

The Wicked Witch:
Exploring Medea, Tituba, and Sula as Figures of Deviance and Non-Normativity

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This thesis represents my own work in accordance with college regulations and the Barnard Honor Code. All sources, both cited and paraphrased, are properly acknowledged throughout the senior essay. All translations are mine or taken from a source that is clearly identified in the main text and the bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION: APPROACHING THE WITCH

The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.

—Pat Robertson, 1992 Iowa fundraising letter

Although I never imagined myself endorsing a sentiment expressed by the notorious Pat Robertson, his vision of the witch as inherently feminist, political, and socially transgressive serves as a remarkably insightful framework for the chapters to follow. The witch figure, indeed, has been understood historically and culturally as linked to and synonymous with many if not all of Robertson's surrounding characterizations: feminist, female, socialist, anti-family, political, anti-marriage, child-killing, anti-capitalist, and queer. Each of these characterizations, further, may be understood as a direct referent for the others—or as a referent for the nexus of them all, contained within the summative category of “witch.” This social understanding of and creation of the witch is translated into various forms of cultural production; this thesis, as such, explores the literary representations of three witch figures: Medea, Tituba, and Sula.

The three women centered in this thesis—and witch figures as a category—transgress the social norms of their community and therefore threaten their society's established hierarchies and imposition of order. They achieve this through specific deviant acts such as practicing magic, sleeping with married men, and killing their children. They also achieve this by simply being women, belonging to an inferiorized racial or cultural group, and possessing power. Medea, Tituba, and Sula are all tragic figures—as are many of history's accused witches—not inherently because they are powerful, but because their power is deemed unacceptable by their societies. These women are tragic figures because of their societies' misogyny, racism, xenophobia, and

colonialist ideologies. The relationship between the witch and her society, however, while defined by counter-ness, is not purely comprised of hatred and alienation. Mixed in with the community's admonishment of the witch is a nuanced but undeniable sense of admiration, reverence, and desire. With the witch's abjection comes a kind of freedom forbidden to the normative members of society; though they publicly condemn this freedom to transgress social norms, the members of the witch's community, on one level or another, recognize in the Other the fulfillment of their own locked-away desires; the expression of a repressed version of themselves.

My analysis of Medea is based in her representation in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (~250 BCE) as translated by R.C. Seaton, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 CE) as translated by David Raeburn, and Seneca's *Medea* (~50 CE) as translated by Emily Wilson, with minor reference to Euripides' *Medea* (431 BCE) as translated by Oliver Taplin. Both Apollonius and Ovid depict the first half of the Jason/Medea story, up to their return to Greece; while the *Argonautica* provides perhaps the most comprehensive account of Jason's encounter with Medea, Ovid's narration offers a valuable perspective as it centers Medea's experience of the relationship. Seneca and Euripides both dramatize the second half of the couple's tragic story; I use primarily Seneca's version for his portrayal of Medea as more intensely non-human, powerful, and tragic. Tituba's analysis is based almost entirely in her representation in Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière . . . Noire de Salem* (1986), with English translations by Richard Philcox that are occasionally changed or augmented by me—my amendments will always appear in brackets, followed by my initials: [—EG]. I briefly engage Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953) for his

depiction of Tituba and her role in the events of the play. My analysis of Sula is based solely in her representation in Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973).

Among these primary texts is significant diversity in genre. The works range from epic poem to novel to drama; the texts within each category cover a variety of more specific classifications. Although Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are both written in epic form and meter, Apollonius' poem fits more squarely into the epic tradition with one protagonist and one plotline, while Ovid's poem deviates from the traditional epic structure and tone, containing elements of "mock-epic" and generally resisting simple genre classification.

The two novels, Condé's *Moi, Tituba* and Morrison's *Sula* contain several important genre-related distinctions. While Morrison's narrative is entirely fictitious, Condé's novel more closely resembles historical fiction: *Moi, Tituba* incorporates a number of historical records and seems almost to step in and fill the historical gap left in the documentation of the Salem witch trials and Tituba's fate—as Angela Davis writes in the Foreword to the English translation, "when Tituba takes her place in the history of the Salem witch trials, the recorded history of that era—and indeed the entire history of the colonization process—is revealed to be seriously flawed" (xii). The novels differ as well in their narration: *Tituba* is told from the first-person perspective of its protagonist, while a third-person omniscient narrator recounts the events of *Sula*.

While the works of Seneca, Euripides, and Miller all fall under the category of drama—and more specifically, tragedy—they, too, are marked by notable differences. Both Seneca and Euripides' *Medea* plays are part of a literary tradition surrounding the mythic Medea. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* also enters into an established dialogue

surrounding preexisting characters and events, but because of its relative temporal proximity to the present, Miller's play is generally understood as historical fiction—a dramatization of true events of the past—as opposed to Seneca and Euripides' ancient engagement with myth. There are also two major stylistic differences between Miller's play and the *Medeas*. First, the dialogue of the *Medea* tragedies is written in verse, while *The Crucible* is written in prose. Second, the *Medeas* are composed almost entirely of dialogue with very minimal stage direction, while *The Crucible* is rife with strikingly detailed authorial directions and descriptions—including a six-page stage direction at the opening of Act I.

Although these texts are categorized by genre, these divisions are permeable and not entirely rigid: the narrative nature of the epic poem extends into the novel; the novel's third-person voice mirrors the drama's diegesis and stage direction; the mimesis of drama echoes in the novel's dialogue and first-person narration. All contain elements of narrative, tragedy, and poetry. Each form possesses the ability to captivate and entrance its reader or spectator, enacting a type of literary magic.

Due in part to the simultaneously distinct and overlapping genres of the texts in which they appear, *Medea*, *Tituba*, and *Sula* each possess unique identities and social/historical contexts while exhibiting striking similarities to one another. This thesis seeks to put these women and their stories in dialogue with one another, using the common themes that run between their narratives as an organizing framework while highlighting the distinct features of each woman's portrayal. The second aim of this thesis is to explore the relationship between the witch and society—more specifically, the role that the witch plays in her community as a powerful and socially deviant Other.

My understanding of the Other as a social construction of power is informed by the work of a number of theorists. Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) has provided a great deal of insight into the function of categorization as a subjugating tool, the process by which all members of society become the arbiters of "normality" (304), and the strict classification of individuals as either normative or non-normative:

Generally speaking, all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal); and that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.) (199).

Georg Simmel's *The Stranger* has contributed a valuable analysis of the Other as exemplified by the stranger as "the man who comes today and stays tomorrow—the potential wanderer, so to speak, who, although he has gone no further, has not quite gotten over the freedom of coming and going" (143). The stranger's freedom contains "many dangerous possibilities," as he does not feel bound to or constrained by the "custom, piety, or precedent" (146) of his current cultural and spatial context. James Baldwin, in his essay "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" (1985) elucidates the nature of the Other as an intimidating mirror that reflects the category-defying and order-destroying realities that exist, unacknowledged, within every "normal" person: "Freaks are called freaks and are treated as they are treated—in the main, abominably—because they are human beings who cause to echo, deep within us, our most profound terrors and desires" (828).

Central to my understanding of the witch as Other is an analysis of the witch's queer sexuality and gender performance. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) informs this analysis immensely, particularly in its

understanding of sex/gender and sexuality as socially constructed and collectively performed categories. Butler reveals the twice-constructed nature and order-threatening power of the Other who fails to adhere to their sex/gender assignment and/or resists the normative performance of sex/gender or sexuality:

The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original; just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a “figure” in that double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin (138).

A second scholar whose queer theory informs my own is Janet Jakobsen, who, in her essay “Queer Is? Queer Does?: Normativity and the Problem of Resistance” (1998), explores “queer” as a verb—to queer; to resist; to shift; to trouble—in addition to its established use and meaning as a noun and adjective. Ultimately, I borrow my working definition of “queer” from David Halperin’s *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (1995): “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative” (62).

As for historical context, Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004) has provided an unparalleled analysis of the 16-18th-century European witch-hunts in relation to the transition to capitalism. Federici investigates the charge of witchcraft as a method of establishing control—employed simultaneously by “missionaries and conquistadors to the ‘New World’ as a tool for the subjugation of the local populations” (163) as well as by the European state in an effort to seize control over the means of (re)production and “weaken the resistance of the

European peasantry” (165) through the persecution of women and the female body. Federici points to the socially transgressive power of the witch as the cause for her attempted extermination: “hundreds of thousands of women could not have been massacred and subjected to the cruelest of tortures unless they posed a challenge to the power structure” (164). *Caliban and the Witch* also serves an important purpose in calling attention to the role of mind/body dualism: in noting the hierarchization of the mind (a referent for the ruling class) over the body (the proletariat), Federici claims that “the human body and not the steam engine, and not even the clock, was the first machine developed by capitalism” (146). While Federici investigates this phenomenon primarily in terms of the ungendered body’s mechanization, I am interested in the implications of this claim specifically on women and the female body, particularly as it relates to the witch-hunt’s criminalization of birth control and other forms of and referents for female sexual and reproductive autonomy. Throughout my analysis of the literary representations of Medea, Tituba, and Sula, I take note of the attention paid—by the text, outside characters, and the witches themselves—to their gendered bodies.

The following chapters explore these three witches and their enactments of agency and expressions of power through the transgression of social norms. Chapter One examines the methods and motivations for each witch’s practice of witchcraft, as well as the explicit connections made between magic and resistance. In this first chapter, I establish an understanding of magic as the most easily recognizable expression of the witch’s deviant power, to be followed by chapters that focus on two forms of deviance more firmly rooted in the witch’s transgression of gender/sexuality norms in her engagement with the members of her community. Chapter Two analyzes the witch’s

transgression of social norms surrounding sexuality, with such deviant characteristics as the possession of a sexuality at all, the dominance of sexual desire over reason and rationality, and the witch's engagement with and expression of queer sexuality. Chapter Three analyzes the witch's transgression of social norms surrounding motherhood, epitomized in her violent rejection of the mother role through her use of contraception, abortion, filicide, and incest.

CHAPTER ONE: THE WITCH AND HER MAGIC

Wicked Witch of the West: Who killed my sister? Who killed the Witch of the East? Was it you?

Dorothy: No, no. It was an accident. I didn't mean to kill anybody.

Wicked Witch of the West: Well, my little pretty, I can cause accidents, too!

—*The Wizard of Oz*, 1939

The witch is seen as a magical, deviant woman. Her use of magic marks her as deviant—her specialized knowledge and unique powers enable her to exercise radical agency—but the witch's use of magic also facilitates and is facilitated by her other expressions of deviance. Homer's Circe uses magic to perform transgression as she seduces men into animalized submission and, in the words of Diane Purkiss, proves "femininity's power to render categories and identities unstable" (260). Accused witches in England were said to deviate from their feminine roles as mothers and caretakers, publicized in a 1601 pamphlet entitled *A strange report of sixe of the most notorious witches, who by their divelish practices murdered above the number of foure hundred small children*.¹

Exhibiting transgression of both sexual and gender-based norms, Canidia and her fellow witches of Horace's Epode V use the liver and marrow, of a tortured young boy—"helpless child, / A tender frame—you might have thought that such a sight / Would have melted hearts of Thracians stern and wild" (12-14)—as ingredients for a love potion—"her philtre of desire" (38). In light of this literary and historical tradition, this chapter examines the magical practices of Medea, Sula, and Tituba—as means to further deviance and also as deviant ends in themselves.

Medea's magical practice, as depicted in both Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is bound up in her transgression of familial roles. After laying eyes on Jason, Medea is overcome with desire—a passion to be discussed further in depth

¹ As cited in Diane Purkiss' *The Witch in History* (1996), 116.

in the following chapter on the witch's transgressive sexuality. Faced with this desire, Medea must decide whether or not to use her magic to help Jason, thus betraying her father, her family, and her Corinthian people. Apollonius describes the agony with which Medea considers her unthinkable decision:

And fast did her heart throb within her breast, as a sunbeam quivers upon the walls of a house when flung up from water, which is just poured forth in a caldron or a pail may be; and hither and thither on the swift eddy does it dart and dance along; even so the maiden's heart quivered in her breast. And the tear of pity flowed from her eyes, and ever within anguish tortured her, a smouldering fire through her frame, and about her fine nerves and deep down beneath the nape of the neck where the pain enters keenest, whenever the unwearied Loves direct against the heart their shafts of agony. And she thought now that she would give him the charms to cast a spell on the bulls, now that she would not, and that she herself would perish; and again that she would not perish and would not give the charms, but just as she was would endure her fate in silence (Book III, 757-774).

