

# Glamorous witchcraft: gender and magic in teen film and television

RACHEL MOSELEY

This essay brings together two interests. first, teen films and television programmes and the ways in which they deal with a significant moment of identity formation, exploring and policing the borders of femininity, and second, representations of the witch and of magic in film and television. My focus is on the figure of the youthful or teenage female witch as a discursive site in which the relationship between feminism (as female power), and femininity has been negotiated in historically specific ways. Beginning with an exploration of the concept of 'glamour', and using it to address texts from *Bewitched* (US, tx 1964–72) to *Charmed* (US, tx 1998– ), through *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976), *The Craft* (Andrew Fleming, 1996), *Practical Magic* (Griffin Dunne, 1998), *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (US, tx 1996– ) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (US, tx 1997– ), I will argue that the representation of the teen witch is a significant site through which the articulation in popular culture of the shifting relationship between 1970s second-wave feminism, postfeminism in the 1990s and femininity can be traced.

I begin by offering three related ideas on the subject of magic and femininity which inform this discussion. The first is a definition from *The Oxford English Dictionary*:

glamour *vb.* 1 Magic, enchantment, spell . . . 2 a. A magical or fictitious beauty attaching to any person or object; a delusive or alluring charm. b Charm, attractiveness; physical allure, esp. feminine beauty      glamour *v* To affect with glamour, to charm, enchant<sup>1</sup>

1 R W Burchfield (ed.) *The Oxford English Dictionary* Volume IV second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989) p. 553

I am interested in the way in which an understanding of the root of the word 'glamour' reveals a relationship between feminine allure and magic, witchcraft and *power*. In the history of the usage of the word, the primary meaning – 'magic, enchantment, spell' – has been displaced by the idea of surface or physical feminine allure (although the relationship implicitly remains and is often expressed, for example, in popular songs – 'It's witchcraft' and 'That old black magic' spring to mind). In reinstating the primary meaning of the word, a profound but contradictory link is posited between femininity and magic in which femininity is produced as superficial and deceptive charm, mysterious and unknowable essence, *and* as power. In this essay I explore some popular representations of femininity and witchcraft in relation to this key, double-edged term 'glamour'. It is worth signalling here the significance in this term of the conjunction of ideas of feminine allure and power to ideas of 'postfeminism' as a way of understanding historically shifts in feminism, and the relationship between feminism and femininity. Recent commentators such as Charlotte Brunsdon, Joanne Hollows and Jacinda Read have questioned understandings of feminism which see female power as compromised by conventional feminine identities. For Brunsdon, the postfeminist girl or woman is 'neither trapped in femininity (prefeminist), nor rejecting of it (feminist). She can use it.' She is both dependent on, and dismissive of, traditional feminist identities.<sup>2</sup> The teen witch texts address the changing relationship between gendered identities and power suggested in the etymology of the word 'glamour' through their concern with the production and management of feminine identities.

Existing theoretical work on glamour comes largely from cultural studies and is empirically based, drawn from in-depth interviews with women. Of particular note here is the work of Norma Sherratt, Jackie Stacey and Beverley Skeggs, all of whom posit significant links between glamour, sex and class, or respectability.<sup>3</sup> Sherratt's research emphasizes the trajectories of young women returning to college, and suggests 'glamour' as a significant explanatory category through which they expressed their career and life ambitions, in which a glamorous job was one which was 'interesting/exciting/different', and not routine, boring or dead-end. Significantly, the careers they thought of as glamorous were also typically feminine ones, and Sherratt identifies a lack of seriousness about careers which she argues means that their interest in glamour almost always lead them back to a domestic career in the home. In her research with young working-class women training to work in caring professions, Skeggs, like Sherratt, also sees glamour as offering the young women in her study 'the ability to appear as something different from the mundane. It is an escape route.' She also theorizes glamour as 'a performance of femininity *with* strength' and, while difficult to achieve, as 'a way of holding together sexuality and

- 2 Charlotte Brunsdon *Screen Tastes Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes* (London: Routledge 1997) pp. 85–6; Joanne Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000); Jacinda Read *The New Avengers: Feminism, Femininity and the Rape-Revenge Cycle* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2000).
- 3 Norma Sherratt 'Girls jobs and glamour', *Feminist Review* no. 15 (1983) pp. 47–62; Jackie Stacey *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge 1994); Beverley Skeggs *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage 1997).

respectability'.<sup>4</sup> Witchcraft then might be understood – and is frequently figured – as a glamorous and 'different' feminine career in teen witch texts. These accounts of the meaning and significance of glamour for social identity – managing an acceptably different identity in which sexuality and respectability are held together, and the pull of the domestic, to which I return later – illuminate the ideological projects of teen witch texts in which glamour as the conjunction of ideal femininities and (sexual) power is made audible and visual.

