Bobby Socks and Broomsticks: Marion L. Starkey and the Invention of the Teen Witch[1]

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Introduction: 'A Pack of Bobby-Soxers'

In 1949, historian and journalist Marion L. Starkey published *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials*. Still viewed as the defining post-war interpretation of the 1692 Salem witch trials, Starkey's book was a phenomenal success, tapping into the zeitgeist of a cultural moment when 'psychoanalytic notions were becoming well known in popular form'.[2] *The Devil in Massachusetts* emerged as a canonical study of America's most notorious witchcraft panic for a number of reasons: its highly literary and imaginative style, its use of psychoanalytic theory, and its attempt to locate in the Salem trials the same mentality that enabled the rise of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century. However, one of the book's most intriguing features is its often-anachronistic representation of the young girls at the heart of the Salem witch trials as quintessentially modern American teenagers. In one emblematic passage, Starkey identifies the source of the witchcraft accusations in the emotional instability, pubertal tensions, and mischievous deeds of teen girls:

> The tragedy which was once enacted in this pleasant neighbourhood originated in the childish fantasies of some very little girls and was carried to its deadly climax by what one might now call a pack of 'bobby-soxers' were not the term pictorially incongruous. It was largely the older girls, who inflamed by the terrors of Calvinism as their immature minds understood it, depressed by the lack of any legitimate outlet for their natural high spirits, found relief for their tensions in an emotional orgy which eventually engulfed not only their village but the Massachusetts Bay Colony.[3]

The language Starkey uses here is laden with meaning, as her words explicitly connect the young women of Salem to the then-novel phenomenon of the teenage girl. Her description of the scene of the events as a 'neighbourhood' immediately evokes images of idyllic mid-century suburbs. Likewise, Starkey's use of the term 'bobby-soxers' is crucial here. Although now

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[1] This article was written prior to the publication of my book *Witchcraft and Adolescence in American Popular Culture: Teen Witches* (University of Wales Press, 2022) and, as such, formed the basis for many of the ideas explored in that study. I would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers and the editors of *IJGHS*, who helped me to develop the arguments and theories that would become central not only to this article, but to the book that grew out of it.

[2] Marion Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths in American Culture* (Routledge, 2007), Kindle edition, loc. 2084.

[3] Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (Anchor Books, 1989) p. 14.

vanished from colloquial English, it is a term that would have been intimately familiar to readers in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Historian Grace Palladino explains that during the 1940s, female 'high school students gained national fame as "bobby soxers", the popular nickname bestowed on swing-crazed fans who were developing a new teenage style. In their saddle shoes, skirts, and sweaters, they became identified with music, fads, and fun.'[4] Moreover, teen girls during the period of their first emergence as a cultural phenomenon were simultaneously fascinating and alienating to adults, at once embodying the hopes of a newly invigorated nation and upending its entrenched values.[5] Starkey, too, captures this essential ambivalence, describing both the girls' 'high spirits' and the (implicitly pubertal) tensions that threatened to undermine the coherence of their ordered, patriarchal communities.

Commencing with an analysis of *The Devil in Massachusetts*, this article argues that Starkey's soldering of modern conceptions of adolescence to her retelling of the Salem witch trials represents an important moment in US popular culture. By integrating images of witchcraft with current discourses surrounding the newly emergent figure of the teen girl, Starkey creates a novel cultural trope: the teenage witch. Although diverse figurations of mystical girlhood – from medieval saints to spiritualist mediums – long predate Starkey's work, her book was the first to explicitly connect the teenager (a new demographic in the post-war period) to the witch. Thus, while teen witches abound in contemporary culture – the past decade alone has given us *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013-14), *The VVitch* (2015), and a newly revitalised Sabrina Spellman in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-20) – the archetype of the teenage girl who is also a witch, or a witch who displays traits typical of the teen girl, owes its origins to Starkey's productively anachronistic study.

In this article, I maintain that Starkey's use of the term 'bobby-soxers' to describe the girls embroiled in the Salem witch trials was a generative moment in the formation of the now-ubiquitous teen-witch archetype. Building on this decisive lexical choice and Starkey's characterisation of the Salem girls as restless, disaffected teens, I follow the coalescence of the teen-witch archetype over the following decade and a half, as she solidifies into one of the twentieth century's most iconic renditions of feminine adolescence. Here, I draw not only on social histories of adolescence, but also on the theoretical work of Julia Kristeva, Barbara Creed, and Elizabeth Grosz in order to analyse how Starkey establishes parallels between witchcraft and the embodied experience of adolescence. Tracing Starkey's influence through

[4] Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (Basic Books, 1996), p. 51.
[5] Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 120.

influential works of historical fiction such as Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), Elizabeth George Speare's *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (1958), and Ann Petry's *Tituba of Salem Village* (1964), I demonstrate that her characterisation of the Salem 'girls' as modern-day 'bobby-soxers' established an enduring trope, a connection between female adolescence and the mystical that not only reflected contemporary anxieties about the 'new' American teenager, but also became instrumental in shaping adolescent identity itself over the subsequent decades.[6]

In this way, while I concur with Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's thesis that the monster is a cultural being, I also maintain that the teen-witch archetype is central to the delineation of teenage identity in modern Western culture. In his influential seven theses on monstrosity, Cohen observes that '[t]he monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically "that which reveals", "that which warns", a glyph that seeks a hierophant.'[7] Yet, inasmuch as the monster reveals the anxieties and the yearnings of their cultures, so too do they shape those cultures: taboos and fears surrounding monsters can influence religious practices, delineate cultural rituals, and codify social norms. Teen witches are cultural bodies, and they reveal much about how their social milieu understands adolescent identity. At the same time, the teenage sorceress does not merely act as a mirror of social anxieties; she is crucial to the constitution of pubescent girlhood. Her spectre roves across the social plain, subtly influencing our cultural construction of the teen girl as ethereal, mischievous, and metamorphic, as well as unleashing new identificatory possibilities for teen girls themselves.

My contention, then, is that the teen witch has always existed alongside the teen girl: she is her shadowy double. Thus, while Catherine Driscoll argues that, as a social category, 'girls have functioned an index of broad cultural changes and continuities', the teenage witch similarly serves as an index of both change and continuity; she is an archetype who both informs and reflects cultural values and concerns.[8] In the following pages, I provide an overview of the teenager's emergence as a unique socio-cultural phenomenon in the years following the Second World War, charting its emergence out of a distinct confluence of

[6] I am intentionally limiting my focus to works of historical fiction centred on witchcraft in colonial New England. While Starkey's legacy undoubtedly informed later incarnations of the teen witch, such as Archie Comics' Sabrina Spellman (created in 1962) and the short-lived *Bewitched* spin-off *Tabitha* (1977-78), the relationship between these texts and post-war pop culture, consumerism, and comedy is beyond the scope of this article. However, some of these texts are explored in my book *Witchcraft and Adolescence in American Popular Culture: Teen Witches*.

[7] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Cohen (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25 (p. 4).