As she oscillates between helping Jason and allowing him to perish, Medea further cements herself as a tragic figure as she contemplates suicide: "Far better would it be for me to forsake life this very night in my chamber by some mysterious fate, escaping all slanderous reproach, before I complete such nameless dishonor" (Book III, 804-807). Medea imagines achieving her death through the same means by which she envisions saving Jason: using her magic drugs. While sitting before her powerful resource, "a casket wherein lay many drugs, some for healing, others for killing" (Book III, 808-809), Medea tearfully resolves to betray her family. Later, after helping Jason to win the Golden Fleece from her father King Aeëtes, Medea aids the Argonauts in the slaughter of many Colchian soldiers—including her brother, Apsyrtus, whom Medea lures into Jason's deadly aim using her "witching charms" (Book IV, 476) and her privileged and trusted position as his sister.

In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Medea's moral dilemma occurs not by chance, but as part of a divine plot; Athena and Hera, knowing of Medea's powers, solicit Eros to "speed his shaft at the daughter of Aetes, the enchantress, and charm her with love for Jason" (Book III, 25-26). After sharing her plan with Athena, Hera concludes, "I deem that by her device he will bring back the fleece to Hellas" (Book III, 27-28). The goddesses plan to infuse Medea with the great passion that will move her to work magic in Jason's favor; they recognize Medea's great power and use it as a device, a resource.

Medea's legacy as an enchantress precedes her also in the minds of mortals, including Jason and his men. Jason and one of his men, Argus, discuss Medea's power and utility to them. Argus insists that if they could win the aid of Medea—"a maiden that uses sorcery" (Book III, 478), "whom the goddess Hecate taught to handle magic and herbs with exceeding skill—all that the land and flowing waters produce" (Book III, 327-328)—they would have no fear of defeat. The other men agree after receiving a sign of approval from the gods: "A trembling dove in her flight from a mighty hawk fell from on high, terrified, into the lap of Aeson's son, and the hawk impaled on the stern-ornament" (Book III, 540-542). Though this omen is meant to convince the men of Medea's utility, which is mirrored here in the dove's narrow and seemingly accidental escape from the hawk, the analogy does Medea no justice. In contrast to her portrayal by Argus, who characterizes her by her knowledge, divine connections, and command over nature, Medea's reflection in the dove depicts her as fragile, small, and weak—but lucky. Her comparison to the "trembling" dove fleeing the "mighty" hawk evokes the fear and helplessness of the pitiful survivors of the Argonauts' battle with the Giants:

many champions withal were slain; Heracles killed Telecles and Megabrontes, and Acastus slew Sophodris; [...] And after them the son of Oenus slew bold

Itomeneus, and Artaceus, leader of men; [...] And the rest gave way and fled in terror just as doves fly in terror before swift-winged hawks (Book I, 989-998).

This characterization of Medea leads Apharean Idas to angrily denounce their plan to rely upon the supplication of “weakling girls” (Book III, 563).

Medea is portrayed as much more powerful later in the *Argonautica* as she is actually depicted using her magic to help Jason complete his arduous tasks for the Golden Fleece.² Apollonius describes how Medea gifts Jason with a magic charm along with detailed instructions on how to perform the ritual that will allow him to survive both the fiery bulls and the soldiers born of the dragon’s teeth. Medea instructs Jason to bathe in the river, perform a sacrifice to Hecate, goddess of witchcraft, and steep the charm with water before anointing his body, shield, and sword with the magic drug (Book III, 1240). Through the performance of this ritual, Jason is granted “boundless prowess and mighty strength” (Book III, 1040); his body, for a short time, becomes impervious to the bulls’ horns as well as the soldiers’ spears. In addition to this magic device and ritual, Medea equips Jason with another instruction: as the soldiers spring up from the earth, he is to “cast unseen among them a massy stone” (Book III, 1054), causing the soldiers to slay one another.

In Ovid’s narrative, Medea acts with even greater agency in her critical role as sage and sorceress in Jason’s victory. As in the *Argonautica*, Medea uses herbs and chants to help Jason win the Golden Fleece; however, Ovid depicts Medea as playing an even more active role in this quest. Instead of simply advising Jason beforehand to throw

² Medea’s father, Aeëtes, tells Jason that he will concede the Golden Fleece to him if he is able to prove his strength, courage, and supposed racial superiority as a Greek by completing—and surviving—a seemingly impossible task. Jason must yoke two fire-breathing bulls and get them to plough a field in which he is to sow dragon’s teeth, which in turn will produce an army of warriors, armed with spears, which Jason will have to defeat. (Book III, 383-409).

a stone in the midst of the enemy soldiers, thus serving an important role but remaining distanced from the action itself, Ovid's Medea seems to think of this strategy as an extra precaution in the moment of battle, and spontaneously decides to control Jason's actions directly:

As she watched that army advancing towards their solitary target,
her face turned suddenly pale and she sat in a frozen trance.
In case the herbs she had given him proved too feeble, she chanted
a spell for his extra support and called on her secret devices.
Jason then hurled a gigantic rock right into the midst
of his foes, and repelled their attack by making them fight with each other
(135-140).

Although afterward the Greeks "swarmed round the victorious hero and hugged him tightly" (143), it appears to have been primarily Medea who achieved this victory—Jason himself did not know or think to throw the stone; it was Medea who, in combining her wisdom of what action should be taken with her magic chanting ability, ensured Jason's success and survival. Medea's great power is further illustrated later in Ovid's narrative, with the depiction of Medea's successful rejuvenation of Jason's father Aeson. Jason supplicates Medea:

I grant, dear wife, that you've saved me from death; you have given me all,
and the sum of your many kindnesses truly passes belief.
Yet I ask, if your magical powers can do it—and what can they not?—
Subtract a few of my years to add to the years of my father (165-168).

Medea replies that her powers enable her to do Jason "an even greater favour than what you are begging" (175): evoking the power of Hecate, "the three-formed goddess" (177-178), Medea will prolong Aeson's years while deducting none from Jason. Medea spends nine days traveling in her chariot, performing her secret rituals and incantations and collecting the necessary herbs: "With these and a thousand nameless objects, the

Colchian witch / was ready to work her spell transcending the powers of a mortal” (275-276).

Just as Medea derives her knowledge of charms and skill with herbs from Hecate, goddess of magic and witchcraft, Tituba learns her magic abilities from another wise and powerful surrogate mother figure: Mama Yaya. Through Mama Yaya’s teachings, Tituba is initiated into « une connaissance plus haute » (23)³: insight into the healing powers of various herbs, a nuanced understanding of nature’s forces, and the ability to conjure the spirits of the dead.

Man Yaya m’apprit les prières, les litanies, les gestes propitiatoires. Elle m’apprit à me changer en oiseau sur la branche, et insecte dans l’herbe sèche, en grenouille coassant dans la boue de la rivière Ormonde quand je voulais me délasser de la forme que j’avais reçue à la naissance. Elle m’apprit surtout les sacrifices. Le sang, le lait, liquides essentiels (23).⁴

When Mama Yaya dies shortly after Tituba’s fourteenth birthday, Tituba does not cry; she trusts in her ability to summon Mama Yaya’s spirit just as she has conjured her mother Abena and adoptive father Yao. Indeed, Mama Yaya continues to communicate with Tituba even after her death; she teaches Tituba to « concoct[er] des drogues, des potions dont j’afermissais le pouvoir grâce à des incantations » (25).⁵

Although Mama Yaya instructs Tituba to only use her magic abilities for good, Tituba, throughout the course of the novel, puts her powers to a variety of uses. She does primarily employ her herbs, charms, and potions for healing purposes—while in Barbados, she comforts the sick and dying; during her time in Massachusetts, she protects

³ “the upper spheres of knowledge” (10).

⁴ “Mama Yaya taught me the prayers, the rites, and the propitiatory gestures. She taught me how to change myself into a bird on a branch, into an insect in the dry grass or a frog croaking in the mud of the River Ormond whenever I was tired of the shape I had been given at birth. And then [above all –EG] she taught me the sacrifices. Blood and milk, the essential liquids” (10).

⁵ “devise [concoct –EG] drugs and potions whose powers I strengthened with incantations” (11).

and nurtures the health of Elizabeth and Betsey Parris; when she returns to Barbados, she heals and cares for wounded and beaten slaves, including a young man named Iphigene. Tituba, however, has trouble separating her magic abilities from the negative identification of “witch” and its connotations of evil and harm-doing—this conflict is first presented by her community, and later appears as a struggle within Tituba herself.

When Tituba’s plantation owner, Darnell Davis, sells his land—but not his slaves—to a new planter, Tituba evades being sent to the slave market and finds herself no longer the property of a white man. She builds a cabin in the forest at the edge of the plantation and lives in solitary freedom—what she later recognizes as « les moments plus heureux de ma vie » (24).⁶ One day, Tituba comes across a group of slaves who treat her with fearful reverence:

A ma vue, tout ce monde sauta prestement dans l’herbe et s’agenouilla tandis qu’une demi-douzaine de paires d’yeux respectueuses et terrifiées se levaient vers moi. Je restai abasourdie. Quelles légendes s’étaient tissées autour de moi ? On semblait me craindre. Pourquoi ? Fille d’une pendue, recluse au borde d’une mare, n’aurait-on pas dû plutôt me plaindre ? Je compris qu’on pensait surtout à mon association avec Man Yaya et qu’on la redoutait (25-26).⁷

Tituba resents and does not understand the slaves’ fear of her, as she and Mama Yaya have only used their abilities for good: « Cette terreur me paraissait une injustice. Ah ! c’est par des cris de joie et de bonne arrivée que l’on aurait dû m’accueillir ! C’est par

⁶ “the happiest moments of my life” (11).

⁷ “The minute they saw me, everybody jumped into the grass and knelt down, while half a dozen pairs of respectful, yet terrified eyes looked up at me. I was taken aback. What stories had they woven about me? Why did they seem to be afraid of me? I should have thought they would have felt sorry for me instead, me the daughter of a hanged woman and a recluse who lived alone at the edge of a pond. I realized that they were mainly thinking about my connection with Mama Yaya, whom they have feared” (11-12).

l'exposé de maux que j'aurais de mon mieux tenté de guérir. J'étais faite pour panser et non pour effrayer » (26).⁸

Despite Tituba's assertion that she does only good and should not be feared, she does use her power for purposes other than healing. When Tituba meets a man, John Indian, whom she desires, she and Mama Yaya Mama Yaya concoct a charm to make him desire and remain committed to her in return. Tituba's character in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, as well, devises love potions—although Tituba's witchcraft is never enacted and is only recounted by others in the drama's diegesis, Samuel Parris describes early in the novel how he caught his daughter and Abigail Williams in the forest with Tituba doing “abominations” (8): speaking incantations, dancing “like heathen[s]” (7), and concocting love potions. In Condé's novel, Mama Yaya instructs Tituba to collect the necessary ingredients for their philter: « Un peu de son sang. Quelque chose qui aura séjourné au contact de son corps » (33).⁹ That week, Tituba attends a dance with John Indian; as they move to the music together, Tituba scratches his little finger and slyly steals a handkerchief that he had used to wipe his sweat. John Indian feels the scratch: « Aïe ! Qu'est-ce que tu fais là, sorcière ? » (33). Although she senses that he is joking, John Indian's response makes Tituba ponder the meaning of this word, *sorcière*:

Qu'est-ce qu'une sorcière ?
Je m'apercevais que dans sa bouche, le mot était entaché d'opprobre. Comment cela ? Comment ? La faculté de communiquer avec les invisibles, de garder un lien constant avec les disparus, de soigner, de guérir n'est-elle pas une grâce supérieure de nature à inspirer respect, admiration et gratitude ? En conséquence,

⁸ “The terror of these people seemed like an injustice to me. They should have greeted me with shouts of joy and welcome and presented me with a list of illnesses that I would have tried my utmost to cure. I was born to heal, not to frighten” (12).

⁹ “A drop of his blood. Something that has come into contact with his skin” (17).

la sorcière, si on veut nommer ainsi celle qui possède cette grâce, ne devrait-elle pas être choyée et révérée au lieu d'être crainte ? (33-34).¹⁰

Although she still struggles to comprehend the association between the acknowledgement and fear of a witch's power, Tituba's use of her abilities to manipulate John Indian reveals a shift in her witchcraft away from the purely "good" purposes of healing and into more ambiguous territory.