Recent teen films and television shows have been profoundly engaged in the policing of difference and the construction and validation of hegemonic femininities, in the correcting of 'aberrant' femininity. The central way in which they have done this is through the trope of the 'glamour' makeover and the space of the high school prom – the significant site in relation to which the 'magical' transformation takes place and in which the new identity is revealed. This is not a new project: teen films have always been concerned with the formation and production of identities. But while 1980s teen films such as *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes, 1985) and *Pretty in Pink* (Howard Deutch, 1986) 'made over' key female characters, they were also concerned with allowing a space for *difference* to exist, and addressed questions of class, for instance, head on, suggesting the significance of clothes and appearance to status. While in *The Breakfast Club* the characters attack each other on the basis of their difference, and near the end of the film Claire (the princess) makes over Alison (the basket case), transforming her from a messy-haired, Parka-wearing, animalistic outcast into a conventionally pretty 'nice girl' who is entitled to a romance, the film at the same time carefully deconstructs its stereotypes, interrogates difference and addresses questions of class and status. Similarly, in *Pretty in Pink*, while Andie gets to go to the prom with the boy of her dreams, it is ultimately on her own terms. Her difficult home life and lack of social standing is addressed directly in the film, and her difference, her 'indie' thrift-shop style, is celebrated in the film through the attention paid to the spaces she inhabits and to the details of her dress through the mise-en-scene as the camera pans and tracks in closeup over the fabrics, garments and accessories. Andie repeatedly quotes and performs 'middle classness' through her style, making use of pearls, smart dresses and jackets within her individual style of dress. Her prom dress is handmade and secondhand, drawing on the feminine ideals of the past – it makes use of her friend Iona's original 1960s prom dress, pink lace and 'proper' 1980s feminine styling in its design. The glamour makeover and the high school prom have not just been a moment of coming out in relation to ideals of femininity, but have also functioned as a test which addresses the conjunction of class and gender. The resolution of the film is too easy, almost trite, and the key issues around class and gender which it sets up remain

unresolved. Nevertheless, the makeover and the correction of feminine difference remain generically central to these texts and are key to their appeal

More recent teen film and television texts, such as *Dawson's Creek* (US, tx 1998– ), *She's All That* (Robert Iscove, 1999), *Cruel Intentions* (Roger Kumble, 1999), *The Faculty* (Roberto Rodriguez, 1998) and *Never Been Kissed* (Raja Gosnell, 1999), have often drawn on these 1980s teen texts, and have at their centre an even greater emphasis on the glamorous makeover or re-education of young women whose identities are in some way out of line with accepted ideals of femininity. While in *The Faculty* – which has been described as *The Breakfast Club* meets *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* – the mother alien turned out to be the seemingly innocent, blonde southern belle, an unconventional dark-haired girl reputed to be a lesbian is gradually made over until by the end of the film she is blonde and deserving of a heterosexual romance with a jock. In *She's All That* and *Never Been Kissed*, the transformation and reinstatement of acceptable norms of feminine appearance and behaviour are both more central and more insistent. In the latter, 'Josie Grossie' gets a second chance to go back to high school and be a teenage girl, and learns how to do it successfully this time, with the right clothes, hair and attitude. In *She's All That*, Laney Boggs is 'plain' and wears glasses, she is also intelligent, an artist and politically aware. Transformed into a potential prom queen for a bet by the most popular boys in school, Laney has to learn to negotiate her talent and intellect with more acceptable, conventionally feminine ways of being a girl.

At the heart of the teen film and television show then, is the glamorous makeover of the central female character, a mechanism through which appropriate feminine identities are constructed and reinforced. The glamour makeover as generic trope and as ideological operation are also key to 'teen witch' texts, and it is through an exploration of these texts – which are also concerned literally with magic on both narrative and audiovisual levels – of their magical textuality, that the significance of glamour as a concept in relation to gender and power is most clearly illuminated

In the pilot episode for the US television series *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, Sabrina is introduced to her powers by her aunts on the full moon following her sixteenth birthday – teen witches usually acquire their powers at a moment which both marks adolescence and captures the moment of transition from child to woman, and thus the potential attainment of adult femininity and (sexual) power. This is also generally a key period of anxiety and instability in relation to identity, and is thus perhaps more easily policed. Significantly, then, Sabrina's first experiment with her new powers is in relation to her appearance and the possibility of self-transformation. As she stands before the mirror she changes her look again and again, each

transformation accompanied by a shower of golden sparkling dust and a percussive sparkle on the soundtrack. First becoming a 1930s bathing belle with a Marcel wave and a hat, then appearing in a 1950s-style summer dress with sunglasses and a pink headscarf, she nods approvingly at both possibilities. Next, however, she acquires a bleached wig, a studded leather jacket and gothic-style makeup; this she considers, but rejects with a shake of the head. Finally she magics a modern pink short dress and red shoes, but as she zaps the shoes to make the heels higher, they grow uncontrollably. This sequence not only offers a range of acceptable and appropriate femininities for the teenage Sabrina, but also makes clear which are *not* acceptable (the gothic/alternative look frequently made over in the teen text), and shows the dangers of excessively glamorous femininity (wearing too-high heels). Similarly in *The Craft*, four teenage girls discover the idea of a 'glamour', described in their magic book as 'an illusion so real as to fool an onlooker . . . one of the oldest forms of magic'. As they sit in the magic circle, Sarah changes the colour of her eyes, and then her hair ('so much simpler than going to a salon!'). Rochelle, a black teenager, wants desperately to be blonde, Nancy wants 'a smaller ass'. Through their concern with the notion of glamour and the production of – and possibility of changing – identities, both of these texts offer potential for a deconstruction of hegemonic feminine ideals. While at times these texts engage with this issue directly, I nevertheless suggest that the ideological project of the teen witch text in relation to femininity and power – glamour – is ultimately superficial, and that the particular ways in which this project is textually articulated are revealing of the pleasures and paradoxes at the heart of the postfeminist project.

