desire, with an eroticism so different from her own that it violates rather than excites her senses. As a punishment for her insubordination, Cassandra remains frozen in non-speech, in non-structure, and subsequently infused with a distorted form of language and memory: ‘She has a knowing that [Agamemnon] will not . . . that he will wait . . . that he
will . . . she does not know the word for what it is she fears, for what it is she knows he will not do. Then the next minute it is gone, it is all gone.'¹²

Especially in the early second wave of feminist writing, the ‘witch’ becomes the other woman, the one who is not only possible, but actually is needed and desired: ‘a woman who does not yet exist, but whose advent could shake the foundations of patriarchy’.¹³ Within this radical paradigm, Mary Daly’s *Gyn/ecology* (1978) and Andrea Dworkin’s *Women-Hating* (1974) focus their critical interest on the witch as a signifier for physically abused and culturally neglected ‘woman’. Similarly, Barbara Walker draws on the hag’s metamorphosis from the wise-woman into the witch that transforms her medieval cauldron ‘from a sacred symbol of regeneration into a vessel of poisons’.¹⁴ According to Daly, the hag is a female *eccentric*, in reference to the Greek *ek* (out of) and *kentrum* (centre of a circle),¹⁵ who deviates from established patterns and defines gynocentric cultural boundaries.¹⁶ The witch-crone, Daly’s most prominent ‘archetype’ of female powers, becomes a guardian of birth-giving as well as of virginity and homosexuality unstained by patriarchal semen. Daly’s rewriting of *hagiography* as *Hag-ography* modulates the hag, making her the very embodiment of feminist sisterhood.¹⁷ Dworkin ‘uses both the image of the demonised witch-stepmother of fairy tales and the figure of the persecuted witch-victim of the Burning Times as figures for the suffering woman-victim of pornography and rape’.¹⁸ Her narratives are manifestos of female powerlessness and, simultaneously, they celebrate the survivor-figure who lives to tell the tale. In fact, radical feminists equate themselves with witches in order to ensure ‘that anyone who disagrees with [them] can be cast as an inquisitor’.¹⁹ Despite a detailed analysis of the torture inflicted on witches, Daly and Dworkin are reluctant to provide (historical) references or to describe particular cases of witch trials. According to Purkiss, ‘male historians never tire of observing that radical feminist histories of witchcraft use almost no early modern texts as a source for views about witchcraft except the *Malleus Maleficarum*’.²⁰

Hélène Cixous, widely translated into Anglo-Saxon context, also refers to this understanding of the witch in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (1975): the woman ‘in her inevitable struggle against conventional man’, the ‘universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history’.²¹ This ‘universal subject’ performs ‘a sort of tetralogy, tackling the problem of the four elements: water, air, fire, earth, applied to philosophers nearer our time’, and simultaneously, it interrogates the philosophical tradition.²² Because it operates on a basis of assumed identity politics, *herstory* emerges as a form of feminist mythology,²³ and constitutes a challenging alternative to the established male-centred master-story about witches.²⁴ This phase of intellectual rebellion and separatism belongs to ‘a crucial period in the experience of women who had always played subordinate roles as dutiful academic daughters, research assistants, second readers, and faculty wives’.²⁵ In *The Newly Born Woman* (1986), Cixous’s and Clément’s witches replicate the traces of subversive symbols (the evil eye, menstrual pollution and the castrating mother) as well as feminine symbols of transcendence (the virginal mother/goddess). The woman as a hysteric figure, the witch-woman as a creature which manifests a ‘distinctively female bonding’ of mind and body,
the go-between whose occult yet necessary labours deliver souls and bodies across frightening boundaries? 

It is in her ‘orgasmic freedom’ that Cixous’s witch figure personifies the assimilated abjection of the witch’s body, her ambiguity of form, and her re-enactment of the absence of patriarchal culture that cannot be conceptualized in the historical language of ‘the symbolic’. The self-touching ‘witch’ ‘lives with her body in the past’, the past referred to by Cixous as a spectacle of forgotten roles: the ambiguous, the subversive and the conservative. 

