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**WITCHCRAFT AS THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN SYLVIA
TOWNSEND WARNER'S *LOLLY WILLOWES*
BA thesis**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses how witchcraft is portrayed as the empowerment of women in Sylvia Townsend Warner's book *Lolly Willowes*, focusing more specifically on the aspects of family, religion, and nature. The main goal of the work is to find out how the aforementioned aspects are manifested in the work, and to analyse how they interconnect through witchcraft and feminism.

The thesis is divided into four parts: introduction, literature review, analysis of the book and a summary. In the introduction, a summary of *Lolly Willowes* is described and the author's background and its connection with the book. The introduction describes the religious background, the treatment of women regarding their family, and the attitude towards nature in the United Kingdom during the time when the book was published.

The literature review provides an overview of previous research and analysis that has appeared in relation to *Lolly Willowes*.

The analysis of the book is based on a close reading of the work and examines the depiction of family, religion, and nature.

To summarize the thesis, it can be said that Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* has critiqued the gender constraints and it highlights the transformative power of breaking free from societal expectations, ultimately affirming the importance of personal autonomy and self-discovery for women in early 20th century England and beyond.

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INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Nora Townsend Warner (1893 - 1978) was an English novelist, poet and musician, most known for her debut novel *Lolly Willowes* (1926) but also for works like *The Corner That Held Them* (1948) and *Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977). Townsend Warner gained her love for literature from her father, George Townsend Warner, who was a housemaster at a local school and home-schooled his daughter after she got expelled from kindergarten for mimicking her teachers. Sylvia Townsend Warner lived in rural Devonshire surrounded by nature. She was greatly affected by her father's death after which she moved to London. (Harman, 'The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society', 2023)

I argue that Townsend Warner got the inspiration for *Lolly Willowes* from her own childhood and life, which she spent in the countryside before moving to London after her father's death. The main character, Laura (Lolly) Willowes's life follows the same path, and the novel places great importance on the countryside and nature, and often links these spaces to women's freedom. In the following thesis, I suggest that in *Lolly Willowes*, women's freedom is found in the countryside and nature because these spaces have been traditionally more open to powerful women such as witches and more autonomous from patriarchal and Church authority.

When looking at Sylvia Townsend's Warner biography, it can be said that she led a courageous life. She rejected many social norms of her time. For example, she denounced religion and the Church and fought for women's empowerment in her writings. Many critics agree today that her texts hold feminist values. *Lolly Willowes* reflects Townsend Warner's feminist values and follows a 28-year-old 'spinster' woman called Laura Willowes, who was dubbed "Lolly" by her family after her niece mispronounced her name. Laura dislikes being called "Aunt Lolly", so hereafter I will be referring to her as Laura.

The novel starts with Laura being sent from Somerset to live with her brother and his family in London after her father's death. After being treated as a child who needs to be looked after, and the constant pestering from her family to find a husband, Laura decides to move to the Great Mop village in Chilterns against her family's wishes. Her new home is idyllic and rural, with chalk hills and beech woods. There, Laura befriends her new landlady, who later is revealed to be a witch in the village's coven, which Laura also joins. (Warner, 1926)

When Laura is settled into her new life, Titus, Laura's nephew, decides to come and live with Laura, although he is uninvited. Laura grows frustrated with her nephew since he constantly relies on Laura for everything, and it seems as if she were back to being a child rather than an independent adult woman with a life and wishes of her own. Laura then makes a deal with Satan, and in exchange of her new freedom, she is owned by him. (Warner, 1926) Laura describes the Devil to be "undesiring and unjudging", "undisturbing" and the ownership to be "satisfied but profoundly indifferent" (Warner, 1926, p. 161).

With Laura gaining new witch-powers, Titus seems to be troubled by all sorts of misadventures, such as being attacked by wasps, and bats, and his milk being constantly curdled, which push him to moving back to London. Laura has her independence back once and for all and is free to spend time with her adopted kitten, Vinegar, who turns out to be her familiar. Besides the appearance of a black kitten, Laura realises she is a witch, she is asked to attend the Witches' Sabbath with her landlady and many other villagers.