As an illustration of the links I am trying to make, I want briefly to address *The Virgin Suicides* (Sofia Coppola, 1999). The Lisbon sisters in Coppola's film are not witches, but they *are* bewitching and conventionally feminine. The literalized sparkle in Lux Lisbon's eye as she winks to camera near the beginning of the film is the signifier of glamour, of superficial beauty, bewitching femininity as mysterious, unknowable essence and magical power, and it reappears on the cards the girls send in the form of glitter. *The Virgin Suicides* pays attention to, and takes great pleasure in, the paraphernalia of teenage girlhood, using tracking and panning shots to lovingly take in the details of jumbled collections of images, jewellery, cosmetics, doodled notes and pictures. The other films I am interested in here, and especially *The Craft*, do the same.<sup>5</sup> This is also the paraphernalia of witchcraft, marked then as feminine, of magical workings and spell castings: candles, incense, scented oils, charms, trinkets, plants and flowers. In *The Virgin Suicides*, there is a formal articulation of an attention to surface over depth, the camera lovingly caressing the surface of the image, but with the promise that something lies

5 Interestingly the image which often links them is that of the Virgin Mary, used to symbolize the goddess as the significant deity of witchcraft or Wicca, signifier of idealized femininity and carefully inscribed in these films.

beneath – beneath the simultaneous inscription of femininity as unknowable essence and essential superficiality. This essence is suggested through the repeated figuring of the identity of the Lisbon girls as collective rather than individual, and in relation to nature and the ephemeral – an impression achieved partly through their costuming in floral, diaphanous and faded fabrics, and through the lighting, which often threatens to make them transparent. Despite the promise that there might be something more beneath that glamorous surface of conventional beauty, the film refuses to reveal – it keeps you literally at the surface to which it pays so much attention. The sparkling paraphernalia of teenage femininity is gathered by the boys who collectively narrate the film and is obsessively examined, as the boys try (and fail) to read that surface for clues to the girls' identities. The film does not allow the viewer access to the girls' subjectivities except through the boys' imaginations. The textual articulation of the magical power of the teen witch performs a similar operation. Interestingly though, in contrast to the texts I have discussed which often end by reinstating it, *The Virgin Suicides* can be understood as an *interrogation* of the notion of glamour, of bewitching femininity as essence, surface, trap. The film website completed the text and similarly emphasized surface, presenting a collage of images and paraphernalia, but it allowed you to click on them and go through to windows in which teenage visitors to the site wrote about their experiences, dreams, desires and identities.<sup>6</sup> While the girls in the film are framed through a male discourse and viewpoint in voiceover, the website has a marked feminine address, and lets you in. As Cecilia, the first of the Lisbon sisters to commit suicide, comments: 'Obviously doctor, you've never been a thirteen-year-old girl'

The sparkle or twinkle (like the cute twitch of the nose in *Bewitched* and *Tabitha* [US, tx 1977–78]) is the recurrent audiovisual motif in films and television programmes about witches, whether as magical sparkling dust in the air when spells are cast, or as a magical percussive sparkle on the soundtrack made by a xylophone or celesta. Magical power in *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* can be captured as phials of coloured glitter, and the spinoff magazine *Sabrina's Secrets* offered teen readers the opportunity to collect a free item of glittery makeup with each issue, and a sparkly vanity case to store them in, making the link between magic, femininity and cosmetics explicit. Sparkles are used as bullet points in Silver RavenWolf's book *Teen Witch*, and in the writing of the name of Irish girl-band B\*witched. The glamorous sparkle – whether of eyes, teeth, cosmetics or dress – is a conventional sign of femininity, but for teen witches it also signals power made manifest as audiovisual effect, or spectacle. Herein lies the paradox of glamour in the texts, and perhaps in the postfeminist project. While the sparkle is powerfully spectacular and grabs the viewer's attention, it is also

6 URL [http://www.paramountclassics.com/virginsuicides/html\\_3/19\\_April\\_2002/](http://www.paramountclassics.com/virginsuicides/html_3/19_April_2002/)

- 7 Sharon Russell, 'The witch in film: myth and reality', in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1984). Russell makes the point that in early cinema, films employed witches in order to maximize the potential for spectacular cinematic trickery.

- 8 See Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and other Pagans in America Today* (1979) (New York: Penguin Arkana, 1997); Phyllis W. Currott, *Book of Shadows* (London: Piatkus, 1999).

highly ephemeral, drawing the eye to the surface of the text.<sup>7</sup> The textual sparkle as a marker of glamour in all its senses emphasizes surface: through glamour, feminine power in these texts is located in and articulated through appearance. In the opening credits of *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, the golden sparkle encases Sabrina's body from head to toe, transforming her clothes, hair and makeup as it descends, and producing her, finally, as an ideal of femininity (Figure 1). Glamour is pleasure, it is fascination; it can also be central, as Skeggs and Stacey argue, to the production of a confident and assured self. In these texts it is additionally presented, however, as emphatically superficial, ephemeral and cosmetic, thus raising significant questions about the representations of gendered power they offer, and the femininities they construct and validate. The postfeminist concern with holding together conventional femininity and power, to which these texts clearly speak, describes a similar contradiction. Is there any depth to these fascinating images of magical power?

As a way into the negotiations made by the texts with which I am concerned, I want to address briefly the history of the relationship between witchcraft and feminism in practice and theory. Numerous feminist covens were formed in the context of second-wave feminism in the 1970s, and were often women-only and/or lesbian-separatist groups which celebrated witchcraft as a goddess-centred religion, based on a feminine principle which looked back to a universal matriarchal history and lineage and forward to a woman-centred feminist future.<sup>8</sup> A number of commentators writing within the context of second-wave feminism re-read and reclaimed for radical



**Fig. 1. *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*: Sabrina is transformed by the magical sparkle.**



9 See Robin Morgan *Sisterhood is Powerful* (New York: Random House, 1970); Diane Purkiss *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

10 Mary Daly *Gyn/ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1979).

11 *Ibid.*, p. 17. While in Wicca the aged crone figure has a positive value, representative of age, experience and wisdom, Daly draws for her hag iography upon the popular crone image of the witch as aged, untamed and unattractive.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

