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Ideological Approaches to Nature and Female Body in Witch Poems*

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Abstract

Witch poems that have female figures associated with wilderness and the occult display different ideologies about nature and female body. Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale* (c. 1476) discusses the medieval idea favouring youth, health and fertility, and shows the degradation of an old witch due to her aged and infertile body. Revealing eighteenth-century discourse that values nurture and elegance, Robert Burns's *Tam o'Shanter* (1791) portrays witches that are stigmatised as creatures associated with lust, ugliness and savagery. On the other hand, John Keats's *Lamia* (1820), which advocates nineteenth century Romantic ideology claiming the superiority of the wild and the untouched, denounces a serpent-woman who despises her natural, half-animal body. Having been influenced by feminist movements in the twentieth century which protest the domination of women and nature, Ann Sexton dignifies witches in *Her Kind* (1960) due to their closeness to nature and their challenge against patriarchal hegemony. The aim of the present study is to understand the role of witch poems in imposing the dominant ideologies about nature and female body through examining the mentioned poems.

Key Words: Witch poems, ideology, nature, female body.

Witch poems are considered to be works written to satisfy human interest in supernatural stories and characters, however they are not just a means of satisfying the interest in the supernatural and occult because they are also an instrument of imposing the dominant ideology about nature and female body. This work explores the relationship between nature and female body in witch poems through studying Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, Robert Burns's *Tam o'Shanter*, John Keats's *Lamia*, and Ann Sexton's *Her Kind*. Exploring the images of witches in the mentioned poems, the present study aims to argue that stigmatization of witches is related with the degradation of nature and women.

The word "witch" generally connotes a female figure who is distinguished with a flying broom, long black dress, and deformed body. This image is made familiar through "cartoons," "TV commercials" and "Halloween," so it can be regarded as a part of "popular entertainment" (Kerns, 2010, p. 5). Witches also occupy a certain place in literature: sometimes they are

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depicted as "old and mean trying to harm people or cause trouble", sometimes as "funny or good" (Kerns, 2010, p. 5). The roots of this dualistic view can be traced back to ancient times. Although such witches as Medea and Circe were portrayed as young and beautiful, there were those who were depicted as "old, ugly, scary women" (Kerns, 2010, p. 13-14). The view of nature was also dualistic since although nature was respected by the Greeks and the Romans as "more basic," "more ancient" and "more venerable," it was also considered inferior to men, who are gifted with mental abilities (Ferkiss, 1993, pp. 4-6). The dualistic view of witches, women, and nature can be observed in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, *Tam o'Shanter*, *Lamia* and *Her Kind* that associate witches with nature and female body.

The Wife of Bath's Tale manifests the medieval view that both respects and despises nature and female body. The common approach towards nature and women was dualistic in the Middle Ages as the qualities attributed to them were both positive and negative (Ferkiss, 1993, pp. 19-29). Nature was respected as an object reflecting the perfectness of God, but it was also regarded as inferior to man who was associated with the spiritual and intellectual aspect of creation (Ferkiss, 1993, pp. 19-20). In the same manner, women were both privileged due to their abilities of reproduction and feeding their infants, but they were despised as creatures identified with "body, lust, weakness and irrationality" (Bynum, 1991, p. 202). Therefore, it is not astonishing to note that in the medieval period women accused of witchcraft were generally "poor or elderly, and a majority were unmarried" (Thomsett, 2010, p. 108). Poor women were the group that felt a great oppression as medieval society "could hardly afford to support ill, unemployed, or unproductive members" due to economic problems (Ben-Yehuda, 1980, pp. 17-18). On the other hand, old woman, who "was a symbol of death" and whose "body merely a skeleton of flesh and bones," was seen as "the incarnation of evil," an image associated with neo-platonic idea that ugliness represents evil (Maerten, 2000, p. 4). The fact that unmarried women were the likely victims is related with "[the] fear of women as seducers" who can tempt men if they are not put under male control through marriage (Maerten, 2000, p. 4).