It is evident from this brief plot summary that *Lolly Willowes* offers a critique to the dominant culture of the 1920s UK, where women had little freedom. Townsend Warner uses the location of the countryside, and a figure of a witch to comment on or critique the social reality of her time. At that point in time, the feminist movement was gaining

momentum and striving for gender equality. Women had already made significant strides in securing voting rights with the Representation of the People Act of 1918, but their fight for equal rights continued (Nym Mayhall, 2000). Feminists advocated for various issues, including women's economic independence, educational opportunities, and legal rights. Organizations such as the Women's Social and Political Union played a crucial role in the suffrage movement (Nym Mayhall, 2000).

However, despite these advancements, societal norms and traditional gender roles still imposed limitations on women's autonomy and opportunities. Women faced challenges in pursuing professional careers, and their primary role was often seen as homemakers and caretakers and when a woman wanted different things from her life, she was often seen as deviating from the norm. As Virginia Woolf said in her speech "Professions for Women": "Even when the path is nominally open--when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant--there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way." (Woolf, 1931)

Often, women who refused to conform to such norms were actively fighting for women's rights and advocating feminist aims. I suggest that we can draw parallels between how feminists were seen at that time and how witches are portrayed in media and the previously mentioned history – both feminists and witches have faced stereotyping and demonization, marginalization, and persecution. Feminists, and witches both have been accused of engaging in unnatural or 'deviant' behaviour. (Federici, 2018, p. 20)

In the 19th and 20th centuries, witchcraft underwent a transformation from being perceived as a malevolent practice to a subject of fascination and folklore. The growing interest in spiritualism, occultism, and folklore led to the romanticization of witches. Scholars like Scott Cunningham explore the idea of ancient witch cults and witchcraft as a

pagan religion. Wicca, a modern witchcraft religion, emerged in the 20th century, emphasizing reverence for nature and goddess worship. (Cunningham, 1988, p. 3-9)

Feminist movements in the 20th century sought to reclaim and reinterpret the figure of the witch. The witch was seen by feminists as a symbol of female power, resilience, and rebellion against patriarchal oppression. Feminists embraced the idea of the witch as a powerful and independent woman who challenged societal norms and fought for her rights. For some feminists, witchcraft became a source of personal and collective empowerment. It offered rituals, symbols, and practices that allowed women to connect with their inner strength, intuition, and spiritual power. (Salomonsen, 1999 p. 282) Witchcraft was seen as a way to challenge societal norms and reclaim autonomy and agency over one's life, and also as a way to connect with other women. Most folklore of witches include some form of a witch's coven. Practising witchcraft also became a way to come together with other women.

The aim of this paper is to show how witchcraft is also used as an empowerment of women in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*. Firstly, I will analyse relevant studies and essays that have already been done on the subject and I will present them in the form of a literature review.

Secondly, I will give my own analysis and a close reading of the book by identifying the topics of religion, family and nature in *Lolly Willowes*. By doing this, I argue that witchcraft functioned as a practice of independence and freedom for women in the early 20th century and Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* is an example of the complex relationship between witchcraft and women's empowerment. By analysing the book with feminist theories, I will show how witchcraft functions as a practical solution for Laura to find her freedom.

I LITERATURE REVIEW

Women have always been accused of being witches. What the word 'witch' means, however, has changed over time. Historically, witches have been called 'wise women' and healers by some people, and 'witches' or charlatans by the authorities. At some point in time, the word 'witch' lost the good connotation of a healer and gained a negative one, where the 'witch' became associated with the Devil and evil.

This came with the wave of Christianity in the UK in the 15th century. The shift in perception of witches from being associated with healers to being associated with the Devil and evil occurred during the period known as the Witch Trials and the witch-hunting craze. This period took place primarily between the 15th and 18th centuries in Europe, including the United Kingdom. (Jones, Zell, 2005, p. 49)

The Christian Church, particularly during the Protestant Reformation, played a crucial role in shaping the negative connotations associated with witches. Although the discrimination of witches started earlier, in the 15th century, in the UK it reached a surge when the Witchcraft Act of 1542 was one of the first legal documents that explicitly criminalized witchcraft, introducing penalties for those practicing or invoking witchcraft. The act was later strengthened by the Witchcraft Act of 1604, which broadened the definition of witchcraft and imposed severe punishments, including the death penalty for those convicted. (Gaskill, 2008, p. 42) The 16th and 17th centuries witnessed a surge in witch trials and persecutions across Europe, including England, Scotland, and other parts of the UK. This period is often referred to as the height of the witch-hunting craze. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English (2010) find that there were thousands of executions¹, which