13 Adler *Drawing Down the Moon*, p. 179.

feminism the history and persecution of women as witches. Robin Morgan, for instance, made a claim for witches as the original resistance fighters against the oppression of women.<sup>9</sup> This critical position understood the witch as a metaphor for female resistance, witches as representative of women who lead unconventional lives – outside that which patriarchal society deemed acceptable in relation, for instance, to female-centred communities or sisterhoods, personal and sexual freedom and political resistance – and who were punished for this. Mary Daly saw in witches a hidden history of powerful women, and reclaimed the figure of the Hag as a powerful, liberated woman, coining the term ‘hag-iography’ to describe this revisionist herstory.<sup>10</sup> The triple goddess of witchcraft as a religion is understood to represent the three biological stages of a woman’s life – maiden, mother and crone – and is linked in turn to the phases of the moon. Here, again, is the essentialist figuring of femaleness in relation to magic and nature. Daly’s choice of the crone or hag in her revision is significant in relation to my project here, for what she does is to inscribe feminist identities in relation to femininity: that is, through a rejection of conventional femininities and modes of self-presentation in her privileging of the untamed, wild ‘crone/harpy’ witch figure and the exclusion of the more glamorous and socially acceptable maiden and mother positions. ‘Self-loathing ladies titter’, she writes, ‘Hags and Harpies roar.’<sup>11</sup> She also reclaims the word ‘glamour’ for feminism as meaning ‘a witch’s power’, citing Jane Caputi’s claim that ‘glamorous women are made up and done in’.<sup>12</sup> This position can be understood then as a feminist celebration of difference in relation to femininity, that which departs from the hegemonic ideal. The political protest group WITCH (Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) stated in its first manifesto

Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, non-conformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary.<sup>13</sup>

Other feminist positions, however, have privileged more conventionally feminine witchy identities, those more in line with the maiden and mother positions, and have celebrated the witch as female essence – woman as mystery, as closely associated with nature and in possession of essentially female ‘special powers’ such as reproduction.

A related position is articulated in Barbara Ehrenreich’s and Deirdre English’s early pamphlet, a study of women as health workers situated in relation to the second-wave feminist rethinking of historical accounts of witches and witch hunts. They argue for witches as ‘wise women’ and autonomous healers working with herbal medicines, suggesting that the mediaeval witch hunts represented ‘a ruling class of terror directed against the female peasant population’, in which female witches represented a political,



14 Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: a History of Women Healers* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative 1973), p. 23

15 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1971) pp. 620–23

16 *Ibid.* p. 634

17 Elizabeth Reis (ed.), *Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources 1998) p. xii

18 Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chain-Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: British Film Institute 1992) pp. 3–4

19 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge 1993) pp. 11–14

religious and sexual threat to the churches and the state.<sup>14</sup> Keith Thomas, too, suggests that witches were usually poor and female, and their motivation for the use of ‘witchcraft’ was probably a desire to escape poverty – the devil was said to offer perpetual protection from lack of food and clothes, as well as sexual satisfaction ‘like most forms of magic, it was a substitute for impotence, a remedy for anxiety and despair’.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, he argues, the accusation of witchcraft was levelled against women perceived to be non-conformist, bad-tempered and guilty of ‘cursing’ and verbal outbursts.<sup>16</sup> If historically, as Elizabeth Reis suggests, ‘the concept of “witch” and the charge of witchcraft help[ed] to set and police the boundaries of female normality and acceptability’ by punishing female power and outspoken-ness,<sup>17</sup> then in the contemporary moment, as we will see, it is through a particular negotiation of these feminist appropriations of the witch that the contemporary texts with which I am concerned figure the relationship between femininity and power around the postfeminist teen witch.

A short discussion of the place of De Palma’s 1976 film *Carrie* in this schema illuminates the shift in representation which has occurred around the figure of the teen witch from a key moment in second-wave feminism to the postfeminist era of *Sabrina* and *Charmed*. There is much at stake in the generic shift from horror to the more benign textual spaces of romantic drama, sitcom and fantasy.

*Carrie* is the story of a teenage girl, ostracized at school and maltreated by her fervently religious mother, who develops powers of telekinesis in relation both to the onset of puberty and the torment she experiences. Carol Clover has pointed out that the film is both feminine (in its concerns with the prom, the dress and makeup) and feminist. She cites Stephen King’s description of the story as being about a historically specific male fear of women, female power and female sexuality, and of *Carrie* as a woman ‘feeling her power for the first time’ – the context of course being the increasingly high profile of the women’s movement during this period.<sup>18</sup> The film provides a useful context for discussion of the shifts articulated in more recent teen witch texts, in that it offers an address to the same generic and contextual concerns (glamour, the makeover, female power, feminism) at an earlier moment. Barbara Creed offers a psychoanalytically informed reading of *Carrie* as an instance of ‘the monstrous-feminine’ in which is played out ‘an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability’, the horrific failure of separation between mother and female child being the source of the monstrosity.<sup>19</sup> *Carrie* develops her magical power at the moment when she has her first period, a moment which is linked visually to her discovery of her body as sexual, and in this way the film links *Carrie*’s magical powers to her female sexual and reproductive power. Creed points out a number of horror films which set up this relationship between first menstruation and supernatural

power – ‘woman as witch and menstrual monster’ – in which young girls receive their powers at the threshold of puberty.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted, too, that conversely the figure of the witch as unglamorous crone picks up on the historical perception of menopausal (and thus non-reproductive) women as dangerous. Carrie is linked to blood and the body throughout the film with, as Creed points out, the culmination of this association being the moment at which Carrie, the newly crowned prom queen, is drenched in pig’s blood and takes her revenge on her classmates.

