

Foreword

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This special issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica* is devoted to a research topic developed in a project supported by the Ministry of Education and Research, in a grant UEFISCDI PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0067, contract number 135/2018, with the title *Iconography of Witchcraft, an Anthropological Approach: Cinema, Theatre, Visual Arts* (IWACTA). In the Romanian cultural context, the implementation of the project seemed very important from a scientific and institutional point of view, by its possibilities of making some significant contributions to the field of visual anthropology.

The research team, composed by Ioan Pop-Curșeu, Delia Enyedi, Daria Ioan, Rareș Stoica and Valer Cosma, intended to analyze how the witch was represented in cinema, theatre, visual arts, and how the fascinating iconography of witchcraft was related to complex socio-cultural structures, practices and interactions. In this respect, we built complex repertoires of movies, theatrical shows and visual representations of witches in cultural spaces all over the world. We worked on iconographical typologies, trying to understand what determines the apparition and development of such typologies, by using a very strict historicist approach that took into account all the details of the studied phenomena.

It is true that the scientific approaches to witchcraft, as a social and cultural phenomenon, are very complex and that many aspects have been addressed and systematized by previous researches, as shown in some works

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with an encyclopedic profile.¹ Nonetheless, there are still many aspects to be discovered and analyzed. For example, the iconography of witchcraft has been a main research topic for Charles Zika, but only regarding the 16th-17th centuries and the images in the limited sense of the word (paintings, engravings, drawings).² The theatrical iconography of the witch, not very often addressed by researchers, deserves a better scientific place, because the theatre was a great reservoir of socio-cultural representations of witchcraft, for example in Elizabethan England – as shown by Diane Purkiss.³ But, besides Shakespeare and Elizabethan dramatists, there are still many aspects to be discovered in the multi-layered link between theatre and witchcraft.

During the implementation of the project, the IWACTA research team organized an international conference, at the Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, between the 17th and the 19th of October 2019. We tried to bring together eminent scholars of witchcraft, Ph.D. students, visual artists and performers who presented their researches to a large and very interested audience. The participants came from 15 different countries (including Romania) and most of the continents were represented in Cluj: Europe, Africa, Australia, North America... The papers presented at the IWACTA conference were stimulating and solid, so our research team was able to make a characteristic selection for this special issue of *Studia*. This issue will be paralleled by a thematic volume, to be published later in 2020, gathering other significant scientific contributions delivered during the Iwacta conference.

¹ *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. The Western Tradition*, Ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2006), *Beyond the Witch Trials. Witchcraft and magic in Enlightenment Europe*, Ed. Willem de Blécourt, Owen Davies (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), *Witchcraft Continued. Popular Magic in Modern Europe*, Ed. Willem de Blécourt, Owen Davies (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), Michael D. Bailey, *Historical Dictionary of Witchcraft* (Lanham, Maryland, and Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2003), *Magie et sorcellerie en Europe. Du Moyen Age à nos jours*, Ed. Robert Muchembled (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994).

² Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft. Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), *Exorcising our Demons. Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).

³ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History. Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005 [1996]), 180-276.

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For this work session of researchers and academics, Ph.D. students, artists and interested people, the special guest, the keynote speaker was an eminent scholar: Willem de Blécourt, Honorary research fellow at the Meertens Institute, KNAW, Amsterdam. His name and works are well known to everyone who wants to study historical anthropology, witchcraft, lycanthropy, fairy tales or magic. The work of Willem de Blécourt started with a historical investigation of the witchcraft accusations in the Netherlands. It was the theme of his Ph.D. dissertation, but also a line of continuity in his researches, because he has been publishing very interesting papers based on Dutch material.⁴ But Willem de Blécourt incessantly diversified his approach and wrote papers on topics regarding the history and metamorphosis of witchcraft all across Europe, from North to South and from West to East. He worked alone, or in collaboration with other scholars interested in witchcraft. Nowadays, Willem de Blécourt is the greatest editor of scientific literature on magic and witchcraft. With Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies, he is the editor of a prestigious series *Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic*, published by Palgrave & Macmillan.⁵ Willem de Blécourt supervised several volumes on magic and witchcraft, to which he has also brought his contribution with a number of papers. De Blécourt also focused his reflections on a very fertile topic: the study of fairy tales. He investigated the genealogy and evolution of fairy tales, as well as the origins of some literary types. Of course, even in fairy tales, he searched for characters and narrative situations linked to the universe of witchcraft and magic.⁶ Witchcraft in cinema and TV film is the most recent field of study for Willem de Blécourt, with some excellent printed results,⁷ but also with papers yet to come. Willem de Blécourt's contribution to *Studia*

⁴ Willem de Blécourt, "The Flying Witch: Its Resonance in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands," *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 11, no. 1 (2016): 73-93, doi:10.1353/mrw.2016.0010, "I Would Have Eaten You Too: Werewolf Legends in the Flanders, Dutch and German Area," *Folklore* 118, no. 1 (2007): 23-43, "Bedding the Nightmare: Somatic Experience and Narrative Meaning in Dutch and Flemish Legend Texts," *Folklore* 114, issue 2 (2003): 227-245.