Tituba's introduction to magic is interwoven with acts of revolt, resistance, and the transgression of established racial hierarchy and the colonial structure. Tituba comes under the care of Mama Yaya after the death of her mother, Abena, who is hanged for violently resisting being raped by their plantation owner, Darnell Davis. After hanging Abena, Darnell sells Tituba's adoptive father, Yao, to another plantation as punishment for his wife's crime. Yao, too, enacts resistance through his own death; he commits suicide by swallowing his tongue.¹¹ Mama Yaya is introduced immediately afterward; she is characterized first by her experience with revolt as an explanation for her possession of special powers:

Une vieille femme me recueillit. Elle semblait braque, car elle avait vu mourir suppliciés son compagnon et ses deux fils, accusés d'avoir fomenté une révolte. En réalité, elle avait à peine les pieds sur notre terre et vivait constamment dans leur compagnie, ayant cultivé à l'extrême le don de communiquer avec les invisibles (21).¹²

¹⁰ "What is a witch? I noticed that when he said the word, it was marked with disapproval. Why should that be? Why? Isn't the ability to communicate with the invisible world, to keep constant links with the dead, to care for others and heal, a superior gift of nature that inspires respect, admiration, and gratitude? Consequently, shouldn't the witch (if that's what the person who has this gift is to be called) be cherished and revered rather than feared?" (17).

¹¹ Derek O'Regan, in his book *Postcolonial Echoes and Evocations: The Intertextual Appeal of Maryse Condé* (2006), analyzes this tongue-swallowing suicide act alongside infanticide as "female modes of opposition to slavery," which "not only represent the release of the slave from a life of misery, but also crystallise death as the ultimate form of refusal of the colonial status quo" (84).

¹² "An old woman took me in. As she had seen her man and two sons tortured to death for instigating a slave revolt, she seemed to act deranged. In fact, she was hardly of this world and

These foundational connections between magic and resistance echo in Tituba's own magical practice—and Tituba's experiences are characterized by the same blend of courageous action, self-empowerment, and crushing tragedy. At the end of the novel, Tituba uses her magic to support a slave revolt back on her native island of Barbados. Their rebellion is thwarted, and Tituba and her fellow rebels are hanged, one by one. Tituba, as « un traitement spécial » (263)¹³ for her witchcraft, is the last to be led to the gallows. Before hanging her for her role in the revolt, a man reads a long list of Tituba's crimes, « passés et présents » (263)¹⁴:

J'avais ensorcelé les habitants d'un village paisible et craignant Dieu. J'avais appelé Satan dans leur sein, les dressant les uns contre les autres, abusés et furieux. J'avais incendié la maison d'un honnête commerçant qui n'avait pas voulu tenir compte de mes crimes et avait payé sa naïveté de la mort de ses enfants (263).¹⁵

In punishing Tituba for her efforts in the slave revolt, the planters also inflict upon Tituba the punishment that she had « échappé » (263)¹⁶ in Salem. They sneer at her: « Eh bien, sorcière ! Ce que tu aurais dû connaître à Salem, c'est ici que tu vas la connaître ! Et tu retrouveras tes sœurs qui sont parties avant toi. Bon Sabbat là-bas ! » (262).¹⁷ The planters justify Tituba's death—and the torture of being hanged last, after watching the

lived constantly in their company. She had cultivated to a fine art the ability to communicate with the invisible" (8-9).

¹³ "special treatment" (172).

¹⁴ "past and present" (172).

¹⁵ "I had bewitched the inhabitants of a peaceful, God-fearing village. I had called Satan into their hearts and turned them one against the other in fury. I had set fire to the house of an honest merchant who had decided to disregard y crimes, but who had paid for his lack of judgment with the death of his children" (172).

¹⁶ "escaped" (172)

¹⁷ "Well, witch, what they should have done to you in Boston [Salem –EG], we're going to do here! And you'll meet up with your sisters who left before you did! And a good Sabbath to all!" (171).

execution of all her fellow rebels—not simply in her association with the revolt but actually based in her witch identity. Tituba’s execution paints a complete picture of Tituba as witch, with the convergence of enactments of transgression, the practice of magic, and the violent response of surrounding social and political forces.

Though Sula’s community does not sentence her to death, the community members’ unabashed bliss at the news of her natural passing echoes the vitriol and contempt with which Tituba’s executioners view the witch. The people of the Bottom not refrain from the type of violent response enacted by Tituba’s society out of a greater sense of compassion or love for the witch—they simply believe themselves to be above the practice of taking action against evil in their midst:

The purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined (without ever knowing they had made up their minds to do it) to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance. They knew anger well but not despair, and they didn’t stone sinners for the same reason they didn’t commit suicide—it was beneath them (90).

The community’s identification of Sula as a witch is also derived from their understanding of Sula as both a magical, supernatural figure and a socially transgressive, threatening force. Sula’s magic is less explicit than that of Tituba and Medea; she has no special knowledge of herbs or incantations. Sula, however, is described as—and accused of—possessing certain magical abilities: she exudes a bewitching and seductive allure; she demonstrates a powerful command over nature; and she experiences a higher form of life after the death of her physical body.

On the wedding night of her best friend, Nel, Sula leaves town. When she returns, ten years later, Sula is accompanied by “a plague of robins” (89) that descends upon the Bottom. The people of the Bottom view this swarm as an “excess in nature” (89),

signaling the presence of an evil force—in this case, the return of Sula. By the time she arrives at the Bottom, the news of her return has already reached the town; people stare from their porches and windows as Sula walks by. When she reaches her grandmother Eva's house, she passes by four dead robins on the walk and opens the door. Eva seems unsurprised at the sudden arrival of her granddaughter after ten years' absence; she simply raises her eyes and says, "I might have knowed them birds meant something."

(91). In addition to the dramatic plague of birds that interrupts each community-member's everyday life, Sula exercises a more subtle command over nature:

Nel alone noticed the peculiar quality of the May that followed the leaving of the birds. It had a sheen, a glimmering as of green, rain-soaked Saturday nights [...] It showed in the damp faces of her children and the river-smoothness of their voices. Even her own body was not immune to the magic. [...] Although it was she alone who saw this magic, she did not wonder at it. She knew it was all due to Sula's return to the Bottom (94).

Whether this effect takes place within nature itself or only within Nel's mind, Sula's power to produce this change remains.

The people of the Bottom suspect Sula of witchcraft also because of her seeming agelessness and lack of physical vulnerabilities:

Among the weighty evidence piling up was the fact that Sula did not look her age. She was near thirty and, unlike them, had lost no teeth, suffered no bruises, developed no ring of fat at the waist or pocket at the back of her neck. It was rumored that she had had no childhood diseases, was never known to have chicken pox, croup or even a runny nose. She had played rough as a child—where were the scars? Except for a funny-shaped finger and that evil birthmark, she was free from any normal signs of vulnerability. Some of the men, who as boys had dated her, remembered that on picnics neither gnats nor mosquitoes would settle on her. Patsy, Hannah's one-time friend agreed and said not only that, but she had witnessed the fact that when Sula drank beer she never belched (116).

Somewhat paradoxically, Sula's only physical blemishes—her "funny-shaped finger" and "evil birthmark"—are also understood as signs of her natural deviance. While the

birthmark signifies to the evil nature with which Sula was born, her finger speaks to Sula's deviant and irrational actions. The funny shape of Sula's left forefinger is self-inflicted: she cuts off the tip of her finger one day when she is twelve years old, in an attempt to disturb and frighten a group of four white boys who threaten Sula and Nel. After slicing her finger, she calmly looks up and says, "If I can do that to myself, what do you suppose I'll do to you?" (55). The boys immediately retreat. Sula's birthmark contains a more ambiguous meaning; it is first described by the novel's third-person narrator:

Sula was a heavy brown with large quiet eyes, one of which featured a birthmark that spread from the middle of the lid toward the eyebrow, shaped something like a stemmed rose. It gave her otherwise plain face a broken excitement and blue-blade threat like the keloid scar of the razored man who sometimes played checkers with her grandmother. The birthmark was to grow darker as the years passed, but now it was the same shade as her gold-flecked eyes, which, too the end, were as steady and clean as rain (52-53).

As this initial description indicates, Sula's birthmark shifts in appearance and significance throughout the course of the novel; although it generally appears to darken over time, its description depends largely on the perspective of the birthmark's beholder. In Shadrack's eyes, the birthmark takes the shape of a tadpole: "She had a tadpole over her eye (that was how he knew she was a friend—she had the mark of the fish he loved)" (156). Nel's husband Jude sees a snake—alternatively a copperhead and a rattlesnake—slithering over Sula's eye. While Shadrack's vision of the birthmark indicates his identification with and sense of comfort and friendship in Sula, Jude's interpretation evokes the destructive and disobedient temptation represented by the serpent of The Fall. The people of the Bottom, after convincing themselves of Sula's evil nature, collectively come to a conclusion about the birthmark's meaning: "it was not a stemmed rose, or a

snake. It was Hannah's ashes, marking her from the very beginning" (114). They associate Sula's physical abnormality with an understanding of her capacity for evil, exemplified by her bizarre and unnatural calm in the face of her mother Hannah's death.

Ultimately, Sula is afforded a kind of immortality—she does not evade death, but experiences a continued existence even beyond it:

While in this state of weary anticipation, she noticed that she was not breathing, that her heart had stopped completely. A crease of fear touched her breast, for any second there was sure to be a violent explosion in her brain, a gasping for breath. Then she realized, or rather she sensed, that there was not going to be any pain. She was not breathing because she didn't have to. Her body did not need oxygen. She was dead.

Sula felt her face smiling. "Well, I'll be damned," she thought, "it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel." (149)

Aside from her own cognition and experience, Sula's power persists after her death as she continues to influence the lives of her surviving community members. As the novel's third-person narrator asserts, "the death of Sula Peace was the best news for folks up in the Bottom had had since the promise of work at the tunnel" (150). Immediately following "the burial of [the] witch" (150), the people of the Bottom are filled with a "strong sense of hope" (153) and the feeling that "either *because* Sula was dead or just *after* Sula was dead a brighter day was dawning" (151). They are quick to notice signs that point to a bright and hopeful future: the prospect of employment for black workers in the construction of the new tunnel; the renovation of an old people's home open to black people; and Eva's transfer "from the ramshackle house that passed for a colored women's nursing home to the bright new one was a clear sign of the mystery of God's ways, His mighty thumb having been seen at Sula's throat" (151).

The hope and joy of Sula's community, however, is quickly dashed with the arrival of an intense ice storm, which ruins the harvest, forces everyone to be house-bound, and bestows ailments upon every child under the age of fifteen. But even more than the ice and the illness is a sense of something gone profoundly wrong: "A falling away, a dislocation was taking place. Hard on the heels of the general relief that Sula's death brought a restless irritability took hold" (153). In the wake of Sula's death, the people of the Bottom can no longer point to an evil against which to define and comport themselves:

Teapot's Mamma and other mothers of the Bottom, who had defended their children from Sula's malevolence (or who had defended their positions as mothers from Sula's scorn for the role) now had nothing to rub up against. The tension was gone and so was the reason for the effort they had made (153).

In a similar fashion, daughters return to their "resentment of the burdens of old people" (154) and wives cease coddling their husbands; "there seemed no further need to reinforce their vanity" (154) with Sula no longer around to threaten their marriage vows.

On January third, about three months after Sula's death, Shadrack leads his annual Suicide Day Parade. Unlike in other years, Shadrack is joined by other marchers, and eventually the parade grows into a "larger and larger crowd that strutted, skipped, marched, and shuffled down the road" (160). The procession stops at the mouth of the tunnel excavation—the tunnel that they were forbidden to work on—and they are possessed by a sudden frenzy. In their need to "kill it all" and "wipe [it] from the face of the earth" (161), they venture too deep; as they tear the tunnel apart, it collapses, killing many. The literal and figurative collapse of the Bottom exemplifies Sula's power and influence on the community, even—and perhaps especially—in her absence. Sula enacts this power in part through her seemingly magic or supernatural qualities—her

agelessness, her charm, her command over nature, her life after life—but the heart of her influence lies in the role that she plays within her community.

The witch's use of magic—whether real or accused—clearly marks her as deviant in the eyes of her community. This practice, however, is only the most recognizable and most legible expression of the witch's transgressive power. In reality, the witch is perceived as a threat to her community not solely because of her skill with herbs, her knowledge of spells, or her bewitching charms. The witch, instead, threatens the community through her transgression of societal norms—while this transgression frequently includes the practice of magic, the witch's deviance is also expressed through non-magical practices and behaviors. The following chapters examine two forms of such deviance: the witch's enactments of and characterization surrounding sexuality and motherhood.

CHAPTER TWO: WITCHES AND TRANSGRESSIVE SEXUALITY

Witches have always been women who have dared to be courageous, aggressive, intelligent, non-conformists, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary... WITCH lives and laughs in every woman. She is the free part in each of us... You are a Witch be being female, untamed, angry, joyous and immortal.