¹ These executions were usually live burnings at stake and averaged from 600 a year for certain German cities to 1000 a year in and around Como. In Toulouse, France, 400 were executed in a single day and during that period, in the 15th to 16th century, 85% of those executions were women. (Ehrenreich, English, 2010, p. 7)

spread from Germany, Italy and other countries to France, and England (Ehrenreich, English, 2010, p. 7) Widespread fear and paranoia about witchcraft led to the demonization of witches, associating them with malevolence, Devil worship, and supernatural powers used for harmful purposes. (Jones, Zell, 2005, p. 49)

Still today, in most contemporary definitions in dictionaries ‘witch’ has been defined with an unfavourable meaning, for example, in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary: “a person (especially a woman) who is credited with having usually malignant supernatural powers” or “woman who is believed to practice usually black magic often with the aid of a devil” (Merriam Webster, 1996). Today, when a woman is called a witch it usually does not have a positive meaning, although the word is being reclaimed as an empowering one in some feminist contexts (Kelly, 2017).

However, a more positive connotations of witchcraft also exist. There is a link between witchcraft, nature, and medicine, which is important because one way of understanding witchcraft is seeing it as a women’s power to use nature for healing. This is how witchcraft is viewed in this thesis. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English discuss the fate of female health workers in their article called *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses. A History of Women Healers* (2010). They mostly review how women arrived at the current day position of subservience from their former position of authority that was given to people with the ability to heal others.

Ehrenreich and English discuss how the hatred for woman-healers or witches has had a lasting effect. They say that witch-hunting did not just span from the 14th to the 17th century but has come with us to the 20th and 21st centuries, not in the literal form, but in the form of misogyny (Ehrenreich, English, 2010, p. 7). That kind of hatred against women – misogyny – does not just fade away, it is still embedded in today’s society. That type of history does not need to be buried but can be used to empower the oppressed group to help

them to heal from the historical trauma. Jone Salomonsen's *Enchanted Feminism: Reclaiming Witches and Other Visions of the Divine Feminine* (2002) explores the resurgence of feminist witchcraft in the 20th century, focusing on how feminist movements embraced the figure of the witch as a symbol of empowerment. Salomonsen gives great insight into the practical aspect of the 20th century witchcraft and feminist correlation. Silvia Federici too approaches witchcraft from a present-day angle and draws correlations between the witch-hunts of the 14th to 17th century and the treatment of women today in her book *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women* (Federici, 2018, p. 20).

Federici argues that today's violences against women are "processes of enclosure, land dispossession, and the remolding of women's reproductive activities and subjectivity." (Federici, 2018) I position my thesis alongside Federici's argument because her work gives a nuanced look into feminist issues and witchcraft, and helps us to understand *Lolly Willowes*, a story of modern witchcraft. Laura, the main figure in *Lolly Willowes*, goes against every wish of her family and doing what she wants for herself instead. This quote captures Laura's empowerment well:

"one doesn't become a witch to run round being harmful, or to run round being helpful either, a district visitor on a broomstick. It's to escape all that – to have a life of one's own, not an existence doled out to you by others, charitable refuse of their thoughts" (Warner, 1926, p. 156)

Lolly Willowes also delves into issues discussed in eco-feminism, which is a philosophical and social movement that explores the interconnection of feminism and environmentalism. Trish Glazebrook has written an article in 2002 called *Karen Warren's Ecofeminism*, which gathers some of the most important information on the movement. It argues that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are interconnected because they stem from similar patriarchal and hierarchical structures. It recognizes that both women and nature have historically been devalued and objectified, treated as resources to be controlled and dominated. (Glazebrook, 2002, p. 13-15)

Eco-feminism challenges the dominant patriarchal systems that perpetuate both the subjugation of women and the degradation of the environment, advocating for a more inclusive and balanced approach to addressing social, gender, and environmental issues. Rosemary Ruether's article *Goddesses and Witches: Liberation and Countercultural Feminism* (1980) is helpful. Ruether discusses the correlations between nature and civilization.