[8] Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 3.

economic, cultural, and commercial factors. Situating Starkey's *The Devil in Massachusetts* within this context, I adumbrate how the book engages with contemporary concerns about adolescent embodiment and sexual desire. I then extend this treatment of female adolescence as both physically and socially disruptive into an analysis of Arthur Miller's representation of the bewitched girls in *The Crucible*, emphasising in particular his conflation of puberty and hysteria. From here, I move on to discuss the portrayal of adolescent corporeal excess in young adult novels that followed in the wake of *both The Devil in Massachusetts* and *The Crucible*, elaborating on how they employ images of adolescent physicality in order to interrogate themes of gender, racial, and class inequality. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how literary figurations of teen witches, rather than simply articulating cultural anxieties about feminine adolescence, open up new identificatory possibilities for teenage readers themselves.

The Birth of the Teenager

Starkey's book is a self-consciously and overtly modern account of the Salem witch trials. *The Devil in Massachusetts* employs mid-century approaches to psychology in its attempt to unravel the tangled web of accusations that suffocated Essex County in the final decade of the seventeenth century. Describing the diverse victims of the Salem witch trials – an honest farmer, a pipe-smoking beggar woman, a decent grandmother – the dust-jacket blurb on the first edition informs us that '[b]ecause of the fantasies and hysterical antics of *unbalanced teen-agers*, decent men and women were sent to the gallows'.[9] As Marion Gibson observes in her astute reading of Starkey's book, the author's language, and that of her publisher, clearly reflects contemporary concerns about post-war American youth and, in particular, the new and somewhat puzzling phenomenon of the teenager.[10]

To fully comprehend the significance of Starkey's description of the Salem 'afflicted' – the central group of individuals whose denouncements and claims of spectral assault propelled the witch trials into the annals of history – as 'unbalanced *teen-agers*' and 'bobby-soxers', it is essential to first understand the strangeness of teenagers in the mid-twentieth century. Although the term 'adolescence' had gained some degree of currency by the turn of the century, following the publication of the psychologist G. Stanley Hall's comprehensive analysis of the demographic in *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (1904), its use was largely

[9] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), n. p., emphasis added.
[10] Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths*, loc. 2084.

confined to the social and psychological sciences.[11] Indeed, as Ilana Nash demonstrates, the 'general consensus of teen identity manifested very sparsely before the 1930s'.[12] Palladino describes, for instance, how up until the 1930s, most adolescents worked – either in factories, on farms, or in the home – and, as such, lacked the capacity to develop a distinct demographic identity.[13]

It was not until the scarcity that characterised the Great Depression that the first rumblings of a cohesive teenage identity could be heard. With fewer jobs available for adults, teenagers who may have previously worked in industry or agriculture were herded *en masse* into the classroom. This large-scale movement into second-level education proved pivotal, as it enabled teens to convene as a peer group and to carve out their own unique cultural space. The concept of adolescence was no longer reserved for the wealthy. Palladino notes that, in the rush to the classroom,

> adolescents had become an age group and not just a wealthy social class, a shift that helped to create the idea of a separate teenage generation. When a teenage majority spent the better part of their day in high school, they learned to look to one another and not to adults for advice, information and approval.[14]

At the same time, it is important not to underestimate the importance of advertising and the influence of post-war affluence on the construction of the teenager as a distinct social demographic. As Jon Savage observes, '[f]rom the very start, [teenager] was a marketing term used by advertisers and manufacturers that reflected the newly visible spending power of adolescents'.[15] It was this consolidation of a visible market demographic that led to the construction of the teenage years as a 'discrete age group with its own rituals, rights, and demands'.[16] Published in the midst of this demographic and cultural turmoil, *The Devil in Massachusetts* addresses itself directly to the cultural concerns of the era. Although Starkey draws numerous parallels between the Salem witch trials and both the totalitarianism that led to World War II and the paranoia of post-war American culture, she nevertheless lays the blame for the panic squarely with a group of female adolescents, who she describes as 'crazed little girls'.[17] While numerous studies of the Salem trials had already been published by the mid-twentieth century, Starkey's unique contribution to scholarly and cultural discourses on the

[11] Nash, *American Sweethearts*, p. 17.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Palladino, *Teenagers*, p. 5.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (Chatto and Windus, 2007), p. xiii.
[16] Savage, *Teenage*, p. xiii.
[17] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 13.

trials resides in her explicit conflation of the Salem girls and contemporary teenagers, a transhistorical amalgamation that she renders in the new language of teen fads, which had grown up in the post-war period.[18]

'All Manner of Cravings and Urges': The Disruptive Power of the Pubertal Body in *The Devil in Massachusetts*

At once embodying youthful promise and rebellious dissent, teenage girls were regularly understood as strange, disruptive in their sexuality, and fanatical in their devotion to boys and movie stars. Starkey's characterisation of Salem's seventeenth-century bobby soxers certainly echoes these concerns about adolescents. In discussing the girls' claims of bewitchment, Starkey contends that '[t]he girls were no more seriously possessed than a pack of bobby-soxers on the loose'.[19] Here, Starkey compares the hysterical behaviour of the afflicted to the excesses that were seen to permeate other intense moments of emotive sociality: a religious revival, a fascist rally, and, significantly, the elaborate performances of grief staged by teen girls mourning a dead movie star. In this analogy, Starkey is most likely thinking of the extravagant grieving of young women in the wake of silent-movie star Rudolph Valentino's untimely death in 1926. However, similar displays of spectacular sorrow would also take place six years after the publication of Starkey's book, in the wake of teen icon James Dean's sudden death. Starkey observes in this passage that a comparable performance of hysteria can be seen in the image of adolescent girls' intense adoration for contemporary crooners.[20] Here, Starkey demonises the passions and collective fantasies of teenage girls by comparing music fans and mourners of popular icons to attendees at religious revivals and, even more disturbingly, fascist rallies.

Starkey's portrayal of the Salem afflicted as a threat to the social order thus echoes, in decidedly modern language, the anxieties about teenage girls that were crackling like electricity in the air of 1940s America. Teenage girls in the post-war period were often seen as uniquely threatening because of their boundless energies, not the least of which was their seemingly infinite capacity for sexual transgression. After all, caught in the midst of pubescent chaos, teenage girls were hormonal and apparently 'boy crazy'; without the regulatory institutions of marriage and motherhood to contain them, it seemed that their sexual energies had the potential for untold destruction. Parlaying this widespread societal concern with adolescent sexuality

[18] Most notably Charles W. Upham's *Salem Witchcraft* (1897).
[19] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 46.
[20] Ibid.

and emotion into her interrogation of the origins of Salem's witchcraft panic, Starkey describes, again in quintessentially modern terms, how

> There was in Salem Village in the winter of 1691-2 quite a store of young girls, unattached teenagers. The Puritans, sober in all things, quite properly looked on marriage as a serious business and did not favour it for the very young. Thus there were several girls about who had reached the age of sixteen, seventeen, and even twenty still manless and unprovided for, and those girls were instinct with repressed vitality, with all manner of cravings and urges for which village life afforded no outlet.[21]