—WITCH New York Coven flyer, 1968¹⁸

History and literature have characterized witches as sexually deviant. In their deviance, witches and accused witches are both powerful and vulnerable: their sexual transgressions pose a threat to the norms of their society; those invested in perpetuating and enforcing these norms take this threat—and therefore their power—very seriously and respond with violence. Within the portrayals of Medea, Tituba, and Sula, sexual deviance expresses itself in a number of forms. For all three witches, a woman's possession and expression of a sexuality at all may be considered non-normative—Silvia Federici notes that the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* of 1486 described women as “more prone to witchcraft because of their ‘insatiable lust’” (Federici 179). This deviance intensifies when the witch's sexual desire overcomes her capacity for reason. Transgression occurs as well with the witch's assertion of her sexuality within heterosexual relationships, resulting in a type of dominance over—instead of the traditional submission to—men. As Federici writes:

Sexual passion undermined not only male authority over women [...] it also undermined a man's capacity for self-government, causing him to lose that precious head wherein Cartesian philosophy was to locate the source of Reason. A sexually active woman, then, was a public danger, a threat to the social order as she subverted a man's sense of responsibility, and his capacity for work and self-control. If women were not to ruin men morally—or more important, financially—female sexuality had to be exorcised (191).

¹⁸ As Federici writes in an endnote to *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), WITCH was “a network of autonomous feminist groups that played an important role in the initial phase of the women's liberation movement in the United States.” The network was born in New York on Halloween 1968, and “covens” formed in several cities across the U.S. (206).

The witch undermines male authority, as well, by subverting not only the man's "sense of responsibility" in society but, further, by rendering the man unnecessary and unwanted in the fulfillment of sexual desire. This powerful kind of sexual transgression occurs with the witch's achievement of sexual pleasure without the presence of men, including the witch's discovery of her own power to give pleasure through masturbation as well as the witch's engagement with queer sexuality. Queer sexuality in these texts appears across multiple definitions: queerness in its stricter, hegemonic definition of homosexuality,¹⁹ as well as queerness as non-heterosexuality and, even more broadly, queerness simply as sexual non-normativity.

Silvia Federici, in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), writes that historians studying the European witch-hunt of the 16th-18th centuries have traditionally depicted the accused in terms of sexual non-normativity—as "social failures (women 'dishonored' or frustrated in love), or even as perverts who enjoyed teasing their male inquisitors with their sexual fantasies" (164). Sexual non-normativity is, in the eyes of these historians, synonymous with wrongness, perversion, and social ill—these scholars prove themselves to be informed by the same misogyny that inspired the writings of their 16th-century demonologist counterparts. By depicting the accused witches as failures and perverts—and as F.G. Alexander and S.T. Selesnick's write in their *History of Psychiatry*, "severely emotionally disturbed women"

¹⁹ Janet Jakobsen's essay "Queer Is? Queer Does?" (1998) explains how a term like "queerness" can develop a hegemonic definition, using "lesbian" as an example: "As a complex of norms whose connection to each other produces normalization, the regime of the normal can operate within counternormative social movements as well as within the dominant society. *Lesbian* in this sense can become a specific regime of the normal embedded in the generalizing tendency of a regime of power organized around normalization. This complexity can lead movements to reiterate the very structure that they were established to contest" (521).

(Federici 164)—historians and scholars discredit the victims of the witch-hunt and perpetuate the violence against them.

This chapter examines the sexual non-normativity of Medea, Sula, and Tituba, placing them among the scores of women demonized as witches, at least in part, due to their sexual expression and behavior. While recognizing the conflation between non-normativity, abnormality, and wrongness—within our own society as well as the societies depicted in the texts examined—we acknowledge this conflation as a tool of power, designed to control and categorize members of society and to shape society as a whole. In the face of this symbolic and literal violence, and in the spirit of the queer theory invoked in the Introduction, this chapter attempts to analyze this conflation between *different* and *wrong* while simultaneously criticizing and condemning it.

Medea, both in Seneca's play and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, appears to be ruled by passion. Both great acts of violence she commits—the murder of her brother and the murder of her two sons—are dictated by her lawless fervor. While Medea kills her children out of rage, the passion that guides her first murder is lust. As discussed in Chapter One, Medea's intense desire for Jason is so far beyond the scope of normative female sexuality that Apollonius attributes her mad lust to divine influence. Ovid illustrates, in his "Medea and Jason" story of Book VII, how Medea finds herself overcome with desire for Jason. Ovid describes the struggle between Medea's sexual passion and her reason; Medea says to herself:

How wretched I am! I *must* extinguish the fire which is raging
inside my innocent heart. I should be more sane, if I could!
I am dragged along by a strange new force. Desire and reason
are pulling in different directions. I see the right way and approve it,
but follow the wrong (17-19).

After pondering Jason's "strong and beautiful body" (44), Medea concludes this struggle between desire and reason, happily taking the side of her passion: she decides to aid Jason and to betray her father. Medea bases this decision purely in her desire for Jason; she plots to place Jason forever in her debt and compel him to marry her: "I'll force him to swear to our pact in the name of the gods" (46-47). As she fantasizes about being his wife, Medea's reason catches up with her—"Be careful, Medea. Are you using respectable words / to cover your evil designs? No, no! Face up to the terrible wrong you're about to commit and recoil from the guilt while you may!" (69-71). But this rationality does not hold dominion for long; as soon as Medea catches sight of handsome Jason again, the fire of her desire is rekindled: "A blush came over her cheeks and the whole of her face glowed hot" (78).

Medea's possession of a powerful, fierce sexuality falls far outside the bounds of normative female sexual passivity, characterizing her as sexually non-normative. Seneca's *Medea* consistently characterizes its eponymous character as wild, barbaric, and untamed; Medea's identification as an ethnic Other coincides with her characterization as sexually deviant. When Jason abandons Medea, choosing to marry a Greek woman instead, the Chorus supports his decision: they implore the gods to attend the "royal wedding" (1.56), asking them to bless the new couple. They praise the beauty and fairness of Jason's new bride—"his woman may outshine all over wives [...] her beauty, hers alone outshines them all" (1.91-94)—and compare her to the clearly inferior Medea: "Jason, you used to tremble as you held an untamed wife, now torn away from your barbarian marriage, lucky man, take hold of this Corinthian girl" (1.102-105). They contrast the civility of the marriages—not only in terms of the bride's personal

“barbarity” but in terms of the marriage tradition as well. They remind Jason, “Your in-laws—unlike last time—give consent” (1.106), calling attention to the disapproval and violence that preceded his union with Medea as well as the nature of marriage as a political social institution operating under the guise of love and romance. Medea and Jason’s marriage is dissolved the moment Jason realizes the political advantages of marrying Creon’s royal daughter Glauke; Medea’s lack of voice and influence in this decision is directly tied to her identity as a Colchian woman.

Because of these two intersecting identities, Medea’s humanity and agency are significantly diminished within the Greek social setting of Seneca’s play. Medea’s reclamation of power, therefore, must directly engage her ethnic/cultural otherness as well as her femaleness. Throughout Seneca’s play, and throughout Medea’s accumulation and expression of power, Medea is depicted as increasingly barbaric, savage, and monstrous—all characteristics associated with her supposedly inferior Colchian ethnic and cultural background. Also throughout the play, Seneca stages a stark opposition between Medea’s female embodiment and her capacity for agency. Seneca’s *Medea* contains very little physical description of its eponymous character; instead of describing her body, others often choose to depict Medea in terms of her mind, possessed by “crazy passion” (2.158) and “violent fury” (4.850).

It appears that, in order for Medea to claim her full agency, she must be distanced from her female embodiment—this distancing process helps to characterize Medea as an androgynous figure. Medea’s androgyny comes more generally from her association with categories and behaviors typically identified with maleness. As our contemporary American conception of sexuality is rooted in an understanding of binary sex and

gender,²⁰ Medea's portrayal as an androgynous figure may be analyzed under the framework of queerness. Medea's identification as a tragic hero certainly connotes transgression as Medea plays a part traditionally reserved for a man, enacting a kind of deviant gender performance. Similarly, the amount of power and control that Medea exercises over the events of Seneca's *Medea* signals her transgression or queering of gender roles.

Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba* presents yet another sexually transgressive woman. Tituba, like the deviant women before her, feels and takes action upon her intense lust. In parallel with Medea, Tituba's lust overpowers her reason; just as Medea betrays her family, Tituba's desire propels her, willingly and knowingly, into slavery. Tituba, like Medea, undergoes « les tourments » (37)²¹ of the struggle between desire and reason. Though she fully understands that the reasonable and rational choice would be to retain her peaceful and independent life on the borders of the plantation, Tituba cannot resist her lust for John Indian. When John Indian first asks Tituba to come live with him in Susanna Endicott's home in Bridgeport, Tituba laughs at the absurd suggestion. But as John Indian woos her with whispers against her neck, Tituba thinks:

²⁰ As one example of a scholar who notes the way in which the social construction of sexuality is anchored to the social construction of the gender/sex binary, James Baldwin writes in "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" (1985): "the American idea[l] of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American idea[l] of masculinity" (185).

²¹ "the torments"

C'était bien là le Malheur. Je voulais cet homme comme je n'avais jamais rien voulu avant lui. Je désirais son amour comme je n'avais jamais désiré aucun amour. Même pas celui de ma mère. Je voulais qu'il me touche. Je voulais qu'il me caresse. Je n'attendais que le moment où il me prendrait et où les vannes de mon corps s'ouvriraient, libérant les eaux du plaisir (35)²²

Tituba's expression of her desire for John Indian to caress her and her language around the "flood of pleasure" echoes an earlier passage in which Tituba fantasizes about John Indian, caressing herself. Tituba's attraction to John Indian reveals to her a newfound awareness of and attention her own body: back at her cabin after meeting John Indian for the first time, Tituba thinks, « Jusqu'alors, je n'avais jamais songé à mon corps. Étais-je belle ? Étais-je laide ? J'ignorais » (30).²³ Tituba takes off her clothes, lies down, and lets her hand explore her body, moving over her bumps and curves and deeming them « harmonieux » (30).²⁴ As she continues to touch herself, Tituba begins to fantasize that the hand that caresses her belongs to John Indian:

Comme j'approchais de mon sexe, brusquement il me sembla que ce n'était plus moi, mais John Indien qui me caressait ainsi. Jaillie des profondeurs de mon corps, une marée odorante inonda mes cuisses. Je m'entendis râler dans la nuit (30).²⁵

These waves of pleasure that Tituba experiences when she touches herself, she imagines that she'll feel when John Indian touches her. The pursuit of this sexual fulfillment is what pulls Tituba in John Indian's direction—her desire for this pleasure is strong enough to even make her consider walking into a life of enslavement.

²² "And therein lay my misfortune. I wanted that man as I had never wanted anyone else. I desired his love as I had never desired any other. Not even my mother's. I wanted him to touch me. I wanted him to caress me. I was merely waiting for the moment when he would take me and the valves of my body would open wide, flooding me with pleasure" (18).

²³ "Up until now I had never thought about my body. Was I beautiful? Was I ugly? I had no idea" (15).

²⁴ "harmonious" (15).

²⁵ "As I neared my genitals, it suddenly seemed that it was no longer me, but John Indian who caressed me so. A fragrant tide, springing from the depths of my body, flooded my thigh. I heard myself moan in the night." [my translation —EG]

For seven nights and days, Tituba struggles with herself over her agonizing decision:

Ma mère avait été violée par un Blanc. Elle avait été pendue à cause d'un Blanc. J'avais vu sa langue pointer hors de sa bouche, pénis turgescent et violacé. Mon père adoptif s'était suicidé à cause d'un Blanc. En dépit de tout cela, j'envisageais de recommencer à vivre parmi eux, dans leur sein, sous leur coupe. Tout cela par goût effréné d'un mortel. Est-ce que ce n'était pas folie ? Folie et trahison ? (37).²⁶

The feelings of pain, remorse, shame, panic, and fear contained in this passage strongly mirror those of Medea in her own moments of tragic ambivalence. Like Medea, Tituba wonders at the intensity of her passion; she wonders if she's been possessed by madness.

Tituba's distinct, intense desire for John Indian—her desire for his body, and for his effect on hers—overpowers even her love of freedom, and so she joins him in slavery. Later, when Susanna Endicott tells John Indian and Tituba of her plan to send them to Boston, Tituba is faced with the same struggle:

Elle savait bien ce que je pouvais rétorquer. Elle n'ignorait pas la parade que je pouvais utiliser. Oui, je pouvais m'exclamer :
« Non, Susanna Endicott ! Je suis la compagne de John Indien, mais vous ne m'avez pas achetée. [...] Aussi donc, vous ne pouvez me vendre et le gentleman de Boston ne fera pas main basse sur mes trésors. »
Oui, mais si je parlais ainsi, je serais séparée de John Indien !²⁷

Although she knows that she could resist being sold to Samuel Parris in Boston, as she has not been bought by Susanna Endicott and is therefore not her property to sell, Tituba

²⁶ “My mother had been raped by a white man. She had been hanged because of a white man. I had seen his tongue quiver out of his mouth, his penis turgid and violet. My adoptive father had committed suicide because of a white man. Despite all that, I was considering living among white men again, in their midst, under their domination. All because of an uncontrollable desire for a mortal man. Wasn't it madness? Madness and betrayal?” (19).