The mechanism of stigmatisation operates in Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale* which reveals the medieval ideas on nature, female body and witches. The untamed nature and the old, malformed body of a witch are stigmatised in the poem to enforce the medieval discourse that appreciates nurture against nature, obedience against revolt, and youth and beauty against old age and ugliness. In the poem, a young knight in King Arthur's court rapes a young woman, for which he is sentenced to death by the king. However, his death sentence is retreated due to the request of the queen who wants the knight to find out what women want most in the world. When the knight visits a wood, he sees a group of women, to whom he decides to ask the queen's question:

> Suddenly, at the margin of a wood,
> He [the knight] saw a dance upon the leafy floor
> Of four and twenty ladies, nay, and more.
> Eagerly he approached, in hope to learn
> Some words of wisdom ere he should return;
> But lo! Before he came to where they were,
> Dancers and dance all vanished into air!
> There wasn't a living creature to be seen
> Save one old woman crouched upon the green.
> A fouler-looking creature I suppose
> Could scarcely be imagined. (Chaucer, 1977, p. 303)

As the group disappears upon his approach, the knight just sees a poor and old woman who turns out to be a witch. The old, deformed witch and the wild, virgin nature represented by a wood are marginalised since they deviate from the medieval patriarchal ideology that praises nature and women as beautiful, fertile and obedient bodies. The wood is marked as a place connected with threat and mystery for it becomes home to mysterious ladies "vanish[ing] into air" (Chaucer, 1977, p. 303). The negative image of the wood is paralleled with the negative image of the witch who is introduced as "old" and "fouler-looking" (Chaucer, 1977, p. 303). The fact that the old witch is depicted in negative terms is related with the socio-cultural atmosphere of the medieval period. In the middle ages, young, healthy and rich women, who were appreciated due to their fertility or material wealth, were put into "segregated settings" in order to be protected from the outside world full of sins and temptations (Gilchrist, 1994, p. 57). On the other hand, "poor, aged and infirm" women were not viewed as valuable enough to be defended against the evils of public sphere, so their deformed bodies could be displayed in medieval hospitals for money (Gilchrist, 1994, p. 49). In the light of these facts, the old witch may be regarded as an outcast whose body is devalued for it is disfigured and infertile. However, her ugliness and poverty grant her a quasi-freedom because her body that suffers from old age and poverty is not exposed to patriarchal protection which is reserved only for young, fertile and rich ladies. Therefore, she can wander in wilderness without male accompaniment and escape from domestic imprisonment. Her old age also gives her some superiority over the young knight who needs her wisdom to answer the queen's question. Since "old women know a thing or two" due to their life experiences, the haggard witch uses her power of knowledge to convince the knight to do anything she desires in exchange for his life (Chaucer, 1977, p. 303).

The fact that the knight, a typical patriarch who values beauty and fertility, makes an agreement with a woman degraded because of her physical deficiencies disturbs patriarchal hegemony over female body that is associated with nature. Having declared the witch's answer at King Arthur's court, the knight is subjugated by the old woman who wants to "keep [his] word and take [her] for [his] wife" (Chaucer, 1977, p. 304). However, the knight protests the idea of union with a deformed, poor woman: "Alas that any of my race and station / Should ever make so foul a misalliance!" (Chaucer, 1977, p. 305). As a young rich man, the knight rejects degrading himself by taking an "ancient wife" that challenges the ideal female image associated with elegance, regeneration, and obedience (Chaucer, 1977, p. 305). In spite of his protests, the knight cannot persuade the witch to "leave [his] body free," and has nothing but to submit to her will (Chaucer, 1977, p. 305).

An old woman's claim on a young, fertile male body poses a threat to patriarchal autonomy which is based on the manipulation of female body for reproduction and nurture. Medieval society respecting women's capacities for reproduction and feeding justified the stigmatisation of old body through considering old age as "the stage of life in which the person goes into a physical and mental decline [and] develops negative qualities" (Shahar, 2004, p. 4). Unpleasant effects of old age were largely attributed to poor women who were associated with "the end of menstruation," a period in which "the old woman was capable of producing poison" since she can no longer get rid of menstrual blood considered to be "an impure and dangerous substance" (Shahar, 2004, p. 44). While the end of menstruation points to the end of reproduction, the fact that old body cannot produce milk any more means old woman cannot perform her duty to feed her child (Shahar, 2004, p. 49). However, although the old witch in *Wife of Bath's Tale* lacks the procreative ability to give birth to children, or nurture her offspring, she claims her right to have a sexual and emotional relationship with a young man. Hence, she refuses to be treated as an outcast due to old age and poverty, or to let her body be victimised by patriarchal policies that disregard women as means of procreation.