For Starkey, Salem's afflicted were motivated by typical adolescent boredom, by the tedium of chores and the isolation of long winters devoid of company. Like teen girls confined to their bedrooms, the young women of Salem were straining against the rules of adult society and the directionless monotony of adolescence. Moreover, in Starkey's rendering of history, they were 'manless', single girls with no outlet for their burgeoning sexuality, and it was this repressed sexual energy that would eventually cause them to see witches perched on the beams of the Salem meeting house, and feel spectral pins pricking their delicate skin. Starkey's preoccupation with the unfulfilled cravings and urges of the Salem girls is especially significant in that it is less reflective of Puritan discourses on girlhood, which were grounded in the idea of preparation for one's wifely duty, than it is of mid-twentieth century ideas about puberty and the female body.[22]

Starkey's formulation of unproductive, directionless female sexuality transforming into destructive violence is evocative of constructions of femininity inaugurated in the wake of the nineteenth-century 'discovery' of sex hormones.[23] Although many scholars have since dismissed the notion that radically different hormonal compositions can fully account for sex differences between men and women, ideas about hormones as the primary source of sexual divergence persist in popular culture.[24] Even more ubiquitous, however, is the image of fluctuating, volatile hormones exerting an irresistible force over both the female mind and body, which remained pervasive throughout the twentieth century. Discussing pubertal differences between boys and girls, Elizabeth Grosz notes that while boys and girls reach

[21] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 32.
[22] See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (Vintage, 1991).
[23] Jane M. Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body* (Routledge, 2006), p. 15.
[24] Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine*, p. 15.

puberty at around the same time, boys' maturation is viewed in far more rational terms, conceived of as the onset of mature sexuality.[25] She states that

> Puberty for girls marks the development of the breasts and the beginnings of menstruation as an entry into the reproductive reality that is presumed to be women's prime domain. Puberty is not figured as the coming of a self-chosen sexual maturity but as the signal of immanent reproductive capacities.[26]

Here, Grosz articulates perhaps the key division between cultural constructions of male and female adolescence. While male adolescence is grounded in notions of maturity and increased agency ('self-chosen sexual maturity'), female adolescence is defined by a lack of control, an irrational capitulation to the forces of biology and the inevitability of fecundity. The teenage girl is thus figured as a biocultural agent whose social marginality is the product of her excessive corporeality.

This rhetoric of uncontrollable female biology was a key component of post-World War II conversations about puberty and menarche. For much of this period, sex-education materials aimed at adolescent girls stressed, rather explicitly, the unruly nature of the pubertal body, and outlined steps that could be taken to control its seepages and disturbances. In her study of twentieth-century puberty pamphlets for girls, Michelle H. Martin discusses the ubiquity of references to containment in these texts, remarking that

> A consistent theme throughout the puberty pamphlets from Kimberly Clark (makers of Kotex products), Personal Products (makers of Always brand sanitary products and, earlier, Modess), and Tambrands (makers of Tampax) is that although menstruation is 'perfectly natural', women must pay special attention to their body odor, particularly while menstruating.[27]

The discourse surrounding menstruation and embodied femininity was, for much of the twentieth century, explicitly preoccupied with a vision of the female body as home to disruptive, unstable, and dangerous forces that perennially threatened to break free. Throughout *The Devil in Massachusetts*, Starkey's description of Salem's bewitched girls pivots around such notions of barely contained feminine excess and out-of-control bodies. Although not specifically referencing menstruation or hormonal fluctuation, the subtext underpinning her multitude of allusions to the girls' 'high spirits', 'tensions', and 'repressed vitality' is clearly

[25] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 204.
[26] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 205.
[27] Michelle H. Martin, '"No One Will Ever Know Your Secret!" Commercial Puberty Pamphlets for Girls from the 1940s to the 1990s', in *Sexual Pedagogies: Sex Education in Britain, Australia, and America, 1879–2000*, ed. by Claudia Nelson and Michelle H. Martin (Palgrave, 2004), pp. 135-54 (p. 142).

intended to signify pubertal upheaval and frustrated sexual impulses. The Salem afflicted, this store of restive, unmarried adolescents, serve to embody the complex status of the teenage girl in the post-war public imagination.

On the one hand, the adolescent girl is a cultural agent, a specific demographic within the broader social arena. Yet, on the other, she is visibly a part of the biological realm, defined by her metamorphic corporeality and the physical symptoms of puberty. She appears as a somewhat threatening figure, her 'feminine excess' (signified by hair growth, dermatological eruptions, and seeping fluids) an uncanny reminder of nature's capacity to reclaim culture. Starkey's teenage girls inhabit this interstitial borderland, their disruption of the community arising from the irrepressible tide of biological tumult surging within. Describing twelve year-old Ann Putnam, Jr, one of the central accusers, Starkey writes that 'Ann was now on the verge of adolescence, already subject to the preliminary strains of that difficult period, to unexplained pains and heaviness in the limbs, to dizziness and flashes of imagination so vivid that they sometime resemble hallucinations'.[28] Ann's propensity towards fantasy and intense flashes of imagination is here explicitly connected to the physical metamorphosis of adolescence, the girl's dizziness and heavy limbs apparently drawing her into soporific flights of fancy. In Starkey's figuration of events, Ann's role as an afflicted girl, her spectral visions and susceptibility to supernatural harassment, is intimately connected to her adolescent biology. The supernatural is therefore explicitly linked to the biological upheavals and hormonal fluctuations of puberty.

'Some Reddish Work Done at Night': Puberty, Sexuality and Hysteria in *The Devil in Massachusetts* and *The Crucible*

Considering the vast influence that Starkey's work exerted in the post-World War II period, the migration of her anachronistically modern Salem girls from historical discourse to the more fanciful territory of fiction seems like an organic evolution of the nascent teen-witch trope. In her study of American witchcraft myths, Gibson describes the influence of Starkey's book on Arthur Miller's seminal dramatisation of the Salem witch trials, *The Crucible* (1953).[29] Moreover, Miller himself cites the influence of Starkey in his essay 'The Crucible in History'. Describing the moment in which the connection between post-war American anti-communism and seventeenth-century witchcraft hysteria crystallised in his mind, Miller writes that the germ

[28] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 38.
[29] Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths*, loc. 2095.

of the idea took root when, on a 'lucky afternoon', he came across a copy of *The Devil in Massachusetts*.[30] Although intended as an allegory of the McCarthy-era's anti-communist persecutions, *The Crucible* is notable in that it locates the source of Salem's witchcraft panic not so much in oppressive Puritan power structures nor in populist prejudice – a clear departure from earlier works that advanced a view of the trials as a historical indictment of either the 'democratic mob' or a scheming elite – but rather in the chaos of hormonal adolescence. [31]

A recurring linguistic motif that runs throughout Miller's play is the regularity with which the words 'girls' or 'children' are used to describe the Salem afflicted. Although historical records show that these terms were sometimes applied to accusers, in reality the Salem bewitched included both men and women, old and young. Nevertheless, the afflicted girls in *The Crucible* are portrayed as just that: a gang of teenage girls inflamed by desire, intense adolescent crushes, peer pressure, and petty jealousy. Margo Burns notes that, despite Miller's characterisation of the young women at the centre of the Salem trials as a homogenous group of teenage girls, the core group at the nexus of the panic was in fact far more diverse:

> The alleged 'afflicted' comprised not just a group of a dozen teenage girls – there were men and adult women who also claimed 'affliction', including John Indian, Ann Putnam, Sr, and Sarah Bibber – and there were more in Andover, where the total number of people accused was greater than any other town, including Salem Village.[32]

Miller's play essentially erases these older afflicted, reducing the core group to a gaggle of teenage girls, who, in the pettiness of their motivations and the intense, cultish elements of their relationships, mirror popular 1950s representations of high-school girls.