While the iconography of *Carrie* links it with the more recent witch texts I discuss later, its significance is markedly different. While the witch’s home is dark, golden and glowing, for example, and surrounded by a white picket fence, it is not a benign space but a dangerous one. As Clover points out, this is a ‘feminine’ film, as such, it exhibits a certain interest in the paraphernalia and spaces of feminine glamour, and employs the generic tropes of the teen film – the prom and the makeover. ‘Glamour’ is present in this film, but Carrie and her magical power are quite explicitly distanced from it. The film pivots on the glamorous makeover of its outcast central character for her prom and sees her transformed into an image of idealized femininity and crowned prom queen. It employs this transformation, however, merely in order to make its withdrawal more powerful. In the mise-en-scene of the Senior Prom – ‘Love among the stars’ – the magical sparkle predominates, and Carrie enjoys her brief moment of ‘normality’ in the promise of heterosexual romance as the teens dance beneath a ball of sparkly silver stars, before a glittering stage and stairs. This glamorous moment is shortlived however, as Carrie is drenched in blood as she is crowned, her dress, hair and makeup destroyed. Her revenge sees the destruction of this space, her power signified not by a magical audiovisual sparkle but rather performed through her terrifying look and signalled by sounds which recall the ‘slashing knife’ violins of *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). Magical female power in *Carrie* is too bloody, dangerous, bodily, sexual and excessive to be represented with ‘glamour’ which, as Skeggs suggests, holds together both sexuality and respectability – the contrast here with Prue Halliwell (Shannon Doherty) in *Charmed*, who also has powers of telekinesis, is significant (Figures 2 and 3). Carrie is ‘unnatural’, her body anything but respectable, clean and proper. Female power in this film – situated by King and Clover in the context of second-wave feminism – is incompatible with the glamour of hegemonic femininity. Glamour, in *Carrie*, remains a temporary distraction for the teen witch, in the other texts addressed in this discussion, it is central to their power.

The particular engagement with the figure of the teen witch in recent film and television is problematic. On one hand it offers a pleasurable investment in female power, and enables an engagement

with serious issues such as male violence and sexual equality; in this way, the texts are often informed by 1970s feminism. On the other hand these are also postfeminist texts, both in the sense in which they engage with the exclusions of second-wave feminism, but also in that their investment is in the conjunction of conventional femininities with power: the idea of glamour spectacularly represented in all its senses. They are, in Brunsdon's sense, both informed by and rejecting of feminist identities. I will argue that the motif of the glamorous teenage girl as witch enables an address to female power and difference, but simultaneously raises questions about the nature of that power and the *policing* of that difference.

*The Craft* focuses on four teenage Los Angeles schoolgirls' experimentation with magic. Witchcraft in this and other texts is represented as sisterhood, and is initially offered as a way of addressing and dealing with difference, as well as with male violence against women. The differences addressed include those which second-wave feminism is seen to have excluded: race (through the figure of Rochelle) and class (through the character of Nancy) as well as personal appearance (through Bonnie, whose body is scarred). Differences of race and class are also expressed in relation to personal appearance and ideals of femininity. While Nancy (Fairuza Balk), Bonnie (Neve Campbell) and Rochelle (Rachel True) have been teaching themselves the Craft, Sarah (Robin Tunney), whose femininity is never in question, is a natural witch whose powers come from within: she has inherited her powers from her dead mother, and both of them are repeatedly figured in relation to images of nature in the film through setting and costume. Setting more



**Fig. 2.** *Carrie*: The horrifying power of Carrie (Sissy Spacek), the teen witch.

**Fig. 3. Prue Halliwell (Shannon Doherty) uses her powers of telekinesis in *Charmed*.**



generally is significant in the film however; the girls' high school is drenched in religious iconography, with crucifixes and images of the Virgin Mary. The Madonna is a particularly interesting motif in this film, for it is suggestive both of the emphasis on the Goddess, on the feminine and feminist principles in Wicca, but also invokes Madonna as pop cultural icon, and her postfeminist reappropriation of that iconography – in particular crucifixes and rosary beads.

Despite the film's initial rhetoric of sisterhood, the power of the young women's joined voices and gazes, and the concern to heal social inequities, the film ultimately becomes a battle between Sarah and Nancy, who are seen, respectively, as natural witch, mother and maiden, and unnatural hag. These distinctions are marked out through casting and clothing. Sarah's home is a gothic, Spanish-style villa – a natural space covered in creepers and bougainvillea, dark, golden and dripping with water. Sarah's real mother is dead, but the photograph she has of her shows her in a garden, in a flowing dress and hat. Sarah is also repeatedly represented in this way. Conventionally feminine, with long hair and usually dressed in earth tones and floral prints, Sarah's relationship to nature is persistently marked out. The magic shop the girls frequent is a similarly dark, golden, glowing space, and the shop owner who identifies Sarah as a natural witch is reminiscent of them both. Nancy's difference is marked out through the casting of Fairuza Balk, whose looks are less conventional, and her costuming in leather, metal and gothic makeup; notably, Nancy's witch look is very similar to the identity rejected by Sabrina in her experimentation with transforming her appearance. In terms of costuming, Rochelle and Bonnie drift between these two

poles, but the film generally represents femininity and magic in terms of a communion with nature at the levels of both form and content, making use of pans, tracks and dissolves to emphasize smooth transitions between images and make connections between the girls and the natural world. This is particularly in evidence in the scene in which the girls go out to the woods to become blood sisters and confirm their commitment to each other and to the Craft. The casting of the magic circle and the power of the supernatural is represented in this film, as in *Practical Magic*, by a circling overhead camera and as their rite is completed butterflies surround them like flower petals or leaves – a natural, physical representation of the magical sparkle which similarly engages and draws the eye to the surface of the text.