The old witch defies patriarchal domination through refusing to be an object of desire or an agent of reproduction by convincing the knight to accept a non-procreative marriage, but still her challenge is problematic. According to the knight "[i]t was such torture that his wife looked foul," and continues to despise her due to her age and social status although they have been married (Chaucer, 1977, p. 305). He calls her "old," "abominably plain," "poor," and "low-bred," and marks her body as an icon of physical anomaly through refusing to have sex with her (Chaucer, 1977, p. 306). Although the knight disgraces her, the old witch does not resist her husband's insults, and she wants to "fulfill [his] worldly appetites" rather than making him accept her as she is (Chaucer, 1977, p. 309). Therefore, the witch transforms herself into a pretty woman to satisfy the knight's desire to have a young beautiful wife:

> [W]hen … the knight had looked to see,
> Lo, she was young and lovely, rich in charms.
> In ecstasy he caught her in his arms,
> His heart went bathing in a bath of blisses
> And melted in a hundred thousand kisses,
> And she responded in the fullest measure
> With all that could delight or give him pleasure.
> So they lived ever after to the end
> In perfect bliss; … (Chaucer, 1977, p. 310)

This problematic submission to the husband's will to possess a young, healthy female body makes it impossible for the witch to assert her autonomy on her body and individual identity. In this way, she becomes a traditional medieval woman whose beauty, fertility, and chastity are preserved in domestic sphere, namely the house of the knight. Since she accepts to be young and pretty for her husband who is a representative of patriarchy, she forces herself to abide by the patriarchal norms which degrade women and nature as inferior beings. Furthermore, the transformed witch allows her body to be controlled by her husband, who gives her "a hundred thousand kisses" in return for her submission to his will to have a pretty wife (Chaucer, 1977, p. 310). The problematic side of the "perfect bliss" (Chaucer, 1977, p. 310) claimed to be had by the witch and the knight thereafter, on the other hand, is that it is achieved at the expense of the witch's denial of her old body which is stigmatised by medieval patriarchal ideology. The witch also has to deny her individual female identity associated with the wild nature where she can act freely without feeling any social oppression.

Like in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, nature uncontrolled by human beings and old, ugly, unhealthy bodies of witches are stigmatized in Robert Burns's *Tam o'Shanter*, a poem which is about a drunkard man's encounter with witches in wilderness. Written in 1791, the poem imposes eighteenth-century aesthetic view of nature and female body. The eighteenth century was a time of important technological and industrial developments and witnessed the glorification of "man and human reason" (Ferkiss, 1993, p. 54). In this period, nature was conquered by human beings by means of technology and this fact, in turn, inspired the idea that "nature altered by man was superior to an unaltered nature" (Ferkiss, 1993, p. 56). Therefore, wild nature associated with "mountains and wilderness" was considered to be inferior to "tamed and cultivated European gardens and landscapes" in terms of "the idea of the *beautiful*" (Carlson, 2007, para. 3).

Considering these facts, it is not surprising that cultivation and delicacy were two terms associated with an ideal female body in the eighteenth century, and women's bodies were

supposed to be cultivated through being covered with "clothes [which] were not made to be functional, but rather to be admired" (Volkwein-Caplan, 2004, p. 205). Degraded as passive, aesthetic objects, women were believed to be "less perfect, secondary beings" (Stafford, 2002, p. 63). Women were also given such domestic roles as "childbearing and suckling," and their bodies were viewed as "soft and delicate, whereas men's [were] hard and tough" (Stafford, 2002, p. 64). Moreover, women, unlike men, were supposed to be "less sexually motivated," and it was claimed that "good women were not interested in sex at all" (Stafford, 2002, p. 64).

Still, medical discourse which was adopted till the late eighteenth century described "all fertile female bodies … as pleasure-seeking regardless of the chastity of the individual woman," and women's sexual power was considered to be a threat to patriarchal autonomy (Rosenthal, 1999, p. 71). Patriarchal society attempted to control women's sexual power through marriage and motherhood, therefore women were expected to have healthy bodies to fulfil their role to reproduce, which "relegated women to the private world of home and family and prevented them from involving themselves in any sort of public role either as workers or as citizens" (Sheffield, 2004, p. 40). Furthermore, women's submission to patriarchal authority was enforced through social norms that defined women's morality "in such terms as complaisance, gentleness, forbearance, and sensitivity" (Sheffield, 2004, p. 40). Accordingly, eighteenth century patriarchal ideology constrained women's bodily and mental powers through describing women as passive, inferior beings.