²⁷ “She knew full well what I could retort. She was only too aware of the argument I could use. ‘No, Susanna Endicott!’ I could retort. ‘I may be John Indian’s woman, but you haven’t bought me. [...] So you can’t sell me and the gentleman from Boston will not lay hands on my treasures.’ Yes, but if I said that, I would be separated from John Indian” (36).

dreads the thought of being separated from John Indian. In the face of reason, once again she chooses desire—and enslavement.

Tituba allows her lust for John Indian to dictate elements of her identity, not only in her self-subjugation but also in terms of her moral code. As discussed in Chapter One, Tituba, early in the novel, establishes her identity in relation to the common conception of the witch. Tituba asserts that, while she indeed practices magic, she does not fit the popular definition of the witch because she does not warrant the fear of those around her. However, Tituba goes against her established principles and conception of herself by doing harm to Susanna Endicott, John Indian's master. During the time that Tituba spends in Susanna Endicott's home after joining John Indian as his wife, Tituba, naturally, develops a great dislike for her. She doesn't think to harm her new mistress, however, until she interferes with Tituba's fulfillment of her sexual needs. One day, Susanna Endicott reveals to Tituba that she knows of her witch identity; when Tituba tells John Indian of their mistress' knowledge, he becomes frantic with worry. That night, John Indian, « pour la première fois depuis que nous vivons ensemble » (49),²⁸ does not make love to Tituba. All through the night, Tituba gropes restlessly for John Indian's body—« cherchant de la main, l'objet qui m'avait procuré tant de délices » (49)²⁹——but John Indian refuses her. The following morning, Tituba resolves that « Il n'y avait pas de place dans ce monde pour Susanna Endicott et moi » (50). She first contemplates killing her, but Mama Yaya warns her not to pervert her heart and « deven[ir] pareille à eux, qui

²⁸ “for the first time since we had lived together” (27)

²⁹ “groping for the object that had given me such pleasure” (27)

ne savent que tuer, détruire » (53).³⁰ Tituba ultimately decides to strike Susanna Endicott with a humiliating and inconvenient sickness.

Tituba's sexual desire, seemingly boundless in its capacity for the destruction of self and others, manifests in other non-normative ways. Throughout the novel, Tituba pursues sex explicitly without the goal of reproduction. Though she is described as having sex many times and with multiple men, she never has a child; when she does become pregnant for the first time, Tituba causes herself to miscarry—« je décidai de la tuer » (82).³¹ Tituba's engagement with and violent rejection of motherhood is explored more in depth in the following chapter.

Aside from her multiple relationships with men, Tituba establishes a very close bond with Elizabeth Proctor, her master's wife, and also engages in a more nuanced and intimated sexual relationship with Hester, whom Maryse Condé borrows from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Like the friendship between Sula and Nel, Tituba's relationships with Elizabeth and Hester are marked by sudden and intense intimacy.

Tituba first meets Elizabeth on their journey from Barbados to Massachusetts, and they become immediately bound by their shared female identity. The first thing that Tituba notes about her new mistress is that they share a common fear of and disgust for Samuel Parris—master of one woman, husband of the other. Upon meeting her, Tituba describes Elizabeth's physical appearance with notable affection: she is a young woman « d'une étrange joliesse » (64)³² with beautiful hair that forms « un halo lumineux autour de sa tête » (64).³³ Tituba claims that Elizabeth's voice is « aussi plaisante que l'eau de la

³⁰ “become like them, knowing only how to kill and destroy” (30).

³¹ “I decided to kill the child” (49).

³² “with a strange prettiness” [my translation –EG]

³³ “a luminous halo around her head” (38).

rivière Ormonde » (64),³⁴ and is even more struck by the compassion Elizabeth's words reveal. In stark contrast to her husband's harsh commands, Elizabeth treats Tituba with gentle kindness. She tells her, « C'est toi, Tituba ? Comme cela doit être cruel pour toi d'être séparée des tiens. De ton père, de ta mère, de ton peuple... » (64)³⁵—expressing a heretofore unseen degree of empathy across the profound racial divide between them. Almost immediately, Elizabeth begins to confide in Tituba intimate details of her personal life: her disgust for her husband, her inability to bear any more children than her one daughter, and the torture of her menstruation—all fundamental aspects of her womanhood that appear to transcend racial boundaries.

Elizabeth beckons Tituba to sit beside her and murmurs, « Que tu es belle, Tituba ! » (65)³⁶. Tituba is overcome with an irresistible impulse and proposes, « Maîtresse, laisse-moi te soigner ! » (65);³⁷ in response, Elizabeth smiles and takes Tituba's hands, remarking upon their softness—« Douces comme des fleurs coupées » (65).³⁸ Their intimate moment ends when Samuel appears and reasserts the racial power dynamic between the women: he admonishes his wife for allowing « cette négresse » (66)³⁹ to sit beside her and he commands Tituba to leave. Shortly afterward, Samuel strikes Tituba's face, drawing blood. Enraged, Elizabeth intervenes on Tituba's behalf—siding with the woman she met just that day over her husband—and she is struck in turn. Tituba writes that their shared bloodshed « scella notre alliance » (69)⁴⁰.

³⁴ “as pleasant as the waters of the River Ormond” (38).

³⁵ “So you're Tituba? How cruel it must be to be separated from your own family. From your father, your mother, and your people” (38).

³⁶ “How lovely you are, Tituba” (38).

³⁷ “Mistress, let me take care of you!” (39).

³⁸ “As soft as cut flowers” (39).

³⁹ “this Negress” (39)

⁴⁰ “sealed our alliance” (41).

Despite the closeness between the two women, their bond is quickly severed when they arrive in Massachusetts and Elizabeth begins to suspect Tituba of witchcraft. Tituba has, indeed, practiced witchcraft in Elizabeth's presence—even for her benefit: earlier in the novel, Elizabeth falls ill; Tituba risks being discovered as a witch and uses her supernatural powers to cure her. While Elizabeth is sick, Tituba treats her with great love and care, calling her « ma pauvre douce Élizabeth » and « mon agneau tourmenté » (74)⁴¹—in stark contrast to Samuel Parris' cold treatment of his wife. Nevertheless, when Tituba is accused of witchcraft, Elizabeth quickly turns against her. Tituba remembers the suspicion and distrust with which Elizabeth looked at her: « Le mal inconnu qui frappait Betsey no pouvait venir que de moi. Ingratitude des mères ! » (112)⁴². The short-lived solidarity between the two women recalls the relationship portrayed in Euripides' *Medea* between Medea and the Chorus of Corinthian women. Medea and the Chorus begin the play with common lamentations; the Chorus attempts to console Medea and expresses a sense of shared pain through friendship:

I hear heard her call, I heard her cry,
 Medea's pain, the Colchian.
 So she has still not settled calm?
 Old woman, tell. I heard her voice
 from deep inside her mansion gates.
 The sufferings of this household cause
 me pain—my friendship's blended close (131-137).

Like Tituba and Elizabeth, the Chorus and Medea bond over their common pains of womanhood. Throughout the course of the play, however, their perspective on the witch changes; by the tragedy's end, the women of the Chorus regard Medea with unequivocal horror. In both Euripides' *Medea* and Condé's *Moi Tituba*, the potential solidarity

⁴¹ “my poor sweet Elizabeth” and “my tormented lamb” (45)

⁴² “The unknown evil that had struck Betsey could only have come from me. A mother's ingratitude!” (70).

between the two women is destroyed by the unassimilatability of the witch, due in part to the pervasive racism and xenophobia of their societies.

Tituba and Hester are able to establish a more sustainable bond largely because of their shared categorization as deviant and non-normative. The two women meet in their shared jail cell; Tituba has been accused of witchcraft and possession, while Hester has been accused of adultery. Tituba first describes Hester as « jeune, pas plus de vingt-trois ans, belle » (150),⁴³ Hester thinks aloud to herself, « Quelle couleur magnifique a sa peau et comme elle peut sous ce couvert, dissimuler ses sentiments! » (151).⁴⁴ Later, they express their admiration to one another directly: Hester exclaims, « Tu ne peux pas avoir fait de mal Tituba ! De cela, je suis sûre, tu es trop belle ! Même s'ils t'accusaient tous, moi, je soutiendrais ton innocence ! » (152).^{45 46} Tituba caresses Hester's face and whispers her response: « Toi aussi, tu es belle, Hester ! » (153).⁴⁷ After Hester's death, Tituba feels her come to her bedside as a spirit:

Cette nuit-là, Hester vint s'étendre à côté de moi, comme elle le faisait parois. J'appuyai ma tête sur le nénuphar tranquille de sa joue et me serrai contre elle.

Doucement le plaisir m'envahit, ce qui m'étonna. Peut-on éprouver du plaisir à se serrer contre un corps semblable au sien ? Le plaisir avait toujours eu pour moi la forme d'un autre corps dont les creux épousaient mes bosses et dont les bosses se nichaient dans les tendres plaines de ma chair. Hester m'indiquait-elle le chemin d'une autre jouissance ? (189-90)⁴⁸

⁴³ “young, no older than twenty-three, beautiful” [my translation —EG]

⁴⁴ “What magnificent color she's got for her skin and what a wonderful way she has of covering up her feelings!” (95)

⁴⁵ “You can't have done evil, Tituba! Of this I am sure; you are too beautiful. Even if they all accused you, I would maintain your innocence!” [my translation —EG]

⁴⁶ This claim by Hester strongly echoes a sentiment expressed by Medea to Jason in Seneca's *Medea*: “If your wife is disgraced, everyone is against her, you alone must protect her, you should out her innocence. One who sinned for your sake should look clean to you” (3.501-503). While Hester appears to agree with this statement, Jason clearly does not.

⁴⁷ “You, too, are beautiful, Hester!” [my translation —EG]

⁴⁸ “That night Hester lay down beside me, as she did sometimes. I laid my head on the quiet water lily of her cheek and held her tight. Surprisingly, a feeling of pleasure slowly flooded over me. Can you feel pleasure from hugging a body similar to your own? For me, pleasure had always

Though Hester's spirit form distances this queer sexual encounter from full, physical embodiment, her ghostly presence and their encounter, within the realm of the novel, is neither insignificant nor imagined.

In Morrison's novel, Sula lives among a community that, for the most part, shares her racial identity. Unlike Medea and Tituba, Sula is not identified by those who surround her as racially Other, but this concept pervades the novel nonetheless. Though Sula is not racially distinct from the people of the Bottom, the town and community as a whole, through systemic white supremacy, has been categorized as racially Other. While not racially Other compared to her immediate community, Sula is accused of transgressing a racial line that leads the people of the Bottom to vehemently reject and condemn her. Sula is accused of "the unforgivable thing—the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuse no compassion. The route from which there was no way back, the dirt that could not ever be washed away" (112). Sula is accused of sleeping with white men. This weighty accusation strongly echoes the claim levied in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (among other documents) that witches have sex with the Devil. Some of the most striking elements of the relationship between the witch and the Devil, which lend themselves to a parallel analysis of the historically perverted relationship between black women and white men, are noted by Federici:

The witch-hunt reversed the power relation between the devil and the witch. It was the woman now who was the servant, the slave, the *succubus* in body and soul, while the Devil functioned as her owner and master, pimp and husband at once. [...] After revealing himself to her, he would ask her to become his servant, and what would follow them would be a classic example of a master/slave, husband/wife relation. He stamped her with his mark, had sexual intercourse with her and, in some instances, he even changed her name (186-187).

been in the shape of another body whose hollows fitted my curves and whose swellings nestled in the tender flatlands of my flesh. Was Hester showing me another kind of bodily pleasure?" (122).

While the Narrator cannot confirm the veracity of this claim that Sula has engaged in this kind of transgressive sexual activity, it might as well be true: “It may have not been true, but it certainly could have been. She was obviously capable of it” (112).

Sula’s ability to commit this unforgivable transgression stems from her disregard for virtually all social norms. This quality is what attracts Ajax, Sula’s lover for much of the novel. Sula’s “elusiveness and indifference to established habits of behavior” (127) arouses Ajax’s curiosity—her freedom and autonomy remind Ajax of his mother, who was “an evil conjure woman” (126). Other members of the community note Sula’s transgression of social norms as well—although none find her freedom and indifference quite so endearing. In addition to her inability to lie—which makes her participation in social conversation impossible (121)—Sula is known throughout the bottom for her promiscuity:

She was a pariah, then, and knew it. Knew that they despised her and believed that they framed their hatred as disgust for the easy way she lay with men. Which was true. She went with men as frequently as she could (122).