As the film progresses, Nancy is increasingly brought into line with Daly's metaphorical feminist Hag. She is figured as sexually active, and the power of her voice and unconventional appearance draw, for instance, on previous representations of the 'bad' witch such as that in *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939). As Nancy's powers increase, her costuming and makeup become 'harder'; she stops her stepfather's violence towards her mother by her scream, causing an explosion in the kitchen of their trailer and inducing her stepfather to have a heart attack by the power of her look. She comes to signify female power out of control, nature out of balance, a destructive force, and becomes increasingly abject in appearance – a witch, then, akin to Carrie. Using a 'glamour' to take revenge on Tim, she appears to him as Sarah, only to reveal her true self when Sarah arrives. As she moves towards him supernaturally, her toes dragging on the floor, she screams and shakes her head, increasingly harpy-like, using her powers to propel him out of the window to his death: 'the only way you know how to treat women is to treat them like whores, and that's got to stop', she screams. In the figure of Nancy as tough feminist avenger, glamour as conventional feminine attractiveness and glamour as female power are insistently separated out (Figure 4). In the final battle, Nancy's body is overrun with insects, her hair and fingers, Medusa-like, turning into snakes (Figure 5). The dark, golden spaces of the shop and Sarah's house are similarly invaded. The iconography of these spaces always suggested this was a possibility in their darkness and dampness, therefore a fine line is drawn between good and bad in the relationship between femininity and magic. As Creed suggests, the abject must be expelled in order to construct a clean and proper self, repressing 'behaviour, speech and modes of being regarded as unacceptable, improper or unclean'.<sup>21</sup> Sarah wins the final battle, of course conventionally feminine, glamorous natural witch, maiden and mother are privileged over the sexualized difference of Daly's Hag, her power mobilized only to control Nancy's. To defeat Nancy, Sarah calls on the power of the north, of the earth, of her mother:

21 Ibid. p. 37

the picture comes to life and the wind blows through her mother's hair – an elemental connection is made between mother and daughter, femininity and witchcraft to banish Nancy's too powerful, too different witchiness.

In the ways in which it draws on a combination of feminist discourses of women's witchiness, *The Craft* emphatically privileges a very specific postfeminist conjunction of female power and conventional, hegemonic ideals of white femininity in its construction of glamour, irrevocably removing its feminist other. *Practical Magic* performs a similar operation, making the relationship between femininity and magical power safe through its insistent inscription of nature in setting and costuming. The film centres on the Owen sisters, their aunts, and Sally Owen's small daughters. Sally (Sandra Bullock), like Sarah, is a natural witch – she has inherited her magical powers more completely than has her sister Jilly (Nicole Kidman). *Practical Magic* sets up an unconventional all-female household: the house is disordered, the young Owen sisters (and their daughters after them) eat chocolate brownies for breakfast and do not do their homework. While the household is unconventional, in its representation it draws strongly on familiar discourses which construct the feminine and feminine space in relation to nature. The inside of the house is unkempt, but beautiful: dark, rich, filled with golden light, with twigs, cuttings of plants, bottles and old wood – images which draw on folk craft traditions. Witches' houses in all of these texts are in the gothic style, with cupolas, turret windows and white painted boarding, exemplified in the San Francisco architecture of *Charmed* and in the Boston home of *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*. The maiden witch aunts who care for the girls, while unconventional in behaviour and dress, give off the air of old money, of elegant times past, and are costumed in a retro-bohemian Edwardian style with parasols, veiled hats, natural fabrics, embroidery and laces which recall the feminine ideal of an earlier moment. It seems significant that mothers – the generational connection to 1970s feminism – are dead or absent in contemporary teen witch texts. Sabrina's mortal mother, for instance, is far away on an archaeological dig, and Sabrina is cared for by her (blonde, glamorous) witch aunts.

*Practical Magic* has a rich audiovisual texture, featuring the magical sparkle and making use of dissolves throughout to signal not just temporal shifts but also almost imperceptible mysterious connections between people, things and events, for instance, between Sally, her potion, a letter, the moon, a voiceover. Again, the film pays attention to the paraphernalia of feminine magic – women's writings, recipes, spells and candles. Sally is clearly constructed in terms of the natural witch/maiden/mother archetype. As a small girl, one night she casts a true love spell out on the terrace, using pink and white flower petals which spiral upwards as a magic sparkle.





**Figs 4 and 5. Nancy (Fairuza Balk) as Harpie and Medusa in *The Craft*.**

Sally is closely associated with nature throughout – she is often figured gardening, her hands in the earth, and as the Owen home is by the sea, she is frequently surrounded by a natural magical sparkle caused by the sun glinting off the waves. While Sally struggles to use her powers in a benign, socially acceptable way to make herbal cosmetics and remedies, thus linking her with Ehrenreich's and English's healer witch,<sup>22</sup> and her dresses and cardigans are often decorated with images from nature – usually lily of the valley – in this film, magical powers are also used to fend off and punish male

<sup>22</sup> As in the in current British television advertisement for WITCH natural cosmetics based on witch hazel – harness the natural power



violence towards women. Like *The Craft*, it draws on divergent feminist and feminine discourses of witchiness, but reorganizes them in a way which ultimately polices the relationship between women and magical power

23 See Purkiss *The Witch in History* ch 4

As with most of these texts, in *Practical Magic* the domestic kitchen is a significant site. It is interesting to note that while witches *were* once understood as women who disordered domestic spaces, and in particular the kitchen – for instance, turning milk sour<sup>23</sup> – recent articulations of discourses around witchcraft and magic centre on the domestic in quite benign ways, repeatedly privileging the alignment of witchcraft with cookery and the production of natural remedies and cosmetics, a connection to which I will return. Equally, the powerful female magic circle is present in the configuration of space and in the camerawork, as it is in almost all of these texts, albeit reconfigured. The unconventional wild female space of feminist witchcraft has been transformed. It has become a powerful, girly, sexualized space – a postfeminist space. In *Practical Magic*, the grownup Owens sisters and their aunts make ‘Midnight Margaritas’ together – their familiar rite is a riotous time where they drink and talk about sex, dancing around the table as the camera circles wildly around and above them, inscribing the magic circle.