⁵ See the catalogue at: <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14693> (accessed March 2020).

⁶ Willem de Blécourt, *Tales of Magic, Tales in Print. On the Genealogy of Fairy Tales and the Brothers Grimm* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2012).

⁷ Willem de Blécourt, "Witches on Screen," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, ed. Owen Davies (Oxford: OUP, 2017): 253-280.

Dramatica, on *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, is directly related to his recent interest in cinema and television series.

As stated before, we've selected some papers presented at our conference for this special issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica*. In its first section, the journal intends to propose some openings on the study of witchcraft in theatre and performance. Ștefana and Ioan Pop-Curșeu, in their paper *The Mask of the Witch: from Ritual to Carnival and Theatre*, try to gather data on the use of witch masks in carnival processions, relating them to ancient ritual practices. In this respect, the theories of Carlo Ginzburg on witchcraft are recalled and their validity is put into question. Then, the carnivalesque material is paralleled to the emergence of theatre and of scenic representations of witches and witchcraft practices.

Three papers, signed by Alexandra Jeler, Elisabeth Lacombe, Turkan Yilmaz, focus on Elizabethan drama, especially on the representation of witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The interpretative perspectives are very diverse. Jeler adopts a point of view inspired by religious and philological studies, deciphering the various meaning of the appellation of the witches in Shakespeare's play ("weird sisters"). Lacombe establishes a connection between the demonological treatises that are interpreting witchcraft in relation to humours (melancholy), and the fictional representations of witches in Elizabethan plays. Yilmaz adopts a more political perspective, contrasting the enigmatic yet egalitarian and free society of the witches (in *Macbeth* and *The Witch* by Thomas Middleton) and the hypocritical norms of the plays' societies specifically related to sexuality and freedom of the individuals.

Three other papers, signed by Pierre Philippe-Meden, Suzana Marjanić, Ophélie Naessens, are focusing on performances, showing that the witch figure is very important for contemporary artists, in order to question the imperatives of a patriarchal society and to formulate aesthetic and political statements. Philippe-Meden approaches a legendary performance by artist and dancer Rita Renoir, called *Le Diable*. Marjanić offers valuable insights on Croatian contemporary art scene, while Naessens focuses on the so-called Witch Blocks and on the work of artists such as Camille Ducellier, Tatiana Karl Pez, Myriam Mihindou. The last paper of the first section of this special issue presents a novel, *The Witches of Smyrna* by Mara Meimaridi (2001), and its adaptations for TV and especially for the stage.

Compared to ancient iconography of witchcraft, one should also notice that there is a modern and contemporary iconography that still needs to be analyzed, as it was developed in various media (printed press and comic books, video art, Internet, music shows), and especially in cinema, from silent film to 3D and 4Dx contemporary movies. Speaking of cinema, there are not so many works yet that focus on the figure of the witch in horror and fantasy movies,⁸ so the understanding of this matter should be extended by relating it to the iconographic tradition.⁹ In this respect, a study of the mechanisms of illusion would be fundamental, because cinema uses specific tricks of editing in order to create its enchanting and powerful witches, characters with as many appearances as ancient Circe (silent movies as *Häxan*, films signed by Roger Corman, Terence Fisher, Mario Bava, Dario Argento, Paul Naschy, Roman Polanski, or the *Harry Potter* series are only a few examples for the great technical means cinema can use in order to produce artistic verisimilitude in the realm of the supernatural).

In the second section of our issue of *Studia*, the papers are focused on some aspects of this rich and fascinating matter offered by cinema and TV. As in the first section, we tried to group the papers in a logical and historical sequence. Delia Enyedi proposes a solid historical study on the figures of the witch in silent cinema. David Melbye focuses on a rich era of horror film, presenting new insights on the “satanic cinema in the seventies.” Two papers, by Willem de Blécourt and Alex McCann, take into account the world of witchcraft in TV series, which have a remarkable worldwide echo

⁸ Estella Tincknell, “Feminine Boundaries. Adolescence, Witchcraft, and the Supernatural in New Gothic Cinema and Television,” in *Horror Zone. The Cultural Experience of Contemporary Horror Cinema*, ed. Ian Conrich (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010): 245-258, Heidi Breuer, “Hags on Film. Contemporary Echoes of the Early Modern Wicked Witch,” in *Crafting the Witch. Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York & London: Routledge, 2009): 137-162, Douglas E. Cowan, *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), Tanya Krzwynska, *A Skin for Dancing in: Possession, Witchcraft and Voodoo in Film* (London, Flicks Books, 2000).