Tam o'Shanter enforces eighteenth-century notion of beauty which focused on nurture and elegance through victimising untamed nature and old, ugly female body. Wild nature is depicted as a place inhabited by Satan "full of lust," an old man "in the shape of beast," and "[w]arlocks and witches" who are lost in a wild dance (Burns, n.d.). The untamed nature is also related with such dreadful images as "[a] murderer's bones in gibbet-irons," "[t]wo span-long, wee, unchristened babies," "[a] thief, newly cut from a rope," "[f]ive tomahawks, with blood red-rested," and "[f]ive scimitars, with murder crusted" (Burns, n.d.). These images connoting savagery and violence construct a negative picture of wilderness depicted as a dangerous place posing a threat to the structure of civilised life characterised by science, reason and order. In this way, wild nature is set against cultivated nature, which leads readers to view wilderness as bleak, threatening and abominable. Likewise, Burns draws an ideal portrait of female body through stigmatising old witches whose bodies are too deformed to be appreciated by eighteenth-century society favouring nurtured beauty:

> … had these [old, ugly witches] been queens,
> All plump and strapping in their teens,
> Their underskirts, instead of greasy flannel,
> Been snow-white seventeen hundred linn!
> …
> But withered crones, old and droll,
> Ugly hags would wean a foal
> Leaping and flinging on a stick,
> I wonder that it did not turn your stomach! (Burns, n.d.)

Giving voice to Enlightenment ideology about beauty that values health, youth and elegance, Tam, the drunkard anti-hero, desires to meet young, pretty women instead of aged, unattractive witches. However, it is wrong to claim that witches are victimised just because of their advanced age and deformed bodies because a young poor witch from "Carrick shore" is also denounced (Burns, n.d.). Notwithstanding her youth and beauty, the pretty witch is depicted as a wicked, vicious female figure that shot "many a beast to dead," "perished many a bonnie boat," and

"kept the country-side in fear" (Burns, n.d.). The main reason behind her denunciation is that her young, beautiful body which is not under male control is imagined as the embodiment of lust, a primitive desire disapproved by eighteenth-century people approving nurture and civility.

The claims about the stigmatisation of witches in *Tam o'Shanter* can also be set in a historical context. A majority of women accused of witchcraft in Salem witch trials of 1692 were "elderly and unattractive" (Thomsett, 2010, p. 108), or they were unmarried persons blamed for "using sex for corrupting the world on behalf of Satan," (Ben-Yehuda, 1980, p. 22) and "nearly one in six of the witches [who were married] was childless" (Demos, 2004, p. 72). These details about women sentenced for witchcraft show that those who were elderly, ugly, poor, unmarried or married but childless were under the threat of being labelled as bad, ugly, or evil. Therefore, Burns reflects the common opinion of his society while denouncing old, ugly witches and a young, beautiful witch who is poor, single and childless.

In the early nineteenth century, the notion of beauty underwent a radical change due to Romantic view that revealed "a strengthened interest in nature for its own sake" and appreciated "wilderness, defined as land untouched by man" (Ferkiss, 1993, p. 56). Therefore, aesthetic understanding of Romantic-era tended to regard "the whole of the natural environment and especially wild nature as aesthetically beautiful and to find ugliness primarily where nature was subject to human intrusion" (Carlson, 2007, para. 6). In the same way, the understanding of female beauty changed dramatically because "[d]uring the nineteenth century, society focused more on spirituality than on physical matters" (Volkwein-Caplan, 2004, p. 205). Therefore, Romantic writers, like Shelly and Keats, depicted witches who were associated with the wild, untouched nature as powerful figures that were "the dominator of action and narrative" (Bruton, 2013, p. 30). Moreover, those witches that attracted attentions with their beauty and youth were not dismissed as vicious temptresses, but they were pictured in more positive terms "as prisoners of their magic forces and their … fatal beauty" (Maerten, 2000, p. 9). All in all, it can be assumed that in the Romantic age the emphasis shifted from physical beauty to spiritual merits, and this shift of focus is well displayed in *Lamia*, which shows the tragic end of a serpent-woman who pays dearly for her desire to have a beautiful and attractive female body.