“Nature is seen as an unspoiled realm of spontaneous harmony that is to be found by getting in touch with the world outside of human intervention. In so doing we rediscover the deep rhythms that connect unspoiled nature and women's bodies. A woman's body becomes a microcosm of the universe, rather than an object of exploitation and contempt. Much of separatist ritual has to do with celebrating those rhythms and connections.” (Ruether, 1980).

These same roots can be found in *Lolly Willowes* since in the book, Laura escapes into nature as well, she ‘lives off the land’ and uses the nature around herself in her day-to-day life.

In conclusion, there has been little research done previously on *Lolly Willowes*, but the aspects I have chosen to focus on in my thesis, have been explored extensively. I build on the research on feminism, witchcraft, and nature, to further analyse the depiction of the family, religion, and nature in *Lolly Willowes*.

II ANALYSIS OF WITCHCRAFT BEING USED AS AN EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN *LOLLY WILLOWES*

In this chapter, I discuss Laura Willowes' name, and how she distanced herself from her family to be able to reclaim her identity and freedom. Then I move to the fact that the distancing from the family helped her to distance herself from religion, which her family follows, and which keeps women in their place – in the house, as mothers and wives controlled by their husbands and fathers. From there I move to nature, and how the distancing from her family and religion helped Laura to (re)discover the nature she loved as a child and how her distancing herself from her family, rejecting the church, and finding a home and an identity in nature (with Satan) is a journey to her freedom as a woman.

Family

In Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*, the protagonist's name is Laura Willowes, "Lolly" is the version of Laura's name used by her family after a mispronunciation by a young niece. She comes to dislike being called "Aunt Lolly" and sees the nickname as a symbol of her lack of independence. As a woman in the United Kingdom in the 1920s, she does not have much that is entirely her own, as her brother Henry stated: "Your capital has always been in my hands, Lolly, and I have administered it as I thought fit." (Warner, 1926, p. 69). It is revealed (Warner, 1926, p. 69-70) that Henry lost some of her money. She had to get by with what was left and she "shan't be as comfortable as I thought I should be (...) But I shan't mind much. It will matter very little to me when I'm there." (Warner, 1926, p. 71). Even though Henry believed that losing

some of Laura's money would be a sufficient reason for Laura to still belong to her brother, he was mistaken, and Laura arrived ten days later at Great Mop to start her new independent life.

In the early 20th century England, women often had limited rights to their own assets and were expected to transfer their property to their husbands. They faced limited access to higher education and professional opportunities and were often discouraged from pursuing careers outside traditional roles such as teaching, nursing, or domestic service. Women often faced legal and economic dependence on male relatives, such as their fathers or husbands. Laws and societal norms often required women to seek permission or approval from male relatives for major decisions, including financial matters, and for instance moving away from one's family to start an independent life. (Woolf, 1929)

What she does have, however, is her name, and with her family insisting on calling her "Lolly" makes Laura feel as if she does not belong to herself but is just her family's possession. Already in the beginning of the novel, Laura's sister-in-law, Caroline, refers to Laura as "Lolly". The point-of-view moves from Caroline to Laura and instantly "Lolly" changes to "Laura".

"Lolly was a gentle creature, and the little girls loved her; she would soon fit into her new home. The small spare-room would be rather a loss. They could not give up the large spare-room to Lolly, and the small spare-room was the handiest of the two for ordinary visitors. (...) While these thoughts passed through Caroline's mind, Laura was not thinking at all. She had picked a red geranium flower, and was staining her left wrist with the juice of its crushed petals. (...) Laura roused herself. It was all settled, then, and she was going to live in London with Henry, and Caroline his wife, and Fancy and Marion his daughters. (Warner, 1926, p. 3-4)

There are many more instances like this in the novel. Because of Laura's preference, I will make it a point to refer to her as Laura in this thesis.