The film draws upon ideas of witchcraft as a discourse about natural, domesticated femininity, and also inscribes, as performance, the stereotype of the ‘bad’ witch in striped stockings, black robes and a pointed hat at the end of the film. It is what happens in the space negotiated between these two representations which is problematic. The final magic female circle of the film, in which the women of the entire community come together, is formed in the Owens’ kitchen to rid Jilly of the demonic, sexual spirit which possesses her. Jilly is the problematic witch in this film. She is sexualized (‘Gillian has her own magic and we all know what it is’, says her aunt), independent and unconventional: unlike Sally, she does not marry or have children. She becomes possessed by the spirit of her evil lover whom the sisters have killed and brought back to life, and significantly, the signs of this female magical power gone wrong suggest nature out of control, symbolized by a rampant rose bush growing over Jimmy’s grave in the garden, and a bottle of tequila called ‘Diablo del Flores’. The women form a magic circle to exorcize this spirit, crossing brooms. While on one hand this is a consciousness-raising exercise, constructed as a girly night in and a way of dealing with bad relationships, on the other, bringing Jilly back into line, ridding her of the excessive sexuality which possesses her, is aligned with a reordering of the domestic space. ‘Come on ladies, let’s clean house’. Jilly’s mode of glamour, her nonreproductive sexuality and her magic are deemed neither acceptable nor respectable.

24 Nadene Ghouri, I was a teenage witch *The Big Issue* 19–25 June 2000 pp 14–15

In a recent article in *The Big Issue* on the growing number of teenage witches, Nadene Ghouri claims that these girls are ‘the same ones who grew up idolising “The Spice Girls” but now prefer worshipping Divine Goddesses instead’.<sup>24</sup> Teen witches are seen here to be engaging with a postfeminist concept of girl power which celebrates the conjunction of female power with conventional modes of femininity, and only in a very circumscribed way, with difference. Marina Baker, author of *Spells for Teenage Witches*, articulates the feminist principles of Wicca, suggesting that her book is about ‘empowering spells’ for doing well at school and not being scared of bullies:

25 Ibid

Wicca is about helping little girls to have control over their own lives. It’s about going out and communing with nature, not sitting in a room being Gothic and wearing black robes.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the best-selling books of Silver RavenWolf, with titles such as *Teen Witch*, *Wicca for a New Generation* and *To Ride a Silver Broomstick: New Generation Witchcraft* have spells with names like ‘Don’t tread on me’, and impress upon teens and reassure parents that witchcraft and glamour are about spirituality, taste, good personal hygiene and a love of nature:

You don’t slap on a pentacle, wiggle into a black dress or dark pants and shirt, paint your fingernails a disgusting colour, wear wild makeup and call yourself a Witch. Nothing doing – to be a Witch isn’t a fashion statement, or the trendy thing to do. The religion does not require you to wear black. If you go around dressed up like that, real Witches will laugh at you.<sup>26</sup>

26 Silver RavenWolf, *Teen Witch: Wicca for a New Generation* (St Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2000) p. 15. See also Silver RavenWolf, *To Ride a Silver Broomstick: New Generation Witchcraft* (St Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2000). Clearly, the increased incidence of US high school violence linked in the media to an interest in the occult is a context here.

In their representation of ‘respectable glamour’, texts like *The Craft* and *Practical Magic* reproduce a discourse which privileges magic, nature and conventionally ‘proper’ femininity over ‘difference’.

I began with the notion of glamour as a term which both figures, and can be used to interrogate, the culturally inscribed link between femininity and magic. This notion of glamour lies at the heart of the difficulties I want to explore in texts which figure young women in relation to magic and witchcraft. In the way in which it brings together conventional ideals of femininity and female power, ‘glamour’ can be understood as figuring a postfeminist identity which, whilst informed by second-wave feminism, rejects the feminist identities associated with it, instead celebrating and understanding conventional modes of femininity as *not necessarily* in conflict with female power. *10 Things I Hate About You* (Gil Junger, 1999), a reworking of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* and one of the most interesting teen films of recent years, also attempts to inscribe both a feminist and feminine identity in its central intelligent and engaged female character. She is sexually active, she knows about Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique*, reads

Sylvia Plath, listens to Riot Grrl music and is not invested in the prom (although she goes). The film seems to allow Kat to have her cake and eat it – her scholarship to an East Coast women's college, her relationship *and* her femininity. In the final shots of the film, however, Padua High School is finally revealed as a fairytale castle, a space in which dreams can, magically, come true: this fantasy resolution, it suggests, is only make-believe.

While it might be argued that these film and television texts which figure young women in relation to magic can be understood as part of a more general backlash against feminism in their policing of identity and ways of being powerfully female, these texts can also be seen as dramatizations of the anxieties and tensions in trying to articulate this postfeminist position. Texts which draw on discourses of magic and witchcraft in their figuring of young feminine identities point up the problematic keenly, because of the quite specific positions on which they draw, and the relationships which those positions have had in relation to feminist and feminine identities. In *Charmed*, the three Halliwell sisters continually find that their powers of witchcraft interfere with their personal and professional lives, disrupting their workplace and their home. Like Carrie, and like Sally Owen in *Practical Magic*, Piper Halliwell (Holly Marie Combs) yearns for a 'normal life', a 'normal' relationship, for a way of being both powerful and a conventional girl. The character of Sabrina Spellman in *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* offers a fantasy of teenage female power, her magic giving her a way of negotiating the tricky emotional teen world of cliques and romance, as well as addressing the issue of growing independence and challenge to authority. The show, however, repeatedly dramatizes the difficulties of having that power, of hiding it from her friends and of using it appropriately, and always brings her back into line to accept the punishment meted out by her aunts or the 'witches' council'. Similarly, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy – not a witch but a teenage girl with supernatural strength – continually struggles to reconcile the conventional pleasures and ways of being a girl with the responsibilities of being a powerful woman with a job 'I want to date, and shop, and hang out, and go to school, and save the world from unspeakable demons. You know . . . I wanna do girly stuff', she says. She wants to have it all. *Buffy*, like the other texts I have been discussing, is engaged in renegotiating what 'being a girl' means now, carving out a new space. The image of Buffy, back from the dead and stomping on demons in her prom dress and high heels in the Season One episode 'Prophecy Girl', was a perfect articulation of this attempt. Willow, Buffy's best friend, does become a witch, and her relationship with Wiccan witchcraft and magic, compared with Buffy's struggle to hold together conventional blonde glamour and power, is a powerful marker of her difference – her 'geekiness', her Jewishness, her lesbian relationship.