She is subversive, ‘because the symptoms – the attacks – revolt and shake up the public’ (the phallic gaze of the others to whom they are exhibited). She is conservative, ‘because every sorceress ends up being destroyed, and nothing is registered of her but mythical traces’. Her ambiguity is ‘expressed in an escape that marks the histories of sorceress and hysteric with the suspense of ellipses’.

Such radical assimilations of the witch figure into various cultural, linguistic and geographical contexts involve also Black women writers, who revive their own cultural traditions across layers of history that leads to the emotional re-discovery of the witch hunting that is presented as an incontestable archaeological proof of universal female oppression. Toni Morrison’s Paradise (1998) and Alice Walker’s In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens (1983) are abundant with references to witches that seem to fall into this category of emotional ‘digging’. As explained by Lissie, one of Walker’s protagonists in The Temple of My Familiar (1990), the first witches to die at the stake were the daughters of the Moors. . . . It was they (or, rather, we) who thought the Christian religion that flourished in Spain would let the Goddess of Africa ‘pass’ into the modern world as ‘the Black Madonna’. After all, this was how the gods and goddesses moved from era to era before, though Islam, our official religion for quite a long time by now, would have nothing to do with this notion; instead, whole families in Africa who worshipped the goddess were routinely killed, sold into slavery, or converted to Islam at the point of the sword. Yes . . . I was one of those ‘pagan’ heretics they burned at the stake.

Such emotional proofs explain, perhaps, why ‘the radical feminist history of witches often appears to offer a static, finished vision of the witch’, one that reflects the feminist desire for an irrefutable reference that could be considered ultimate and eternal.

Victimization of the female body as a site of patriarchal oppression is also evoked in Monique Wittig’s Les Guérillères (1985), Sally Gearhart’s Wanderground (1985), Elana Nachman’s Riverfinger Women and Bertha Harris’ Lover, all presenting communities of strong, witch-like women rebelling against patriarchy and drawing on the myths of Amazons and other pre-historical matriarchies. These are predominantly eco-feminist and lesbian manifestos about witch-Amazon, the rebel-warriors riding bare-breasted under a brilliant helm of crescent horns that appear at the point in history when there was one rape too many . . . the earth finally said ‘no’. There was no storm, no earthquake, no tidal wave or volcanic eruption, no specific moment to mark its happening. It only became apparent that it happened, and that it happened everywhere.
Although the identifications with the Amazon as a figure of female autonomy and creativity were ‘both too radical and too narrow for a broadly based critical movement’, such acute and legitimate refusals to cooperate with the phallocentric culture enabled a turning point in feminist imagery of witches.

Angela Carter’s witch- and vampire-like characters in her short story collection *Burning Your Boats* (1996) belong to the most extraordinary examples of the literary shift that started in the late 1980s. Her witches are usually depicted as apocalyptic, castrated creatures, producing death instead of life. Often, their barren wombs (alluding to their suspended reproductive function) associate with the tomb and the denigration of female autonomy in culture. These prototypes are no longer of a female but of an apocalyptic, abysmal sex, infinitively poised between the woman and the monster. As with all other cultural attributes of the non-conforming female body, the witches are defined in terms of hysterical sexuality. A reader of Foucault, Carter argues that this sexuality is never expressed in a vacuum, but is bound to the ‘metaphysics’ of politics and gender. She formulates her interpretation of power structures and places them in the context of partly abused and partly romanticized female body. Her aim is to demystify the hysterical locations of both female and male sexuality by disrupting the prohibitions placed on the body, a strategy deriving from the conviction that ‘where there is a desire, the power relation is already present’.