In one of her humorous domestic essays, Shirley Jackson identifies a quasi-tribal mentality amongst the phalanx of teenage girls of which her own thirteen-year-old daughter is a part:

> It is the participation in group thought that is the pattern of the thirteen-year-old life, not the group thought of manufacturers of charm bracelets, or even the makers of 45-rpm records, but the group thinking of her own crew, the Lindas and the Caroles and the Cheryls and the Barbaras, who decide by a kind of spontaneous flare that one disc jockey is preferable to another, or one television program is, as of this moment, dull and another exciting. […] her life

[30] Arthur Miller, 'The Crucible in History', in *The Collected Essays of Arthur Miller* (Bloomsbury Metheun Drama, 2015), pp. 465-83 (p. 476).
[31] Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths*, loc. 763.
[32] Margo Burns, 'Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*: Fact and Fiction (or Picky, Picky, Picky ...)', *Seventeenth-Century Colonial New England*, 30 October 2015 <http://www.17thc.us/docs/fact-fiction.shtml> [accessed 1 April 2019].

> is controlled, possessed, by a shifting set of laws that make your garden-variety savage initiation rite look like milk time in the nursery school.[33]

In this short piece, Jackson attributes an almost supernatural power to the teen girls, who appear to almost psychically manipulate the behaviours and attitudes of their peers. In *The Crucible,* the leader of the afflicted girls is Abigail Williams, her age raised for the purposes of drama from eleven – as she was in reality – to seventeen. Recalling Jackson's pubertal 'savages', Abigail seems possessed of an uncanny power to control her adolescent peers. Indeed, Abigail also fits perfectly with Starkey's description of Salem's primary troublemakers as 'bobby-soxers', older teenage girls whose minds were nevertheless immature.[34]

Although there is no concrete evidence for this in the historical record, Miller's older Abigail is also explicitly associated with the occult, having been observed by her uncle, Reverend Parris, 'dancing like [a] heathen in the forest'.[35] In *The Crucible*, we are told that the adolescent Abigail has engaged in magical practices that would certainly have been denounced as witchcraft by her community, and her uncle accuses her of having 'trafficked with spirits in the forest'.[36] Leaving behind the rigid strictures of her suffocating community, Abigail flees to the liberating space of the forest to take part in occult rituals. Moreover, Abigail, we are told, is not simply content to transgress Puritan prohibitions against dancing. Her young cousin Betty reminds her early in the play that she went to the forest and 'drank a charm to kill John Proctor's wife', accusing the older girl: 'You drank blood, Abby!'[37] In this way, Abigail, like the teen girls addressed in mid-century puberty pamphlets, is closely linked to images of blood and seepage. Attempting to silence the frightened Betty and dissuade her from informing the reverend about their dalliances with the occult, Abigail warns the child that if she speaks of their woodland rituals,

> I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it; I saw Indians smash my dear parents' heads on the pillow next to mine, and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down! [38]

[33] Shirley Jackson, 'On Girls of Thirteen', in *Let Me Tell You: New Stories, Essays, and Other Writings*, ed. by Laurence Jackson Hyman and Sarah Hyman Dewitt (Random House, 2016), pp. 359-64 (p. 363).
[34] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 14.
[35] Miller, *The Crucible* (Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 8.
[36] Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 9.
[37] Miller, *The Crucible*, p.15.
[38] Miller, *The Crucible*, pp. 14-15.

Although its proximity to Abigail's description of her parents' murder by 'Indians' suggests that her knowledge of violence stems from her experiences of conflict on the Maine frontier, the term 'reddish work' evokes imagery of blood magic such as that used on Goody Proctor.[39] Abigail thus becomes associated with blood and consequently with feminine excess that threatens to spill over and infect the social order. Recalling post-war figurations of female adolescence as defined by the omnipresent threat of seepage – odours and fluids that must be contained – and the imperative that teen girls learn how to properly control their bodies, Abigail's connection to blood and 'reddish work' gestures towards a subversive femininity in which the corporeal is not repressed for the sake of the social order. Such embedded references to effluvia also recall early-modern conceptions of the witch as essentially Protean, capable of 'unfixing' the 'limits of her own body by shifting her shape'.[40] In contrast to the contemporary emphasis on the need for corporeal control and the importance of the teen girl imbibing strategies to enact this control, Abigail's association with all things sanguine suggests an abject erosion of bodily boundaries and a disregard for the separation of the social and the biological. In this way, Abigail reflects not only Starkey's description of the Salem girls as restless, frustrated teens, but through her engagement with occult rituals, she also gestures forward to the more cohesive pop-culture archetype of the teen witch who would follow in her wake.

Like Starkey, Miller also conflates bewitchment and excessive feminine biology. Echoing Starkey's description of Ann Putnam, Jr as a metamorphic creature on the verge of adolescence, prone to the lethargy and physical discomfort of the teenage years, Miller has his fictional Ann, Sr complain that her daughter has become a strange, remote creature: 'A secret child she has become this year, and shrivels like a sucking mouth were pullin' on her life too.'[41] Starkey's work similarly locates the strangeness of the Salem accusers in their excessive female biology and, in doing so, she attempts to diagnose the girls through contemporary psychoanalytic paradigms. Early in her book, Starkey describes how the quasi-Edenic space of early-modern Massachusetts was brought to the brink of ruin by 'the prophecies of crazed little girls'.[42] In her diagnosis of the girls, Starkey observes that the force of their delusions (spectres balanced on courthouse beams, malevolent birds, the dark presence of a sinister 'black man'),

[39] See Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (Vintage, 2002) for a detailed discussion of the relationship between the Salem witchcraft panic and the influx of refugees from the Indian Wars on the Maine frontier.
[40] Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (Routledge, 1996), p. 125.
[41] Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 12. Note that in Miller's play Ann Putnam, Jr has been renamed Ruth, possibly to avoid confusion with her mother, Ann Putnam, Sr.
[42] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 13.

combined with their spectacular displays of physical affliction (fits, fainting, the sensation of spectral pin pricks) suggests that the girls are suffering from that most indefinite and all-encompassing female malady: hysteria. With the surety of the modern observer, Starkey confidently claims that despite the strangeness of the girls' demonical behaviour, 'the general pattern of their conduct is clear enough; in modern terms they all of them, in one degree or another, had hysteria'.[43]

For Starkey, this diagnosis of hysteria is in keeping with 'the findings of modern psychology, particularly the Freudian school'.[44] Although hysteria was becoming outmoded by the end of the 1940s – it is absent from the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-1) (1952)[45] – the diagnosis nevertheless retained a great deal of rhetorical power as a means of defining feminine excess, both biological and psychological. Jane M. Ussher contends that it is for this reason that ordinary femininity, the everyday processes of womanhood, are often discursively and imaginatively merged with hysteria: simply being a woman is to invite hysteria.[46] The premenstrual woman, for example, is frequently constructed as 'mad, bad or dangerous – driven to violence or criminality because of corporeality out of control, with the abject body blamed for a host of aberrations, from murder, to moodiness, and everything in-between'.[47] Tellingly, Ussher suggests, this 'hysterisization' of the fecund body begins at menarche.[48] Starkey's diagnosis of the Salem girls as suffering from hysteria is therefore significant in its lexical and categorical slipperiness. It suggests psychological and biological tumult, but it also functions as shorthand for unruly feminine excess in a more general sense.