With ease, Sula sleeps not only with the unattached men in the town, but the married ones, too—even the husband of her best and only friend, Nel. When Nel walks in on her husband Jude and Sula together, the narration takes on Nel’s voice in the first person. Nel describes how she saw the two of them, “down on all fours naked [...] on all fours like (uh huh, go on, say it) like dogs” (105). In the face of this unthinkable betrayal, Nel abandons her uniquely sympathetic view of Sula and instead sees her with the condemning eyes of their community: Sula as animal, monstrous, inhuman.

In her seducing and then discarding of the husbands of the Bottom, Sula breaks two major social norms. First, she disregards the norm of monogamy and disrespects the

institution of marriage by sleeping with men with wives. But second—and even more unacceptable in the eyes of the townspeople—Sula does not cherish these men whom she steals away from their normative, monogamous relationships. When Nel finally confronts Sula, three years later, about sleeping with her husband, Nel asks her, “How come you did it, Sula?” Sula replies, “Well, there was this space in front of me, behind me, in my head. Some space. And Jude filled it up. That’s all. He just filled up the space.” This answer angers Nel; she responds in bewilderment, “You mean you didn’t even love him? [...] It wasn’t even loving him?” (144). In Nel’s eyes, Sula’s transgression becomes more hurtful, more unacceptable, because it was not committed out of love but simply out of a bored, indifferent kind of lust. Nel is most wounded and appalled not at Sula’s disregard for the institution of marriage, but at her disrespect for the rules and bounds of their friendship. Sula, on the other hand, had believed their intimate friendship to entail complete unity and sharing. Having grown up “in a house with women who thought all men available” (119) and having cultivated this intensely intimate relationship with Nel, she could not imagine Nel’s possessiveness over Jude.

Sula’s relationship with Nel evokes transgression in more ways than one. Aside from Sula’s assumption about the boundlessness of their sharing, many aspects of Sula and Nel’s friendship lend themselves to a queer analysis of their relationship. John N. Duvall, in his book *Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness*, asserts, “the figurative language of *Sula* repeatedly questions the exclusivity of heterosexual affect in the novel. There may be no homosexuality in *Sula*, but there very definitely is a representation of female homosociality in the friendship of Sula and Nel” (54). Indeed, the language surrounding Sula and Nel’s friendship hints at

homosexuality; at the very least their relationship involves a level of intimacy that is neither common nor normative.

Toni Morrison herself stated in an interview with Claudia Tate that “friendship between women” is the focus of her novel, and that “there is no homosexuality in *Sula*” (Tate 157).⁴⁹ Despite the fact that Morrison appears not to have written *Sula* was homosexuality in mind, this does not mean that homosexuality cannot be found in the novel. The knowledge of Morrison’s interpretation of her work should not limit alternative interpretations; access to Morrison’s thoughts on her work is immensely valuable but must be engaged with an understanding of and appreciation for the limits of authorial intent.

Morrison’s novel describes Sula and Nel first meeting in daydreams and then on the playground; “So when they met, first in those chocolate halls and next through the ropes of the swing, [...] they found in each other’s eyes the intimacy they were looking for” (52). As the girls grow together and develop individual sexualities, their intimacy becomes increasingly intense. Even in the discussion of their shared desire for a man, an underlying eroticism between the two girls appears:

“Even then, when she [Sula] and Nel were trying hard not to dream of him and not to think of him when they touched the softness in their underwear or undid their braids as soon as they left home to let the hair bump and wave around their ears, or wrapped the cotton binding around their chests so the nipples would not break through their blouses and give him cause to smile his slipping, falling smile, which brought the blood rushing to their skin” (136).

⁴⁹ As cited on page 53 of John N. Duvall’s “Engendering Sexual/Textual Identity: *Sula* and the Artistic Gaze,” in *Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* (2000).

Even if they do not explicitly desire one another, their desires are conflated, and the conflation of their bodies and actions—“when they touched the softness of their underwear”—alludes to a sexual engagement between the two girls.

There is one passage in particular whose language, although lacking in explicit mentions of sex, strongly signals Sula and Nel’s relationship as sexually charged. This scene, read literally, depicts the two girls at twelve years old playing by the riverbank. The passage continuously calls attention to the girls developing bodies and budding sexualities—for example, “They ran in the sunlight, creating their own breeze, which pressed their dresses into their damp skin” (57) and “Underneath their dresses flesh tightened and shivered in the high coolness, their small breasts just now beginning to create some pleasant discomfort when they were lying on their stomachs” (58). After running together and then flinging themselves to the ground, pausing “to taste their lip sweat and contemplate the wildness that had come upon them so suddenly” (57) the girls enact what Duvall analyzes as “a kind of symbolic mutual masturbation” (65):

In concert, without ever meeting each other’s eyes, they stroked the blades up and down, up and down. Nel found a thick twig and, with her thumbnail, pulled away its bark until it was stripped to a smooth, creamy innocence. Sula looked about and found one too. When both twigs were undressed Nel moved easily to the next stage and began tearing up rooted grass to make a bare spot of earth. When a generous clearing was made, Sula [...] poked her twig rhythmically and intensely into the earth, making a small neat hole that grew deeper and wider [...] Together they worked until the two holes were one and the same. [...] Neither one had spoken a word. They stood up, stretched, then gazed out over the swift dull water as an unspeakable restlessness and agitation held them” (58-59).

As Duvall notes, aside from the symbolism of the girls “playing with their holes” (Duvall 65), much of the figurative language invoked in this passage echo the language of other, heterosexual, sexually-charged scenes. Mud, which has a very strong presence in the above passage, is repeated as a sexual symbol throughout the novel. It appears, for

example, Sula's inner monologue during sex with Ajax; her thoughts of mud—"I will put my hand deep into your soil, lift it, sift it with my fingers..." (131)—alternate with the description of their lovemaking.

In his essay "Hybrid Embodiment and an Ethics of Masochism: Nella Larsen's 'Passing' and Sherley Anne Williams's 'Dessa Rose'" Biman Basu explains how, even if Sula and Nel do not sexually desire one another, their relationship can still be analyzed as distinctively queer—working with a definition of queer as non-normative or deviant that echoes Halperin's: "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant..." (62). Basu writes of "the privileged economy of desire"—a privileged economy in which "heterosexual, genital, reproductive, monogamous desire is intricately related to, and even sustains, social, political, and economic structures." Sula and Nel's intensely intimate friendship falls under a category of "unforeseen" relationships; relationships that begin to articulate "new desires" and "new erotics" and, in the style of Foucault, invent new ways of being. These types of relationships arouse a "common fear" in other members of society—this is because of the power of these new desires to "disturb the distribution of privilege" (398). Regardless of Sula and Nel's sexual attraction to one another, their relationship pushes the bounds of normative ways of being and relating to other people; the proof of this transgression's power lies in society's fearful response.

Federici highlights the power and relevance of this form of social transgression in her discussion of the changes in law during the European witch-hunts. Female friendships became an object of suspicion at exactly the time when other, perhaps more overt forms of deviance such as prostitution and birth out of wedlock were outlawed, and infanticide, while already illegal, was made a capital crime. As Federici notes, female friendships

were “denounced from the pulpit as subversive of the alliance between husband and wife, just as women-to-women relations were demonized by the prosecutors of the witches who forced them to denounce each other as accomplices in crime” (186). The extent to which a behavior is persecuted generally serves as an accurate indicator of the power of this behavior to threaten the social order; this passage highlights the connection between each of these gender- and sexuality-based transgressions. The following chapter continues to analyze these forms of deviance as they relate specifically to motherhood.

CHAPTER THREE: WITCHES AND UNNATURAL MOTHERHOOD

Witch: What's the matter?

Rapunzel: Oh, nothing! You just locked me in a tower without company for fourteen years, then you blinded my Prince and banished me to a desert where I had little to eat, and again no company, and then bore twins! Because of the way you treated me, I'll never, never be happy! [she cries]

Witch: [pause] I was just trying to be a good mother.

— *Into the Woods*, 2014

Witches have been perceived as unnatural regarding their magic abilities, their sexual deviance, and their failure to fulfill what has traditionally been deemed their natural female role: motherhood. Medea, Sula, and Tituba evade or violently reject motherhood, and all three women end their stories childless as a result of their actions—through their use of contraception, abortion, or murder. In response to their existing children, whether biological or surrogate, all three women destroy these mother-child relationships. Medea vengefully murders her young (male) children, while Sula accidentally kills a young boy in her care. After aborting her unborn child, Tituba's relationship with a younger man, initially expressed in terms of mother and son, becomes incestuous as the intimacy between them turns sexual.

Silvia Federici cites the 1484 papal bull of Innocent VIII—known as *Summis desiderantes*—as the first documented association between “contraception, abortion, and witchcraft” (180). The document, as quoted by Kors and Peters in their work *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100-1700: A Documentary History* (1972) states:

by their incantations, spells, conjurations and other accursed superstitions and horrid charms, enormities and offenses, [witches] destroy the offspring of women [...] They hinder men from generating and women from conceiving; whence neither husbands with their wives nor wives with their husbands can perform their sexual acts (Kors and Peters 107-8)

Just two years later, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, written by Heinrich Kramer, published a similar claim: that witches infected sexual intercourse by “obstructing [the] generative force” of both men and women, by “procuring abortion,” and by “offering children to the devil” (1971: 47). The *Malleus* contains, as well, an entire chapter dedicated to the condemnation of midwives or “wise women” who were traditionally considered “the depository of reproductive knowledge and control” (Federici 183).

Witchcraft, however, has been associated with child-killing dating much farther back than the 15th century. The Latin word *striga* (pl. *strigae*), which translates to “witch” or “hag” in modern English, is defined by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short’s *A Latin Dictionary* as “a woman that brings harm to children.” Rosemary Ellen Guiley, in her *Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft, and Wicca* notes that the *strigae* were said to be “terrible women who could turn themselves into dreadful birds of prey, with huge talons, misshapen heads and breasts full of poisonous milk” which they would feed to unprotected children (336). Horace, in his Epode V, narrates the torture and murder of a young boy at the hands of Canidia and three other witches who wish to use his body parts as ingredients in a love potion; Petronius’ *Satyricon* describes how a group of witches abuse and abduct a young boy, leaving his mother with “a straw changeling” (63). Petronius’ character Trimalchio concludes this tale with the assertion that these witches “can turn the whole world upside down” (63); as Guiley writes, they “posses[s] the power to overthrow the natural order of things” (336).

This special power of women to defy nature and vitiate their supposedly natural motherhood is met with equally powerful condemnation, suppression, and violence on the part of the community, the larger society, and the state. Federici stresses the

prevalence of reproductive crimes—the killing of young children as well as abortion and even the prevention of contraception—in the witch trials. She writes that the 16-17th century European witch-hunt's persecution of birth control may explain “why contraceptives, which had been widely used in the Middle Ages, disappeared in the 17th century, surviving only in the *milieu* of prostitution, and when they reappeared on the scene they were placed in male hands, so that women were not allowed to use them except with male permission.” (214). This criminalization, coupled with the persecution of women for infanticide, effectively “destroyed the methods that women had used to control procreation, by indicting them as diabolical devices, and institutionalized the state's control over the female body” (184). Though the state itself does not explicitly play a role in the stories of Medea, Sula, and Tituba, its categorizing, condemning, and persecuting power is mirrored in the reactions of each woman's community—and perhaps, too, in the readers of each text.

In the context of Seneca's play, as well as Euripides' play of the same name, Medea is primarily known not as a witch, but as a woman who kills her children. This horrifying, unnatural act has become her defining feature, and both Seneca and Euripides conclude Medea's story mere pages—in Seneca's case, less than fifty lines—after the deed is done. The termination of these plays immediately following Medea's murder of her children signals the profoundly disruptive power of this act—it appears to break plotting and break the enchantment of the play itself. The boldness and horror of the act of mother killing her children in cold blood—and not, as in other plays, in a fit of insanity—is so unspeakable and unseeable that it ends all possibilities of representation.

Despite the violent elimination of her children, Medea's language throughout Seneca's play evokes her motherhood. The first words of *Medea* are "O gods of marriage! Juno, childbirth goddess" (1.1); though Medea initially appears to be calling upon these gods for guidance, it is quickly revealed that she is, instead, cursing them. Medea then calls upon the gods with which she'll be replacing those of marriage and childbirth—"Chaos of endless night, kingdoms that hate the gods of heaven, blaspheming powers, master of the melancholy realm, and queen—abducted, but he kept his word to you" (9-12)—and, most importantly, the Furies.