In *Lamia* (1820) Keats enforces the Romantic idea that the wild and untouched is superior to the tamed and civilized through considering untamed nature and a serpent-woman beautiful and charming. Keats divides his poem into two sections in order to show the contrast between the beauty of wilderness and repulsiveness of nurtured city life. In the first part, he portrays Lamia, an enchanting witch having such feminine qualities as "a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete," "fair" eyes, and a "honey" voice (1820, pp. 6, 7). This fascinating character dwells in "the green-recessed woods" among "the grass and flowers sweet," and "bow'd branches green," that is, she lives in the very heart of wild nature (Keats, 1820, pp. 11, 9). Lamia largely owes her charm and power to her snakeskin which is "[v]ermillion-spotted, golden, green, and blue" and to her "fair" eyes charming both Hermes, a lovesick god, and Lycius, a young handsome man from Corinth (Keats, 1820, pp. 6, 7). However, Lamia loses all her power and charm when she decides to leave her "serpent prison-house" (Keats, 1820, p. 15) so that she can have a young, beautiful female body:

> … in moments few, she was undrest
> Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,
> And rubious-argent: of all these bereft,
> Nothing but pain and ugliness were left. (Keats, 1820, p. 12)

The painful transformation of Lamia's body is important in that it supports the Romantic idea that unnatural intrusions to natural bodies bring about nothing but ugliness. It is also important to note that Lamia's physical change accompanies the change in her character. Once she sees her new, transformed reflection in "a clear pool," (Keats, 1820, p. 13) Lamia gets so arrogant that she tries to persuade Lycius, who is charmed by her unnatural beauty, to leave the wild forest, her natural habitat associated with primitiveness for Corinth, a city symbolizing nurture:

> Thou canst not ask me with thee here to roam
> Over these hills and vales, where no joy is, -
> Empty of immortality and bliss!
> Thou art a scholar, Lycius, and must know
> That finer spirits cannot breathe below
> In human climes, and live ... (Keats, 1820, p. 19)

Lamia condemns untamed nature as a place lacking "joy," "immortality," and "bliss" because it is devoid of such things essential for "finer spirits" as elegance, ostentation and cultivation (Keats, 1820, p. 19). However, the second part illustrating her movement from wilderness to urban life shows that Corinth is not the right place for her wild, free spirit to live in. Lamia actually has a "wild and timid nature" (Keats, 1820, p. 31) yearning for "solitude" so she feels uneasy when she finds herself under "common eyes" of "dreadful guests" (Keats, 1820, pp. 35, 36). Moreover, she cannot act freely in the banquet-room "[f]ill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume," adorned with "woolf-woofed carpets" and "silk seats" (Keats, 1820, pp. 37, 38) according to "mad pompousness" of Lycius (Keats, 1820, p. 33). The stifling air of elegancy becomes more disturbing for Lamia when she sees among the guests "the sage, old Apollonius" who represents "cold philosophy" whose "meer touch" makes "all charms fly" (Keats, 1820, pp. 40, 41). Lamia meets her tragic end when Apollonius reveals her true identity: "'A Serpent!' echoed he [Apollonius]; no sooner said, / Than with a frightful scream she vanished" (Keats, 1820, p. 45). In this way, Keats scorns tamed, cultivated nature lacking the magnificence of wild nature and despises the female figure that denies her natural body and values elegance over her natural charm.

The changes in the images of witches in the twentieth century show parallel with the change in the attitude to nature and women. First-wave ecocriticism, which was influential in the late twentieth century, aimed to challenge the conventional idea that man is superior to nature and he can exploit it through claiming "the natural world is … an active participant in the formation and transformation of human culture and society" (Rigby, 2002, p. 158). Ecofeminism, on the other hand, bases its argument on binary oppositions between nature and culture, feminine and masculine (Nayar, 2010). Ecofeminists criticize patriarchal society that relates nature with such feminine qualities as "reproduction and nurture" and attributes masculine qualities to culture in order to "dominate both women and nature" (Nayar, 2010, p. 250). Moreover, feminist movements in the twentieth century resulted in the association of witches with "a positive symbol, representing the rediscovery of the power and the possibilities of women" (Maerten, 2000, p. 10).

Written in 1960, Ann Sexton's *Her Kind* can be read from ecocritical and feminist perspectives. The poet identifies herself with three different witches who have challenged patriarchal norms restricting their sphere of power. In the first stanza Sexton (2009) associates herself with a deformed witch described as a powerful female figure who can go out at night without a male companion and who has control over human life thanks to her occult powers:

I have gone out, a possessed witch,
haunting the black air, braver at night;
dreaming evil, I have done my hitch
over the plain houses, light by light:
lonely thing, twelve-fingered, out of mind.
A woman like that is not a woman, quite.
I have been her kind. (p. 684)