Taking its cue from Starkey's history, Miller's *The Crucible* also portrays the Salem girls as consumed by an analogous hysteria; here, the condition is envisioned as a spectacular retreat into visionary supernaturalism and elaborate physical performance that serves to release them from the constraints of a rigid Puritan social order. Hysteria and hysterical behaviour are mentioned numerous times throughout the play. Notably, references to the pathology are confined to the stage directions, so that they appear to be a contemporary diagnosis that informs the actors' movements and expressions, without ever intruding upon the dialogue of the play's seventeenth-century characters. Thus, Miller's representation of the girls' behaviour frames

[43] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 45.
[44] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 17.
[45] Patricia Gherovici, 'Where Have the Hysterics Gone? Lacan's Reinvention of Hysteria', *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, 40.1 (2014), pp. 47-70 (p. 47), doi:10.1353/esc.2014.0000.
[46] Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine*, p. 24.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

them as occupying a nebulous space between bewitchment and hysteria. In the initial stages of her enchantment, Betty Parris, the first of the girls to display symptoms of supernatural affliction, is portrayed as suffering from a sort of hysterical paralysis, an immobility that has been recorded in cases of hysteria stretching from the early-modern period through to Freud's treatment of 'Anna O'.[49] In the stage directions for Act One of Miller's play, we are told that 'BETTY PARRIS, aged ten, is lying on the bed, inert'.[50] In her soporific state, Betty enacts a retreat inwards, away from society and into the body. Upon waking, her behaviour is erratic and unstable; her pathology has transmuted into the kind of liberating excess that the theorists Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément view as characteristic of the hysteric: Betty 'darts off the bed' and 'flattens herself against the wall', crying out for her deceased mother.[51] Asserting that she will 'fly to Mama', Betty 'raises her arm as though to fly, and streaks for the window, gets one leg out'.[52] Her dramatic acts of abnormal defiance transform her into a 'stylized [channel] into which *excess* demonically flows – excess desire, excess rage, excess creative energy – only to be annihilated by the society that drove it in such directions'.[53]

Moreover, in *The Crucible*, the girls' hysteria often manifests as a group phenomenon, recalling the quasi-anthropological studies of mid-century teen girls that appeared in the media around this time. Just as these portrayals often foregrounded the symbiotic nature of friendships between teen girls, as well the rigidity and homogeneity of their social groupings, so too does Miller present the Salem bewitched as embroiled in a form of group thought that enables each girl's hysteric excess to transcend her own corporeality and affect those around her. When Mary Warren, the Proctor's servant girl, attempts to extricate herself from the accusing circle, Abigail Williams and the other girls respond as if bewitched, imitating Mary's words and actions in unison:

> MARY WARREN [pleading]: Abby, you mustn't!
> ABIGAIL AND ALL THE GIRLS [all transfixed]: Abby, you mustn't!
> MARY WARREN [to all the girls]: I'm here, I'm here!
> GIRLS: I'm here, I'm here!
> […]
> MARY WARREN [screaming at the top of her lungs, and raising her fists]: Stop it!!
> GIRLS [raising their fists]: Stop it!!

[49] Andrew Scull, *Madness in Civilisation: A Cultural History of Insanity, from the Bible to Freud, from the Madhouse to Modern Medicine* (Thames and Hudson, 2016), p. 2 and p. 135.
[50] Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 4.
[51] Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 14.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Sandra M. Gilbert, 'Introduction: A Tarentella of Theory', in *The Newly Born Woman*, ed. by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. ix-xviii (p. xii).

> [MARY WARREN, utterly confounded, and becoming overwhelmed by ABIGAIL's – and the girls' – utter conviction, starts to whimper, hands half raised, powerless, and all the girls start whimpering exactly as she does.][54]

Miller's afflicted girls are therefore emblematic of a series of potent post-war concerns about adolescence as a new cultural demographic, designated at least in part by intense peer relations. Indeed, the behaviour of the Salem girls – their unthinking adherence to the cruel demands of their ostensible leader Abigail, the viciousness with which they ostracise those who fail to conform to group norms – suggests that Miller has imbibed, at least to a degree, the era's widescale contempt for teenage girls. His portrayal of the afflicted merges with popular mid-century images of adolescent femininity as spiteful, impulsive, conformist, and mean-spirited. Yet, following Starkey, Miller merges this vision of the teenage girl with the iconography of possession and the supernatural. In doing so, both authors generate dynamic new ways of thinking through female adolescence. This mode of conceptualising adolescent girlhood employs images of bewitchment, hysterical violence, and uncanny corporeal seepage as means to articulate and understand the novel phenomenon of the liminal, disruptive, and potentially destructive teenage girl.

The Teen Witch in Young-Adult Historical Fiction

Beyond the direct influence exerted on Miller by Starkey, other works of mid-twentieth century historical fiction also owe a debt to her figuration of the Salem accusers as defined by psychic and corporeal excess, while also echoing Starkey's anachronistic construction of the afflicted as modern teenagers. In 1964, the author and civil-rights advocate Ann Petry produced a young-adult novel centred around the experiences of the slave Tituba and her interactions with the Salem girls. Petry's book begins with a brief glimpse of Tituba's life in Barbados, an island described as lying 'like a jewel sparkling in the sea. Its yellow-white coral-encrusted coast line [blazing] in the brilliant light.'[55] When her mistress, desperate for money, sells both Tituba and her husband, John Indian, to a Boston minister, the pair are forced to leave their bright, colourful Caribbean home for the cold winters and grey skies of Boston. In contrast to *The Crucible* and other fictional retellings of the Salem witch trials, Petry moves Tituba – historically, the first person accused of witchcraft – from the periphery of the story to the centre. Thus, *Tituba of Salem* fulfils what Jerome De Groot considers to be one of the paradigmatic

[54] Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 73.
[55] Ann Petry, *Tituba of Salem Village* (Open Road Media Teen & Tween, 2015), Kindle edition, n. p.

functions of historical fiction, its capacity to be 'a disruptive genre, a series of interventions which have sought to destabilise cultural hegemonies and challenge normalities'.[56]

The novel details Tituba's loneliness in her new home, but also shows her developing deep, meaningful relationships with her master's family and the neighbouring servant girls. The novel also attempts to upend existing historical and literary stereotypes that frame Tituba as a sorceress or voodoo practitioner; it does so by explaining that the slave was taught to read fortunes at the behest of her superstitious mistress: 'She liked to play card games. She liked to have her fortune told. She'd had a gypsy women teach Tituba how to tell fortunes with cards.'[57] As the narrative unfolds and the village of Salem is gripped by fears of witchcraft, Petry delineates how Tituba, an enslaved woman of colour, therefore became a convenient scapegoat for her community. In this way, Petry uses Tituba's story to recover the silenced voices of Black slaves and serving girls, those figures relegated to the margins of history. Like Miller, Petry uses the story of Salem to explore contemporary social issues. However, while Miller constructs the events of seventeenth-century Massachusetts as an analogue for McCarthyism, Petry establishes a parallel with the 'political movements in Black America since the sixties'.[58]