Although she, in her first line, renounces the gods of marriage and childbirth, Medea continuously identifies herself as a mother. This motherhood, however, is not in relation to her two children but rather regarding the fury to which she's given life and invoking the divine procreative power of mothers. In her opening lines, Medea describes her murderous plot; immediately afterward, she declares, "Now it is born, my vengeance is delivered: I mothered it" (1.25-26). Medea's vengeance and rage appear to have taken the place of her children; though she births and then nurses these powerful forces as she would a child, they demand the elimination of her sons. Medea strengthens the association between her motherhood and violence in her discussion of past and future crimes; as she contemplates what vengeance to exact against Jason and against Corinth, she says,

Away with feminine fears,
 dress up your mind like your own cruel home.⁵⁰
 All the horrors witnessed back at home by the Black Sea,
 Corinth will see now. Evils to make

⁵⁰ The footnote in the play (translator and editor Emily Wilson) reads: "the mountain-range of the Caucasus, which bordered on Medea's home city, Colchis, was famous for its harshness; the inhabitants of the Caucasus were believed to be particularly fierce and inhospitable" (222).

heaven and earth both shudder equally
 are what my mind revolves: wounding, murder, death
 creeping through the limbs. But all this is too slight;
 I did those as a girl. Let weightier rage swell up:
 now I have given birth, my crimes ought to increase (1.42-50).

As discussed briefly in Chapter One, Medea must engage the disempowered aspects of her identity, namely her foreignness—associated with savagery—and her femaleness—associated with weakness. Here, we see Medea evoke the supposed barbarity of her native land, Colchis—“you own cruel home”—in summoning of powerful rage, as well as her identification of a mother—Let weightier rage swell up: now I have given birth, my crimes ought to increase.”

Contrary to what would commonly be understood the natural instinct for a mother to passionately protect her children, Medea’s identification with childbirth and motherhood fuels the violent rage that drives her to kill her sons. Later, Medea reiterates this sentiment: “Come now! I will reveal how trivial and ordinary they were, those crimes I did before. With them, my bitterness was only practising: how could my childish hands do something truly great? Could the rage of a girl do this? Now, I am Medea. My nature has grown with my suffering” (5.905-910). As she wavers between killing and sparing her children, Medea again speaks of motherhood—she appears to be split between her two selves: the mother of her young sons and the mother of her fury.

Children—once my children—
 you must give yourselves as payback for your father’s crimes.
 Awful! It hits my heart, my body turns to ice,
 my chest is heaving. Anger has departed,
 the wife in me is gone, I am all mother again.
 Is this me? Could I spill my own children’s blood,
 flesh of my flesh? No, no, what terrible madness!
 Let that horrible deed, that horrible crime, be unthought of,
 even by me. Poor things! What crime have they ever done?—
 Jason is their father: that is their crime. And worse:

Medea is their mother. Let them die; they are not mine.
 Let them die; they are mine. They did nothing wrong, they are blameless, they are
 innocent: I admit it. [...]
 Let their father lose their kisses,
 their mother has already lost them. Again, my anger grows,
 my hatred boils. My ancient Fury seeks
 my reluctant hands again—anger, I follow your lead.
 I wish as many children as proud Niobe bore
 had come from my womb, I wish I had
 twice-seven sons! I was infertile for revenge:
 but my two are just enough to pay for brother and father (5.924-957).

After much oscillation, Medea kills her children. Her final, convincing words to herself are, “Now do it, heart: you must not waste your courage in secret: prove to the people the things you can do” (5.976-977)—Medea is acutely aware of the performative nature of her act; she kills her children explicitly for her spectators. After committing the violent act, Medea emerges triumphant, proclaiming for her internal and external audience exactly all the things of which she’s capable: “Now, now I have regained my throne, my brother, and my father. The Colchians keep the treasure of the Golden Ram. My kingdom comes back to me, my stolen virginity returns” (5.982-984). With the murder of her children, Medea exercises an immense, nature-upturning amount of power: she reverses time, resurrects her brother and father, and, perhaps most importantly, reinstates her “stolen virginity.” With the murder of her children, Medea achieves the bodily autonomy feared and condemned by the state described by Federici. Mirroring the state, Jason responds to Medea’s obscene agency by compelling his community-members to burn her: “Somebody, bring fire, and burn her up, let her fall consumed by her own flames” (5.995-996). Unlike the accused witches of 16th-18th century Europe, however, Medea possesses the supernatural power to evade this execution—she hovers in the air, calls for her chariot, and flies away, taking the place of the gods and thus concluding the play.

Tituba's enactment of reproductive autonomy occurs before her children can even be born. Shortly after watching the disturbing execution of Goody Glover, whose persecuted, abused, and hanged body brings Tituba back to the sight of her own mother hanging,⁵¹ Tituba discovers that she is with child. Tituba's realization of her pregnancy is followed immediately by her resolution to kill the child: « Ce fut peu après cela que je m'aperçus que je portais un enfant et que je décidai de le tuer » (82).⁵² Tituba ponders the tradition of enslaved women killing their children:

Pour une esclave, la maternité n'est pas un bonheur. Elle revient à expulser dans un monde de servitude et d'abjection, un petit innocent dont il lui sera impossible de changer la destinée. Pendant toute mon enfance, j'avais vu des esclaves assassiner leurs nouveau-nés en plantant une longue épine dans l'œuf encore gélatineux de leur tête, en sectionnant avec une lame empoisonnée leur ligament ombilical ou encore, en les abandonnant de nuit dans un lieu parcouru par des esprits irrités (83).⁵³

Tituba describes the slave woman's murder of their children as an act of necessity, even an act of love. Though the mother herself enacts this violence, the perversion of her motherly role is required by the structures of evil under which she lives. Tituba describes, too, the practices of witchcraft by which she's witnessed enslaved women prevent pregnancy altogether: « Pendant toute mon enfance, j'avais entendu des esclaves

⁵¹ « Moi-même, je hurlai et tombai à genoux au milieu de la foule excitée, curieuse, presque joyeuse. C'était comme si j'avais été condamnée à revivre l'exécution de ma mère ! Non, ce n'était pas une vieille femme qui se balançait là ! C'était Abena dans la fleur de son âge et la beauté de ses formes ! Oui, c'était elle et j'avais à nouveau six ans ! » (81)

⁵² "It was shortly afterward that I realized I was pregnant and I decided to kill the child" (49).

⁵³ "There is no happiness in motherhood for a slave. It is little more than the expulsion of an innocent baby, who will have no chance to change its fate, into a world of slavery and abjection. Throughout my childhood I had seen slaves kill their babies by sticking a long thorn into the still viscous-like egg of their heads, by cutting the umbilical cord with a poison blade, or else by abandoning them at night in a place frequented by angry spirits" (50).

échanger les recettes des potions, des lavements, des injections qui stérilisent à jamais les matrices et les transforment en tombeau tapissés de suaires écarlates » (83).⁵⁴

Though the process is not described, we may presume that Tituba uses one of the herbs introduced to her by Old Judah—a witch-like woman whom Tituba encounters in the forest—in order to bring about her miscarriage. Though her husband, John Indian, is present for the miscarriage and grieves with her, Tituba does not tell him that the loss of their child was intentional. Tituba mourns the loss of her child-to-be, despite her conviction of having done the right thing:

Je me remis difficilement du meurtre de mon enfant. Je savais que j'avais agi pour le mieux. Pourtant l'image de ce petit visage dont je ne connaîtrai jamais les contours réels venait me hanter. Par une étrange aberration, il me semblait que le cri qu'avait poussé la femme Glover en s'engageant dans le corridor de la mort, venait des entrailles de mon enfant, supplicié par la même société, condamné par les mêmes juges (86).⁵⁵

As she struggles between her tortured feelings of loss and relief, Tituba acknowledges with a profound sense of clarity—« par une étrange aberration »—that the same categorizing and degrading social structures that condemned Goody Glover to death were fundamentally responsible for the fact that her child was, in Tituba's eyes, better off unborn. Later, Tituba asserts that life is not a gift for those who cannot choose the womb in which they are carried and who are subsequently born into « la cohorte des exploités, des humiliés, de ceux à qui on impose un nom, une langue, des croyances » (187).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ “Throughout my childhood I had heard slaves exchange formulas for potions, baths, and injections that sterilize the womb forever and turn it into a tomb lined with a scarlet shroud” (50).

⁵⁵ “I had trouble getting over the murder of my child. I knew that I had acted for the best. Yet the image of that little face whose actual features I would never know haunted me. By a strange aberration it seemed to me that the cry uttered by Goody Glover setting off along the corridor of death came from the bowels of my child, tortured by the same society and sentenced by the same judges” (52).

⁵⁶ “the cohort of the exploited and humiliated, those whose name, language, and religion are imposed upon them” (120).

Despite her lack of biological children, Tituba does serve as a type of surrogate mother in two distinct settings: during her enslavement by Samuel Parris, and upon her return to Barbados. While in the service of the Parris family, Tituba quickly establishes an intimate bond with Betsey Parris, Samuel and Elizabeth's adolescent daughter. This connection exists in Miller's *The Crucible* as well; a stage direction describes how Tituba approaches the young girl, who has fallen ill: "She enters as one does who can no longer bear to be barred from the sight of her beloved" (6). In Condé's novel, Tituba refers to the girl with terms of endearment such as « ma petite Betsey » (92)⁵⁷ and lovingly cares for, plays with, and exchanges joyful "stolen kisses" (49)—« les baisers volés » (82)—with her. Later, Tituba wonders if Elizabeth Parris has harbored a secret resentment for her because of « les liens qui m'unissaient à sa fille » (113)⁵⁸ Tituba watches attentively over Betsey—« je n'avais pas cessé d'être à la dévotion de [Betsey] » (112)⁵⁹—and protects her from any hint of illness with « parfum[s,] épic[es] » (113)⁶⁰ and her various other materials of witchcraft. Tituba's bond with Betsey, however, is violently severed when Betsey, likely at the pressuring of her friends, accuses Tituba of having bewitched her.

Finally, upon her return to Barbados, Tituba encounters another surrogate child-like figure. She is almost universally called « mère »—"mother"—by the people she encounters; this initially irritates Tituba, who thinks herself too young to be considered a type of community elder. When she first meets Iphigene, their relationship falls neatly into that of a mother and son. A group of slaves brings Iphigene to Tituba one day after

⁵⁷ "my little Betsey" (56)

⁵⁸ "the ties I had [that united me –EG] with her daughter" (71).

⁵⁹ "My devotion to [Betsey] had been unceasing" (70).

⁶⁰ "season[ings,] spice[s]" (70)

he is whipped by the overseer and left for dead. Tituba cares for the weak boy as she would an infant. She sets up a small bed for him in the corner of her bedroom, « afin que pas un de ses soupirs ne m'échappe » (244)⁶¹. She carefully nurses him back to health, treating his wounds with « des cataplasmes et des emplâtres » (244)⁶² and consistently changing his forehead compresses. After « vingt-quatre heures de soins acharnés » (245)⁶³ Iphigene opens his eyes; three days later, he speaks for the first time. When he first speaks, Iphigene excitedly mistakes Tituba for his biological mother—« Mère, mère, te voilà revenue ! » (245);⁶⁴ although Tituba corrects him, he continues to call her « mère ». Tituba essentially raises Iphigene, supporting him through the expedited steps of child development: she helps Iphigene to gradually sit up, stand, and eventually take his first steps. Though Tituba initially regards Iphigene as a child, with the same kind of caring affection, Iphigene continues his accelerated figurative growth into his true age as a young man. One day, Tituba tells Iphigene that she thinks of him as a sort of replacement child for the baby she forced herself to miscarry. Iphigene responds with agitation: « Est-ce que tu as pensé parfois que j'aurais souhaité que tu ne me traites pas comme un fils ? » (255).⁶⁵ On the night that have sex, Tituba initially responds to Iphigene's expression of desire with a sense of shame; she is suddenly overwhelmed with « une absurde conviction de commettre un inceste » (259).⁶⁶ But Iphigene's desire becomes contagious—they engage in a passionate, urgent lovemaking that leaves them

⁶¹ “so that I could hear his every murmur” (159).

⁶² “poultices and plasters” (159)

⁶³ “twenty-four hours of constant attention [tireless care —EG]” (160)

⁶⁴ “Mother, O mother, you've come back!” (160).