Under the influence of poststructuralist thought, the ‘witch’ figure has undergone many transformations and increasingly begun to convey the diasporic status of sexuality, especially sexually incompatible with the dominant discourse. The late twentieth century writers’ interest in the history of sexuality, especially the history of madness, violence and hysteria, attest to these new cultural horizons. Mapping the intellectual territory of nineteenth century Canada, Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace* (1996) reclaims the documented but enigmatic story of Grace Marks, who was convicted in 1843 of murdering her employer and his housekeeper, and was subsequently held in the Lunatic Asylum in Toronto and the Kingston Penitentiary. The controversial conviction sparked much debate about whether Marks was actually instrumental in the murder, or merely an unwitting accessory. A number of theories were offered as to Marks’ psychic state: that she acted as if she suffered from mental illness in order to be placed in an asylum, that she had multiple personality disorder, or that she was possessed by the consciousness of her deceased friend Mary Whitney. Atwood chooses to explore the 19th century conception of ‘female difference’ intertwining neurological aspects of possession and hysteria with fragments of biblical imagery, superstitions, and demonology. Grace’s madness is brought into immediate association with her culturally restricted and exploited body, subjected not only to science and law, but also to the private fantasies of the doctors and judges. The novel depicts the nineteenth century (women’s) body, designed to be domesticated, ‘caged in wire crinolines . . . so that they cannot get out and go rubbing up against the gentlemen’s trousers’, just as they are destined to become pregnant in order to preserve their cultural entrapment. In this oppressively phallocentric structure of knowledge, Grace’s mental condition seems to be deriving from her connection with the distorted mother of mankind, Eve, who was seduced by the snake and infused with disobedience. Focusing on Grace’s absence of mind (God, Law) in the moments of her ‘hysterical’ attacks, Atwood inscribes madness as ‘mysteria’, a ‘Western
nineteenth-century view, which linked hysteria to a specific version of femininity as itself a “mystery”.  

Also, Susan Fletcher’s *The Highlands Witch* (2010) represents a more contemporary portrayal of the witch figure in a historical romance, written in an epistolary form. Playing on the traces of the witch-woman suggested by the – in historical terms highly problematic – work by Ehrenreich and English, the novel is a poetic narrative about Corrag, a child-bodied witch-herbalist with amazing healing powers. The novel recounts a historical event, the Massacre of Glencoe, which took place in Scotland, 1692, when families of the MacDonald clan (that refused to pledge allegiance to the Protestant king William), was brutally murdered by soldiers who had enjoyed their hospitality. Corrag, condemned for her involvement with the clan, is imprisoned, accused of witchcraft and sentenced to death by burning. As she awaits her death, Charles Leslie, an Irish Jacobite, seeking any evidence against the king, pays Corrag a visit, and day by day, becomes increasingly enchanted by her amazing storytelling talent, as she unfolds her life story filled with love, tenderness and hope towards life. While a true and rare friendship develops between the two, eventually Corrag’s tantalizing story makes Leslie question his own socio-political beliefs and leads to his courageous act of rescuing her from the prison.

These historical representations of the ‘witch’ mark a turning point in philosophical understandings of marginalized bodies in the social structure. Most recent literary imagery of the witch, under the impact of postcolonial and transnational thought, suggests that social alienation, and exclusion from the mainstream politics and culture, is subject to multiple conditions, such as gender, sexual orientation, class, origin, race, accent, and religion. Over the last three decades, and most recently, at the turn of the twenty-first century, significant diversifications across race, class, and political systems have taken place. Along with these diversifications, the ‘witch’ continues to represent new forms of heresy, stigma, and cultural provisionality within the framework of socio-political relations. Radically neither a word nor a concept, but rather a condition of possibility and move, the ‘witch’ as a subject is continuously departing from Western logocentric models, and continuously ‘becoming’ in its cultural incommensurability. As an overlapping cultural trait (of language, system, or geography), a moment of crossing, or transgressing culture, the experience is charged with tension, instilling constant changes in the subject value. This topography of the ‘witch’, radical in its persistent desire to transcend hostilities of the dominant structure, still interferes with the very structure, and transforms its foundations.

**Notes**

7 Justyna Sempruch, Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008).
9 Ibid., 15.
11 Sempruch, Fantasies.
15 Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology (Boston: Beacon, 1978), 186.
16 Walker, Crone, 122.
19 Ibid., 16.
20 Ibid., 11.
24 Sempruch, Fantasies.
26 Cixous and Clément, Newly Born, 8.
27 Ibid., 12.
28 Ibid., 15.
30 Purkiss, The Witch, 10.
35 Margaret Atwood, Alias Grace (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1996), 33.

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