⁹ I tried to do so in a paper from 2015, analyzing the aesthetical opposition between the extraordinary beauty of the witch and her monstrous ugliness in some films that can be paralleled to paintings dating back to 16th-19th centuries: Ioan Pop-Curșeu, “Corps de sorcières, entre horreur et beauté. De la peinture au cinéma, avatars d’une tradition iconographique,” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Series dramatica* 60, no. 1 (2015): 119-130.

with the apparition and development of new platforms such as Netflix. Willem de Blécourt places the series he discusses, namely *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, in a large network of comparisons with comics, animated series, films and other media products. He studies the cultural sources and borrowings used in the series. *Chilling Adventures...* introduces interesting developments in witchcraft media mythologies, by setting the short plots in a more clear Satanic and (counter-)Christian realm. Alex McCann constructs a feminist analysis of Samantha from *Bewitched* series, through lenses borrowed from a seminal book of second wave feminism: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

Till Kuhnle, in his paper, starts an original investigation, putting into light the sources of an emblematic erotic film of the seventies: *Successive Slidings of Pleasure* by Alain Robbe-Grillet (1974). As stated by Robbe-Grillet himself, this film was highly influenced by *La Sorcière (Satanism and Witchcraft)*, published by French historian Jules Michelet in 1862: Till Kuhnle carefully presents the subtle links between the written essay and the filmic text. Even if Michelet was criticized through time by various historians, his romantic method and his views – deprived of any scientific foundation, but yet fascinating for artists – live a new life in some contemporary essays on witchcraft (those of Diane Purkiss, Mary Daly, Silvia Federici, Barbara Ehrenreich & Deirdre English, authors that think and write like Michelet did in the 19th century, although they haven't read his *La Sorcière*).

Claudia Negrea's paper is concerned with the coming-of-age subgenre in cinema and with the analysis of the importance of witchcraft in this specific narrative frame and visual structure. She proposes two case studies, the Norwegian film *Thelma* by Joachim Trier and the American film *The Witch* by Robert Eggers. Daria Ioan focuses on photography and on the representations of magic through still images, describing her own work as a photographer, together with a team of students. As for the last paper of this issue of *Studia*, signed by Rebeca Dogaru, it offers a case study of witchcraft images and metaphors in the music of the British extreme metal band Cradle of Filth. It should be pointed out here that witchcraft in rock music and in stage performances by rockers could be a valuable argument for an entire volume of essays and articles. There is a very rich matter a researcher interested in this topic would find not only in the musical compositions, but also in performances

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staged by bands and artists such as Coven, Black Widow, Jethro Tull, Ozzy Osbourne, Black Sabbath, Venom, Inkkubus-Sukkubus, Bishop of Hexen, Witch Mountain, Witchfinder General, Nightwish and many others seems to us of a great interest.

A general view on this issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica* could point out the richness of the content, as well as the variety of approaches. Within two different sections, we tried to cover many aspects, from ancient carnivalesque rituals to contemporary performances, through Elizabethan theatre, and from silent film to TV series and rock music. In these 16 papers and in the two reviews, a sort of history is depicted, a history dealing with artistic representations of witchcraft. Even though these representations know how to take advantage of the specific freedom of artistic creation, they remain solidly grounded in anthropological and historical facts. These facts were cited and analyzed each time they shed a light on art...

On the other hand, the methodological frames and the means of interpretation are very diverse and – at the first glance – even irreconcilable. Historicism and religious history, feminism, psychoanalysis, philology shape some of the papers published here and, sometimes, these different approaches are even combined in the attempt to better understand the artistic representation of witchcraft. This issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica* may be seen as a radiography of what is thought nowadays on witchcraft in scientific and scholar circles. We should emphasize, though, that we are aware of the fact that each interpretation is inscribed in history, that mind frames and reading strategies change over time and that our present understandings of witchcraft may perhaps not be completely acceptable in twenty or fifty years.

In a sort of a preliminary conclusion, it should be noted that what we tried here is to provide valuable insights on the images of witchcraft, to open paths for visual anthropology researches and for interrogations on the still persistent mystery of witchcraft and magic... In fact, our focus on images – in a wide sense of the word – is based on the conviction that images fascinate and attract more than scientific theories and historical approaches do, and that they will be as interesting and appealing for people in the future, as they are for us now, in this trouble and bizarre present, when only magic seems able to deliver the humanity from its viruses.