Where Petry's novel coincides with Miller's play is in its portrayal of the destabilising power of adolescent, or occasionally pre-teen, energy. As Lloyd W. Brown observes, Petry renders Abigail Williams as a rebellious figure, desirous of love and attention from those around her.[59] However, Abigail is not the only destructive force present in Petry's Salem. Echoing Starkey's description of a 'store' of bored, directionless Salem girls provoked by the tedium of long winters, Petry likewise depicts the restlessness of the Parris children and other local girls, mostly servants, as the catalyst for the Salem panic.[60] It is their fascination with fortune telling and their desire to know what the future holds that sparks Salem's hysteria. Tempting Mary Warren to have her tarot read by Tituba, Abigail goads her friend to enter the realm of the supernatural by asking: 'Wouldn't you like to know who you're going to marry? And if you're going to have a farm or live in a fine house in Boston? Wouldn't you like to know if you'll have servants so you can box their ears and beat them with brooms? Wouldn't you like to find out?'[61] For the young girls of Petry's Salem – children charged with silence and obedience, or indentured servants desperate for a better future – Tituba's occult practices

[56] Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel* (Routledge, 2010), p. 139.
[57] Petry, *Tituba*.
[58] Lloyd W. Brown, 'Tituba of Barbados and the American Conscience: Historical Perspectives in Arthur Miller and Ann Petry', *Caribbean Studies*, 13 (1974), pp. 118-26 (p. 118).
[59] Brown, p. 125.
[60] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 32.
[61] Petry, *Tituba*.

provide a means for them to transgress the tedious rigidity of their lives and escape to a fantasy world of wondrous future possibilities. Echoing Starkey's portrait of eager teen girls lured to the Parris kitchen by what she calls 'Tituba's fascination', Petry sees much of Salem's misfortune as originating in the frustrations, hopes, and aspirations of disenfranchised young girls.[62]

Grosz notes that such fantasising or daydreaming is essential to the embodied experience of adolescent femininity. For Grosz, because the 'adolescent body is commonly experienced as awkward, alienating, an undesired biological imposition', teenagers are regularly tormented by the 'discord between the body image and the lived body'.[63] She goes on to note that 'the philosophical desire to transcend corporeality and its urges may be dated' from adolescence.[64] Yet, while this analysis may suggest a flight into asceticism and spirituality, it is more often the case, in both fiction and reality, that teenagers escape the pains and bodily eruptions of adolescence by giving themselves over to fantasies in which the self is whole and unified, attractive and in control of its functions. The opportunity to disappear into a fantasy of elegance and wealth enables the Salem girls to transcend their awkward physicality and marginal social position in order to lose themselves in a world of opulence and power.

Later when their interest in fortune telling is discovered by the adults of the village, the girls concoct elaborate tales of bewitchment to account for their behaviour. The 'bound girl', Mercy Lewis, even goes so far as to claim assault by demonic forces in an attempt to disguise her failed elopement with another young servant. The girls' fantasies are wildly disruptive. They upend the social order and invert the rigidly hierarchical structure of Puritan Salem. Again, the excess associated with feminine adolescence, whether corporeal, psychic, or fantastic, poses a danger once it is unleashed. Nevertheless, despite the chaos they engender, the girls themselves, by virtue of their elaborate tales and accusations, come to occupy a privileged position within their community. No longer relegated to silence and invisibility, they are the bright nucleus around which village life orbits. Now, they are treasured and are consequently moved from the margins to the centre of village life. Moreover, many of the girls find that their social category has changed. As adolescents, occupying a nebulous space between girl and woman, their social designation is fluid: before their assault by spiritual forces, they are seen as adults, occupying the role of servants, but once in the grip of supernatural forces, they become children, delicate and in need of care. As Mercy Lewis

[62] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 31.
[63] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 75.
[64] Ibid.

observes: 'Sixteen years old I am and up until now I have been the serving wench. That's what they've always called me and now, now, I am child to be treated tenderly.'[65] The status of the Salem girls is malleable, plastic, and capable of change. In ordinary circumstances, they are viewed as servants, grown women, or 'wenches' occupying a marginal social role. Once their fantasies cast them as supernaturally afflicted and capable of mystical insights, they are treasured and coddled.

Significantly, the girls – all of whom are white – are praised for their daydreaming, all the while using Tituba – a woman of colour – as a blank canvas onto which they project their fantasies of divination and occultism. Mirroring the relationship with her mistress, who had Tituba learn fortune telling for her amusement, the slave woman becomes a means for the white adolescents of Salem to transgress the mundanity of their daily lives. Because of her visible Otherness, she becomes emblematic of an exotic mysticism through which the girls seek to flee the constraints of their strict Puritan community. While the adolescent girls of the village escape into fantasies of witchcraft and are ultimately praised by their elders for their ability to divine the presence of malefactors, Tituba is punished for her fantasising. A slave sold away from her Caribbean home to the unforgiving cold of New England, Tituba frequently dreams of being in Barbados. However, unlike the girls – whose visions of demons and wicked hags result in their being embraced as seers – Tituba is condemned for her fantasies of home, and her imagined returns to the Caribbean are mistaken for the nocturnal flights of witches. When she tells her master that '"I go to Barbados, to the island, in my dreams"', he assumes that sinister magic is at play: '"Then you admit you can be in two places at once."'[66] As a woman of colour, fantasy is dangerous for Tituba. Her dreams do not lead to sympathy from the townspeople, nor to the coddling relished by Mercy Lewis. Certainly, Tituba's status as an adult woman plays a role in her persecution, but more than that, it is her status as a racial Other that leads to her demonisation by the community.

Palladino argues that the vision of teenage girls as mischievous bobby soxers, vacillating between fresh-faced innocence and threatening, precocious sexuality, was never applied to minority adolescents. Rather, in her discussion of the Mexican-American teens who would have been contemporaries of the era's bobby soxers, Palladino describes how Mexican girls, or *Pachuquitas*, whose fashions consisted of short skirts, sheer blouses, red lipstick, and dark makeup, were described by critics as 'little tornados of sexualised stimuli'.[67] In this way,

[65] Petry, *Tituba*.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Palladino, *Teenagers*, p. 159.

while white teenage girls were approached with a great deal of ambivalence, ethnic-minority teenagers were viewed as wholly, unequivocally destructive. Petry's novel captures this double standard. Tituba's fantasies are viewed as diabolically inspired, and therefore carry with them the penalty of hanging. The daydreams of the white teenage girls who keep Tituba company on the margins of their Puritan community are undeniably excessive, seeping out of the girl's fantasies and releasing a persecutory spirit into the town. Yet, as much as the girls are framed as destructive figures within the novel, the response of community elders is one of ambivalence: the Salem afflicted are marginal, often disobedient creatures, yet at the same time, they are embraced for their visionary qualities. *Tituba of Salem Village* is one of the few teen-witch texts to emerge at this time that explicitly addressed the racialised nature of the post-war phenomenon of the teenager. While Tituba is here figured as a grown woman in her 30s, she nevertheless serves as a contrast to the Salem girls, whose destructive daydreams are always tinged by perceptions of innocence. By presenting adolescent and pre-teen girls as possessed of the capability to unleash disruptive fantasies while simultaneously being held aloft as paragons of youthful innocence, Petry's novel suggests that the conflicted image of the bobby soxer that defined post-war America was facilitated by the whiteness of these teenagers. No such ambivalence accrues around women of colour, whether teenagers or adults, and Tituba's dreams arouse neither sympathy nor curiosity. She is demonised by the community and narrowly escapes death by bolstering the girls' tales of diabolical pacts and woodland sabbaths.

