



Which Face of Witch: Self-Representations of Women as Witches in Works of Contemporary British Women Writers

Adriana Madej-Stang

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For centuries, the figure of the witch represented the hostile and feared other on the edge of human society, placed in between the world of people and the world of demons. Whether she stood for the untamed powers of nature, dark powers of knowledge or magic, or evil powers derived from the devil, she was always identified with fear as a disturbance, as a danger to the order of society and to the well-being of those who understood themselves as settled within the borders of the patriarchal order and its psychological and sexual corselet. In this role, the witch appeared in numerous literary works, including, among others, writings by Chaucer, Shakespeare and Middleton. However, since the 1840s, the image of the witch has undergone enormous transformations, mainly due to the influence of various matriarchate theories and of feminist ideas. The witch, reclaimed by women for women, became an identification figure and representative of their expectations, fears, hopes and claims. This study investigates examples of witches in publications by contemporary British women writers to see how this figure is perceived, related to, and utilised in their respective texts. Iris Murdoch, Jeanette Winterson, Angela Carter and Fay Weldon, among others, refer consistently to this witch figure, whom they interpret in various creative and surprising ways, adopting innovative approaches to this comparably ancient figure.

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