⁶⁵ “Have you ever thought I don't want you to treat me like a son?” (167)

⁶⁶ “the absurd feeling of committing incest” (169)

breathless, frightened, and exhausted. Afterward, as Iphigene—her « fils-amant » (260)⁶⁷ sleeps beside her, Tituba thinks about what she’s done; she reprimands herself: « J’avoue qu’une fois l’ivresse dissipée, j’eus un peu honte. Quoi ! Ce garçon aurait pu être mon fils ! » (260). Through this transformation of their relationship, Tituba enacts a type of filicide; she must symbolically murder Iphigene/son in order to make way for his replacement, Iphigene/lover.

Like Tituba, Sula never gives birth to natural children. There is no mention in Morrison’s *Sula* of its eponymous character ever having children or even becoming pregnant, despite her abundance of sexual pursuits described and implied over the course of the novel. Sula’s counterpart, Nel, does have multiple children. Nel’s participation in motherhood is just one of the ways in which she adheres to traditional gender norms; Nel’s motherhood is also closely tied to her status and role as a married woman. Sula, in her lack of children as well as a husband, avoids enacting either of these gendered roles—the non-normativity of this choice is particularly striking when observed alongside Nel’s normativity. The first time that Sula and Nel see each other after Sula’s ten-year absence, they sit in Nel’s home and talk:

“Hey, girl.” [...]
 “Hey yourself. Come on in here.”
 “How you doin’?” Sula moved a pile of ironed diapers from a chair and sat down.
 [...] “You been gone too long, Sula”
 “Not too long, but maybe too far.”
 “What’s that supposed to mean?” Nel dipped her fingers into the bowl of water and sprinkled a diaper.
 “Oh, I don’t know.”
 “What some cool tea?”
 “Mmmm. Lots of ice, I’m burnin’ up.”
 “Iceman don’t come yet, but it’s good and cold.”
 “That’s fine.”
 “Hope I didn’t speak too soon. Kids run in and out of here so much.” (96-97).

⁶⁷ “son-lover” [my translation —EG]

Through subtle but consistent references to Nel's children, Nel's identity as a wife and mother continuously presents itself in glaring opposition to Sula's unattached status.

Upon Sula's return, Sula and Nel quickly reestablish the closeness they shared in girlhood. As a result, Sula's deviance seeps into and threatens Nel's normative life. After Sula sleeps with Nel's husband Jude, Sula and Nel's friendship collapses—with this rupture, the divide between the women specifically regarding their engagement with motherhood becomes even wider. Jude leaves Nel, who can therefore no longer fulfill her role as wife; Nel's loss of this normative and stabilizing identity propels her into an extreme and monstrous version of motherhood. Many years later, when Nel thinks of visiting Sula, who has fallen ill, she imagines

looking at the nostrils of the woman who had twisted her love for her own children into something so thick and monstrous she was afraid to show it lest it break loose and smother them with its heavy paw. A cumbersome bear-love that, given any reign, would suck their breath away in its crying need for honey (138).

Sula, on the other hand, finally experiences the sensation that appears to have set her apart from Nel and other women in her relations with men: the desire for possession. When Sula first feels this possessive love in her experience with Ajax, she is “astounded by so new and alien a feeling” (131). Ajax quickly recognizes the familiar signs of a woman who desires to possess him, and he leaves her the following day (134); Sula, for the first time, feels devastation and disappointment at the termination of a romantic and sexual relationship. The fact that Sula, for the first time, begins to desire and approach a normative, monogamous relationship model—which would lead to Sula building a more normative life including a husband and children—pronounces her ultimate failure to become a mother.

Although Sula avoids the role of explicit motherhood, she does occupy, for a brief time, a mother-like position in her interaction with a younger child named Chicken Little. Sula and Nel encounter Chicken Little along the river immediately following their intense experience of digging in the dirt—what I analyze in Chapter Two as a sexually coded ritual. As the digging passage highlights Sula and Nel’s positions on cusp of their sexual awakening, it is fitting that, following the completion of this ritual marking the girls’ entrance into their sexual identities, Sula would immediately enter into a kind of motherhood role.

While Nel immediately teases Chicken, Sula is gentle and kind—she tells Nel to “Leave him ‘lone” (59) and offers to help him climb a tree. Sula creates an intimate rapport of care and trust with Chicken; she coaxes him as he climbs, lifting him to the first branch and then following him in his ascent, “steadying him, when he needed it, with her hand and her reassuring voice” (60). After sharing a charming moment at the top of the tree, they descend together. When they reach the ground, Sula picks Chicken up and begins to swing him around by the hands; suddenly, he slips from her grip and flies into the river. He drowns. Though almost certainly unintentional, Sula kills this young boy whom she’s meant to protect and care for. In this way, she falls into the category of unnatural motherhood, deviating severely from her established role as the female caretaker for a young child.

John N. Duvall, who, in “Engendering Sexual/Textual Identity: *Sula* and the Artistic Gaze,” offers a reading of Sula and Nel’s play in the dirt as “a kind of symbolic mutual masturbation” (65), also addresses this incident with Chicken Little that

immediately follows. He posits Sula's accidental killing of Chicken as a protection of the girls' homosocial and homoerotic space. Duvall writes:

What Sula's act does at a literal level is to rid the girls of the unwanted male who intrudes on their play at a moment in their development when they stand between innocence and experience; that is, they are aware of their budding sexuality, though they have not yet experienced sex (65-66).

Sula's murder of Chicken, even if accidental, reestablishes the intimacy in and priority given to the relationship between Sula and Nel. While the killing effectively removes this male presence from the girls' relationship in the immediate sense, it also strengthens the long-term bond Sula and Nel in their possession of a shared, unspeakable secret.

Sula's choice to abstain from motherhood likely reflects, at least in part, the models of motherhood with which she was raised. Both Sula's mother Hannah and her grandmother Eva deviate significantly from the norm of motherhood. The two women are fairly open about not adhering to normative standards of motherly love. When Hannah asks her mother Eva, "Mamma, did you ever love us?" Eva replies, "No. I don't reckon I did. Not the way you thinkin'" (67). Sula, in turn, overhears her mother Hannah telling a friend, "I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference" (57) Upon hearing her mother's admission, Sula, bewildered, takes off running; she meets up with Nel and they run, together, to the river, where they subsequently perform their erotic digging ritual and Sula mothers and then murders Chicken.

Sula's grandmother Eva transgresses the norm of motherhood in a much more extreme, Medea-like way: she kills her son, Plum. Though Eva, like Medea, is motivated at least in part by anger, she acts primarily out of love—like Tituba in her decision to miscarry—not Medea's hate or fury. Eva later tells Hannah that she decided to kill

Plum because, after seeing him return from war and become addicted to heroin, she sensed that he wasn't able to fully become a man:

He give me such a time. Look like he didn't even want to be born. [...] After all that carryin' on, just gettin' him out and keepin' him alive, he wanted to crawl back into my womb and well . . . I ain't got the room no more even if he could do it. There wasn't space for him in my womb. And he was crawlin' back. [...] I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, not no more. I birthed him once. I couldn't do it again. He was growed, a big old thing. Godhavemercy, I couldn't birth him twice. I'd be laying here at night and he be downstairs in that room, but when I closed me eyes I'd se him . . . six feet tall smilin' and crawlin' up the stairs quietlike so I wouldn't hear and opening the door soft so I wouldn't hear and he'd be creepin' to the bed trying to spread my legs tying to get back up in my womb. He was a man, girl, a big old growed-up man. I didn't have that much room. [...] I would have done it, would have let him if I'd've had the room but a big man can't be a baby all wrapped up inside his mamma no more; he'd suffocate. I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn't and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man (71-72).

Eva decides to kill her son because he demands a form of motherhood of Eva that she is unable to provide. Despite her desire to be capable, Eva cannot let Plum back into her womb—she can no longer carry him in that extreme motherly way. In order to put an end to Plum's wretchedness as well as her own torment, Eva goes to his room in the night, soaks him in kerosene, and sets him aflame (47).

In response perhaps in part to Eva's violent expression of love—and perhaps in part due to her knowledge of her mother Hannah's true feelings for her—Sula approaches both her foremothers with a certain coldness and indifference. This demeanor manifests itself in two important events. First, Sula watches as her mother Hannah burns to death—while her inaction could be attributed to shock, Eva expresses her conviction that “Sula had watched Hannah burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested” (78). Second, when Sula comes back to the Bottom after her 10-year hiatus,

she seizes dominion over Eva's house, kicking the grandmother out and sending her to a nursing home called Sunnydale.

For Sula's community, both of these events signal, Sula's evil nature and contribute to her identification as a witch:

When the word got out about Eva being put in Sunnydale, the people in the Bottom shook their heads and said Sula was a roach. Later, when they saw how she took Jude, then ditched him for others, and heard how he bought a bus ticket to Detroit [...] [they] said she was a bitch. Everybody remembered the plague of robins that announced her return, and the tale about her watching Hannah burn was stirred up again (112).

In the face of these already condemnable transgressions, the people of the Bottom begin to conjure additional justifications for their hatred and fear of Sula. When a five-year-old boy named Teapot stumbles when descending Sula's front steps, Teapot's Mamma witnesses Sula helping him up. The sight of Sula "bending over her son's pained face" (114) causes Teapot's Mamma to fly "into a fit of concerned, if drunken, motherhood" and later she tells everybody in town that Sula had pushed her son (114). Following this incident, Teapot's Mamma received a great deal of attention and "immersed herself in a role she had shown no inclination for: motherhood" (114). After seeing (or believing to see) Sula harming her son, Teapot's Mamma "became the most devoted mother: sober, clean and industrious"—in stark contrast to her previous drunken and "indifferent" (113) motherhood. Sula's evil predisposition to harming children—a quintessentially unnatural role for a woman—somewhat counter-intuitively inspires "good" motherhood in the rest of society—among those who define themselves against her.

This phenomenon of the community defining itself against the witch's bad example extends, as well, to Medea and Tituba's stories as well as the innumerable histories of witches in society. Motherhood, the birthing and raising of children, is an

essential—if not the essential—component of the construction and maintenance of society. The importance of this role is communicated in the extent to which it has been regulated and surveilled; as Federici writes, “more women were persecuted for witchcraft in [16th and 17th-century Europe] than for any other crime, except, significantly, infanticide” (179).

CONCLUSION: THE WITCH AS OTHER

Ainsi l'homme qui s'atteint directement par le cogito découvre aussi tous les autres, et il les découvre comme la condition de son existence. Il se rend compte qu'il ne peut rien être (au sens où on dit qu'on est spirituel, ou qu'on est méchant, ou qu'on est jaloux) sauf si les autres le reconnaissent comme tel. Pour obtenir une vérité quelconque sur moi, il faut que je passe par l'autre. L'autre est indispensable à mon existence, aussi bien d'ailleurs qu'à ma connaissance de moi.

—Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*⁶⁸

The witches examined in this thesis span millennia, from 431 BCE to 1986. The breadth of this time begs the question: how and why has the witch existed for so long, in so many histories and geographies? The three women I investigate, Medea, Tituba, and Sula, share many qualities—I have spent the last three chapters investigating the nuances of their portrayals regarding three common behaviors: the practice of magic, the transgression of sexual norms, and unnatural motherhood. The fundamental similarity between these women, however, is remarkably simple: they exist within a society that defines itself against them.

Medea, Tituba, and Sula play this role well; they continuously reaffirm their communities' conceptions and productions of themselves—as moral, as rational, as civilized, as human. The Greeks understand themselves in opposition to the Colchians' barbarity. Tituba's Salem imagines itself as worthy of Paradise against her godlessness. Sula's community members, confronted with her indifference, perform their adherence to social convention with unprecedented conviction. Against the witch, these people construct the superiority inherent to their understanding of self. Despite—and more likely

⁶⁸ “And so the man who reaches himself directly through the *cogito* discovers, as well, all the others, and he discovers them as the condition of his existence. He realizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense that one says he is spiritual, or that he is evil, or jealous) unless others recognize him as such. In order to achieve any sort of truth about myself, I must pass through the other. The other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any understanding I can have of myself.” [my translation —EG]

in accordance with—their abjectification of the witch, these communities do recognize her immense power. She is known to levitate, to raise the dead, to bewitch men, to speak in tongues. She is known to possess an unthinkable capacity for evil. In their vision of the witch as alternatingly—and very often simultaneously—super- and sub- human, the result is always dehumanization. This dehumanization is at the heart of all forms of othering, be it on the basis of sex, race, nationality, or religion. It is through dehumanization of the Other that the human as it exists is created and affirmed.

Binary opposition lies at the heart of virtually every aspect of human existence, from the production of language to the imposition of gender to the construction of man as distinct from animal. It is through binaries that we create meaning and impose order. It is through binaries that we construct identity. Essential to the conception of the Self is the Other; integral to an “us” is the existence of a “them.” The timeless witch has filled this timeless role of “them,” of Other, occupying a margin of society that is, in reality, at its very center.

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