In *The Crucible* and *Tituba of Salem Village*, as in Starkey's generative work of historical scholarship, teenage girls are figured as dangerously unstable entities. They exist on the border between adulthood and childhood, while through their corporeal and psychic excesses, they draw attention to the fragile boundary between inside and outside, body and society. In all of these works, the Salem girls – through their preoccupation with the occult and propensity for mediumistic divination – occupy a nebulous space somewhere between witch and bewitched. Thus, these teenage mystics invariably recall Kristeva's formulation of the abject. A phenomenon intimately connected to the dissolution of boundaries, Kristeva's description of the abject conjures up notions of the uncanny, while at the same time remaining 'essentially different from "uncanniness", more violent, too'.[68] For Kristeva, the abject is that which 'does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.'[69] Manifest in blood, excrement, and bodily fluids, as well as in the ultimate

[68] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 5.
[69] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

cataclysm of the corpse, the abject reminds us that those categories and distinctions by which we live and construct our reality are as fragile as gossamer: the law can be violated, taboos broken, and the corporeal body penetrated. According to Barbara Creed, in her discussion of the abject, 'Kristeva is attempting to explore the different ways in which abjection works within human societies, as a means of separating out the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject'.[70] The Salem seeresses of Starkey's history and the occult-obsessed teens of post-war fiction unequivocally embody such notions of the abject. As a new cultural phenomenon, the teen girl demolished the border between child and woman, causing a profound uncertainty as to her identificatory status.

At the same time, it is equally difficult to determine if she is a fully constituted subject or only partially formed, still in the midst of her constitution. Nash writes that '[s]tanding at the crossroads between childhood and womanhood, the teen girl faces Janus-like in both directions, a liminal figure who combines two identities that incite pleasure and anxiety in the adult male'.[71] In this way, the liminality of the teen girl reflects the equally indeterminate nature of the witch. According to Malcolm Gaskill, witches are unique precisely because of their interstitial nature and their confusion of categories: 'witches are human. Unlike monsters, they belong to society – a disguised enemy. They are "other" and yet they are also "us".'[72] Creed also draws attention to this abject, transgressive feature of the sorceress. For Creed, '[t]he witch sets out to unsettle boundaries between the rational and the irrational, symbolic and imaginary. Her powers are seen as part of her "feminine" nature; she is closer to nature than man and can control forces in nature such as tempests, hurricanes and storms.'[73] This motif of womanhood as supernatural due to its connection to nature or the primitive is a recurrent motif in Starkey's historical work on Salem, where she explicitly connects the girls with the irrational: 'During the witchcraft, and to some extent through the witchcraft, thinking people in Massachusetts passed over the watershed that divides the mystery and magic of late medieval thinking from the more rational climate of opinion referred to as "the Enlightenment".'[74] For Starkey, the quasi-supernatural girls of Salem are connected to the medieval, to the 'Dark Ages', while the sceptics and public figures, mostly adult men, who saw the trials brought to their denouement, are associated with progress and enlightenment. Thus, while the Salem girls were viewed as quasi-divine messengers during the early stages of the trials, later histories treat them as

[70] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 1993), p. 8.
[71] Nash, *American Sweethearts*, p. 3.
[72] Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 1.
[73] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 76.
[74] Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, p. 15.

fanatical, irrational girls who become the conduit through which men experience enlightenment and craft civilisation.

Yet, despite the adolescent witch's connection with anxiety-inducing figurations of darkness, transgression, and the abject, there is also a sense in which the teen sorceress can unveil new possibilities for adolescent identity. The heroine of Elizabeth George Speare's young-adult novel *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (1958) earns her status as a teen witch not by engaging in fortune telling or mediumship, but rather because she is seen as a witch by her small New England community. The novel follows a sixteen-year-old girl named Kit Tyler who, in the spring of 1687, leaves Barbados where she had been raised by her doting grandfather to live with austere Puritan relatives in New England. Kit is spoiled and decadent in her ways, arriving in the devout colony with trunks full of silk dresses and delicate kid gloves. She arouses both envy and fascination in her teenage cousins Judith and Mercy, but in particular she raises the ire of her deeply religious uncle Matthew, as well as that of the small, insular community. Before even setting foot in the town, Kit is suspected of witchcraft because she demonstrates the ability to swim and 'a true witch will always float'.[75] Kit, however, is not literally a teenage witch. She does not practice witchcraft and she does not possess magical powers. Yet, the identity of an adolescent witch is projected onto her by the townspeople. Significantly, though, unlike Starkey's bobby soxers, Kit does not reflect fears about the newly emergent teen demographic, but instead serves as a model for responsibility and kindness. According to Ramona Caponegro, 'the allegations of witchcraft against sixteen-year-old Kit, the story's protagonist, are an allegory for the public's panic about juvenile delinquency'.[76] Unlike the directionless adolescents of Starkey's Salem, Kit does not embody the uncontainable power of youthful energy or repressed sexual drive. Instead, she is merely an outsider, coming from Barbados with her 'Royalist loyalties, Anglican faith, and proslavery beliefs'.[77] She is strange by the standards of her new home: she can read, she dives into the river to rescue a little girl's lost doll, and her friendship with an old Quaker woman leads to her being further ostracised and persecuted by the narrow-minded Puritan community. She arouses disdain and suspicion amongst the townspeople primarily because she displays traits typical of a mid-twentieth-century American teenager: she has a love of fashionable clothing and a distaste for chores.

[75] Elizabeth George Speare, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (Houghton Mifflin, 2011), p. 13.
[76] Ramona Caponegro, 'Where the "Bad" Girls Are (Contained): Representations of the 1950s Female Juvenile Delinquent in Children's Literature and *Ladies' Home Journal*', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 34 (2009), pp. 312-29 (p. 323), doi:10.1353/chq.0.1941.
[77] Caponegro, 'Where the "Bad" Girls Are', p. 324.