These texts can therefore be understood as postfeminist, since they are engaged in negotiating the relationship between feminism and femininity. As I have suggested, in drawing on feminist and feminine understandings of magic and witchcraft, they point up the difficulty of negotiating such a position and end by policing, as well as articulating, difference. They predominantly inscribe and validate a respectable white hegemonic glamour. It is relevant that in most cases these girls are teenagers, because teenagedom is a liminal space – a time of possibility in relation to identity and power which is thus potentially easier to police.

It is illuminating to draw a line between the 1960s television sitcom *Bewitched* and the texts I have been discussing, and to think about the difference in the representations at those two moments of the relationship between feminism and femininity. As Lynn Spigel has suggested, *Bewitched* figures femininity and magic quite specifically in relation to the suburban domestic.<sup>27</sup> Samantha's (Elizabeth Montgomery) magic powers are harnessed in the service of the domestic (although husband Darrin objects to her using magic to do the chores), family values and her husband's business. As Friedan pointed out in *The Feminine Mystique*, despite the magical labour-saving devices of the 1950s and 1960s housework expanded to fill the available time, and as Penny Sparke has discussed, the 1950s ideal became that of the 'glamorous housewife'.<sup>28</sup> That glamour is figured in the advertising of those appliances which foregrounds their magical possibilities. They even use the magical audiovisual sparkle in their articulation of the glamorous, magical feminine with the domestic.<sup>29</sup> While *Bewitched* presents all three phases of the goddess of witchcraft – maiden, mother, crone – it privileges the mother and the domestic ideal. Perhaps surprisingly, this discourse has remained central in contemporary teen witch texts, and particularly the televisual ones, which almost always fixate on the kitchen as the centre of the domestic space. As I have suggested, the emphasis in *Charmed* on the problems experienced by the Halliwell sisters in trying to combine identities and roles – career girls/witches/ sisters/mothers – opens up a reading of the text as an articulation of the postfeminist difficulties of 'having it all'. However, the show generally privileges the domestic realm and role, for instance Prue facing the tension between career advancement and motherhood (and choosing the latter) when she unexpectedly has to care for an abandoned baby (and as in *Bewitched*, using her powers to help with the housework and childcare), or in its repeated figuring of spellworking as cookery around Piper's talent in the kitchen. Similarly, Silver RavenWolf's *Teen Witch* sends its readers to the grocery store for the ingredients for magickal workings.

In the historical and discursive shift between *Carrie* and *Charmed*, teen witch audiovisual texts have effected the banishment of the powerful and painfully present unruly witch of the second-wave

<sup>27</sup> Lynn Spigel 'From domestic space to outer space: the 1960s fantastic family sit-com' in Constance Penley, Elisabeth Lyon, Lynn Spigel and Janet Bergstrom (eds), *Close Encounters: Film Feminism and Science Fiction* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) pp. 205–35.

<sup>28</sup> See Penny Sparke 'The happy housewife: domesticity renewed' in *As Long As It's Pink: the Sexual Politics of Taste* (London: Pandora, 1995) pp. 165–86; Betty Friedan *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Gollancz, 1963).

<sup>29</sup> I am grateful to Helen Wheatley for pointing out this connection.

30 See Sarah Projansky and Leah R. Vande Berg, 'Sabrina, the teenage witch: Girls, witches, mortals and the limitations of prime-time feminism', in Elyce Rae Helford (ed.), *Fantasy Girls: Gender in the New Universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television* (Lanham: Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), pp. 13–40, for a discussion of the articulation of feminist and feminine discourses in *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*.

feminist reclamation (for example, Nancy in *The Craft*), thereby privileging the conventionally feminine, benign witch of *Charmed* and *Sabrina* in the process.<sup>30</sup> The power of contemporary young film and television witches is glamorous, not excessive and bodily; it is respectable (they are sexy but their bodies are under control and their powers in check), and it is domesticated. In this move, the contemporary teen witch is returned to the realm of the glamorous housewife of texts from *Cinderella* to *Bewitched*, in which magic is harnessed to the production of a clean and orderly (ladylike) self, domestic space and romance reminiscent of an earlier text *Calamity Jane* (David Butler, 1953) and the song 'A Woman's Touch', which centres on the glamour makeover of Calam (Doris Day) and her cabin. Here again, feminine allure is linked with domestic space, nature and magical power as the cabin and Calam are transformed 'One smile from her and zoom, little buds begin to bloom'.

The appeal of these texts remains located in the audiovisual sparkle which signifies the hegemonic glamour of the teen witch: the coincidence of her femininity and her power. While they often dramatize contemporary anxieties around the conjunction of gender and power, the commonsense meaning of the word 'glamour' is securely in place, with power, danger and difference safely contained on the spectacular surface of the text. The glamour of the teen witch may well be both a sequinned corset and a glittering prison.