The poet challenges medieval ideology which stigmatises women who display marginal behaviours or whose bodies have "extra fingers, extra toes, birthmarks or moles" (Illes, 2010, p. 262). Although her power is ignored by the patriarchal voice calling her "lonely thing, twelve fingered, out of mind," the "possessed witch" is a powerful character controlling "the black air" through "dreaming evil" and performing her "hitch" (Sexton, 2009, p. 684). Not only does she have control over her environment, but she also has the autonomy of her body as she is not imprisoned into a domestic area represented by "the plain houses" (Sexton, 2009, p. 684). Instead, she inhabits "the black air" connoting the wild, dark nature which serves as the real home for the witch who feels "braver at night" (Sexton, 2009, p. 684). Moreover, the fact that she is a "lonely thing" means she does not have to share the property in her body with a male figure that would call her "out of mind" if she disregarded social rules (Sexton, 2009, p. 684).

The second stanza, on the other hand, illustrates a witch who goes against the conventional values bidding women to take care of their home and children. Rejecting marriage and motherhood, the witch chooses caves as her home instead of a comfortable patriarchal house where she is expected to deal with domestic affairs:

I have found the warm caves in the woods,
filled them with skillets, carvings, shelves,
closets, silks, innumerable goods;
fixed the suppers for the worms and the elves:
whining, rearranging the disaligned.
A woman like that is misunderstood.
I have been her kind. (Sexton, 2009, p. 684)

Since the witch's home is in the breast of untamed nature and she prepares "the suppers for the worms and the elves," she is associated with the wild and primitive, which makes her an undesirable figure in conventional patriarchal society favouring nurture and elegance (Sexton, 2009, p. 684). Excluding herself from patriarchal society, the witch does not allow her body to be regarded as an object kept in a patriarchal house as an inferior entity. Furthermore, she defies the traditional dichotomy between nature and nurture. She attributes a home-like quality to the "caves in the woods" by calling them "warm," an adjective suggesting a civilised house heated pleasantly, and she adorns the inside of the caves with products of civilization, like "skillets," "carvings," "shelves," "closets" and "silks" (Sexton, 2009, p. 684). Bringing the things associated with civilization into the caves related with wild nature, the witch removes the divisions between culture and nature, the tame and savage, the civilized and uncivilized.

In the last stanza, Sexton refers to witch hunts in Medieval and early modern Europe and illustrates a woman who is condemned to death for witchcraft. The so-called witch is carried in a "cart" most probably to be burned at the stake since she says that "[her] ribs crack" and "flames still bite [her] thigh" (Sexton, 2009, p. 684). Although she is about to die, the woman does not feel any fear, but she is cheerful enough to wave "[her] nude arms at villages going

by" (Sexton, 2009, p. 684). Talking about her "nude arms," "thigh," and "rib" unreservedly, she is condemned as a temptress who is "not ashamed to die" (Sexton, 2009, p. 684). Since the witch depicts her body boldly, she challenges the moral values of patriarchal society, which expects women to be pure, passionless beings that are not indulged in their bodies. That is why she is marked as a female outcast and punished for her will to emancipate her mind and body from patriarchal bondage. Associating herself with this female figure that is labelled as an unashamed temptress due to her rejection of patriarchal domination, Sexton reveals her desire to break the taboo about female body related with purity and chastity. Furthermore, through referring to the witch hunts of middle and early modern ages in which both nature and women were dominated by patriarchal men, Sexton attacks the conventional mindset which justifies patriarchal hegemony.

Dealing with the relationship between nature and female body in a socio-cultural context, *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, *Tam o'Shanter, Lamia* and *Her Kind* reveal the prevalent attitude of their own periods to wilderness and women. In *The Wife of Bath's Tale* wild nature and old, unattractive female body are stigmatised within the frame of medieval ideology favouring youth, health and fertility. *Tam o'Shanter*, on the other hand, imposes eighteenth-century view valuing nurture against the wild and primitive through despising the old, ugly and unhealthy bodies of witches dancing in wilderness. However, *Lamia* discusses nineteenth century aesthetic ideology that holds superior the wild and natural against the civilised and nurtured, and condemns a serpent-woman for her desire to have a young and beautiful female body. *Her Kind*, on the other hand, criticises the domination of nature and female body from twentieth-century perspective and focuses on the exploitation of women and nature through putting three different witches against the social norms marking them as outcasts. Accordingly, in the mentioned poems, witches that challenge dominant ideologies about nature and femininity are ostracized as malevolent and abnormal beings.

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