However, Speare does not conflate witchcraft with conventional signifiers of adolescence in order to reflect pervasive post-war concerns about juvenile delinquents, nor to depict teens as disruptive. Instead, Speare links adolescence with the seventeenth-century witchcraft trials in order to condemn contemporary social panics about teens as dangerous, ignorant, and destructive. Kit Tyler emerges from *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* as a capable and self-reliant heroine. She triumphs through her wit, intelligence, and determination. Anticipating late twentieth-century figurations of the teenage witch as role model – Willow Rosenberg from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) might be one of the most enduring examples – Kit is brave and resourceful; she is not hemmed in by the expectations of the era, and she defies social convention for the sake of authenticity. In her Introduction to the 2011 edition of the book, author Karen Cushman writes that through the character of Kit Tyler, young girls may learn important lessons such as 'the value of being yourself, fighting for what you believe in, taking care of those who need care, seeing beauty in things that might ordinarily seem plain, building friendships and community, and the importance of hard work'.[78] From Cushman's perspective, the image of the teen witch typified by Kit Tyler is not reflective but generative; she opens up new horizons and possibilities for adolescent self-actualisation.

Consequently, the teen-witch archetype that emerges from Starkey's study is not simply an empty vessel into which an anxious adult population can pour its anxieties about the uncanny strangeness of adolescent girl. She also serves as a model, a template for the construction of a new, more expansive vision of adolescence, one defined by the values of mid-century liberalism. In their study of identity construction and young-adult fiction, Jessica Kokesh and Miglena Sternadori conducted interviews with a large sample of teenage girls in the early 2000s.[79] Their findings concluded that the majority of these girls use young-adult novels 'as a guide to life'.[80] Focusing on the process of identification – how readers receive and understand texts as if they were part of them – Kokesh and Sternadori note that '[i]dentification is one of the main mechanisms through which people develop their social attitudes and construct their identities'.[81] In particular, their research demonstrates that adolescents' identifications with female protagonists in young-adult novels 'may be one of the factors contributing to their gender identity construction, actions, or performance, perhaps occasionally beyond their

[78] Karen Cushman, 'Introduction', in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, by Elizabeth George Speare (Houghton Mifflin, 2011), pp. v-ix (p. vi).
[79] Jessica Kokesh and Miglena Sternadori, 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: A Qualitative Study of How Young Adult Fiction Affects Identity', *Atlantic Communication*, 23.3 (2015), pp. 139-58 (p. 139), doi:10.1080/15456870.2015.1013104.
[80] Kokesh and Sternadori, 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly', p. 139.
[81] Kokesh and Sternadori, p. 142.

awareness'.[82] Works such as *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* frame witchcraft not only as an allegory for contemporary public panics about juvenile delinquency, but as a metaphor for difference and intolerance, as well as a moral lesson on the necessity of generosity and acceptance.

Significantly, Kit's Quaker friend, Hannah, is also accused of witchcraft. Unlike Miller's and Petry's texts, there is no fortune telling or transgressive fantasy in Speare's novel. Indeed, there is no trace of the occult at all. The figure of the witch, or rather accused witch, does not embody corporeal excess or subversive desire. Instead, the accused witch becomes an avatar of independence, selflessness, and compassion. As the novel progresses, Kit matures from a spoiled, selfish girl into a tolerant and compassionate young woman, risking execution and the stigma of a witchcraft accusation to protect her friends. She even renounces her previous materialism, embracing the status of outsider bestowed on her by the accusation of witchcraft because it allows her to be true to herself. Breaking off her engagement with a wealthy but dull young man whose fortune had once enticed her, Kit stresses the value of self-reliance: 'I'd like to live in a fine house. But not if it means I have to be an example. Not if it means I can't choose my own friends.'[83] In this way, Speare's work represents a move away from the figuration of witchcraft as a mode of historical horror and towards the model of aspirational witchcraft that would characterise later iterations of trope. In particular, both the ABC sitcom *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003) and the darker *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* present their heroines as admirable characters who grow and mature in a manner that allows viewers to construct them as role models or identificatory templates. The witch is an outsider, but she powerful, admirable, and strong. Through identifying with 'witches' like Kit Tyler, adolescent girls can construct a gender identity, an understanding of womanhood, defined by self-reliance and intellect.

Conclusion

In contemporary film and television, teenage witches abound. They are, following Kit's example, formidable and subversive figures. Often their narrative trajectory sees them strive to dismantle or escape from patriarchal social structures that marginalise and silence them. In recent years, in the wake of movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp, teen witches such as the reimagined 2018 Sabrina Spellman and *The VVitch*'s Thomasin have served as a powerful

[82] Kokesh and Sternadori, 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly', p. 142.
[83] Speare, *The Witch*, p. 230.

means of engaging with issues of autonomy, consent, and identity. However, as I have demonstrated, the teen witch is not a new phenomenon. She has existed for as long as the teenager has been a visible demographic or a subject of public discourse. In her earliest incarnations, she was produced out of a pervasive adult concern with teen behaviour and juvenile delinquency, a trope crystallised by writers such as Starkey, who saw in the fanatical girls of Salem an analogue for their own fears about modern adolescence. However, in as much as teen girls and their connection with the occult mirrored adult concerns about transgression and rebellion, the teenage witch also proved instrumental in shaping modern formulations of adolescence.

Works such as Starkey's *The Devil in Massachusetts* were not only reacting to post-war anxieties about the strange new phenomenon of the teenager; they were also integral in constituting adolescent girls as mischievous, transgressive, and perhaps even dangerous. Yet, Starkey's conflation of witchcraft and adolescence also allowed for the emergence of powerful, independent models of femininity that would ultimately enable young women to imagine new possibilities for themselves as independent subjects. In the decades that followed Starkey's reconceptualisation of the Salem afflicted as uncontrollable, hormonal teens, popular cultural constructions of the witch underwent unprecedented transformations. The rise of occultism and alternative spiritualities in the 1960s, as well as the reappropriation of the witch as a feminist icon, enabled associations with witchcraft to accrue a plethora of unprecedented, positive connotations. In works like Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) and Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (1972), witches came to represent, not always in a historically accurate manner, the persecution of wilful women by patriarchal structures, and (proto)feminist resistance against those structures. Incorporating this more affirming vision of the witch, contemporary teenage sorceresses are enabled to move beyond Starkey's (and Miller's) construction of adolescent witches as beholden to uncontrollable pubescent bodies that bleed, leak, and seep. *The VVitch* and *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* present teen witches who exert agency over their bodies, determining for themselves how to use their powers and for whose benefit. Thus, in *The VVitch*, Thomasin is viewed as a threat to social and family stability because she has recently experienced menarche. However, while her corporeality is initially framed as uncontainable and dangerous, a source of anxiety for her family, at the end of the film, she makes the decision to become a witch. She chooses to 'live deliciously', determining

to procure for herself a life of pleasure, controlling both her body and her destiny.[84] Likewise, in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, the title character refuses to choose between becoming a full-fledged witch or aligning herself with her mortal (human) friends, instead inhabiting a decidedly liminal and contingent identity over the course of the series.

Thomasin and Sabrina are the descendants of Starkey's unstable gaggle of bobby soxers. While the evolutionary strains that carried the teen witch from the hysterical girls of Salem to the powerful pubescent sorceresses of modern popular culture cannot be fully traced in this brief article, it is clear that their lineage stretches back to that moment in the mid-twentieth century when the teen girl seemed so new, so threatening, that she appeared almost supernatural.

[84] *The VVitch*, dir. by Robert Eggers (A24, 2015).