After moving in with her brother Henry and his wife, Laura fulfils the traditional roles expected of her as an unmarried woman, but she gradually becomes disappointed

with her limited role in society and her lack of personal freedom. She had moved in with them in the hope of being surrounded by family in a time of distress because of her father's death, but Laura's brother and her sister-in-law see her as an opportunity of 'free help' –

“She would have liked to go by herself for long walks inland and find strange herbs, but she was too useful to be allowed to stray.” (Warner, 1926, p. 43) – and as a child who needs constant supervision. “Henry was right – they had been the proper people to make a home for Laura when her father died, and she was too old now to begin living by herself. It was not as if she had had any experience of life; she had passed from one guardianship to another: it was impossible to imagine Laura fending for herself. A kind of pity for the unused virgin beside her spread through Caroline's thoughts.” (Warner, 1926, p.38)

Even though Laura was regarded as a child or as a maid by her brother and his wife, their children looked at Laura as a parental figure. When Laura proposes to leave to Great Mop, Henry says: “The children – all the children look on you as a second mother.” (Warner, 1926, p. 67) While the novel does not explicitly delve into Laura's personal feelings about taking care of the children, it is implied that she fulfils her familial duties out of obligation and societal expectations rather than genuine joy.

Laura's decision to break away from her family and seek personal accomplishments suggests that she did not derive complete fulfilment from taking care of her brother's children. It implies that her involvement in their upbringing was more a result of societal pressures rather than a genuine passion or desire to care for them.

As the narrative progresses, Laura starts to yearn for a life of her own, independent of her family's expectations and over-protection. She desires freedom and resents the limited role she has been assigned within the household. This dissatisfaction ultimately leads her to move to Great Mop and sell her soul to the Devil. By doing this, she gains the freedom she desired. This quote captures Laura's thoughts on her being over-protected by her family versus being owned Satan well:

“They say: ‘Dear Lolly! What shall we give her for her birthday this year? Perhaps a hot-water bottle. Or what about a nice black lace scarf? Or a new workbox? Her old one is nearly worn out.’ But you say: ‘Come here, my bird! I will give you the dangerous black night to stretch your wings in, and poisonous berries to feed on, and a nest of bones and thorns, perched high up in danger where no one can climb to it.’ That’s why we become witches: to show our scorn of pretending life’s a safe business, to satisfy our passion for adventure.” (Warner, 1926, p. 155)

Religion

In the 1920s, Christianity continued to be the predominant religious faith in the United Kingdom, playing a significant role in both personal spirituality and societal institutions. The Church of England, as the established church, held considerable influence, particularly in matters of governance, education, and cultural traditions (Bruce, 2001, p. 200). However, some began questioning traditional religious beliefs and practices, and alternative spiritual movements gained popularity (Cunningham, 1988, p. 3-9). The period witnessed a shift in religious observance and engagement, with some people embracing a more individualistic and less institutionalized approach to faith.

While there is no evidence of Warner ever indulging in witchcraft, similarities can be drawn between the author and her character Laura. Sylvia Townsend Warner herself had a complex relationship with religion. She was raised in a religious household with a strong Anglican background, but she gradually distanced herself from organized religion and identified as an atheist later in her life. I believe this shift in her beliefs is reflected in *Lolly Willowes*.

Laura Willowes also goes through a similar transition. Initially, she adheres to societal and religious expectations, fulfilling her role as a dutiful daughter and aunt. However, as the story progresses, she experiences a spiritual awakening and is drawn towards a more pagan understanding of the world. She becomes enchanted by nature,

develops a connection with the countryside, and seeks solace and freedom in witchcraft. Both Warner and Willowes share a sense of dislike with traditional religious structures and a desire to explore alternative paths. They both challenge the constraints of conventional religion and embrace a more personal, unconventional, and nature-centred spirituality.

Lolly Willowes portrays a tension between traditional organized religion and the more nature-centric, pagan aspects of witchcraft. The depiction of witchcraft in the book goes beyond the typical stereotype of an evil or malevolent force, with witches being old women with green skin, pointed hats and a broom to fly on, instead presenting it as a source of feminine strength and rebellion against societal norms, which contrasts with the rigid dogma of organized religion. The aspect of witchcraft serves as a powerful metaphor for personal liberation and the quest for autonomy in a world that often seeks to confine and suppress individuality. Witches are seen as accepting:

“That was one of the advantages of dealing with witches; they do not mind if you are a little odd in your ways, frown if you are late for meals, fret if you are out all night, pry and commiserate when at length you return. Lovely to be with people who prefer their thoughts to yours, lovely to live at your own sweet will, lovely to sleep out all night!” (Warner, 1926, p. 160)

Witchcraft emerges as a source of liberation and personal autonomy for the main character Laura. It provides her with a pathway to reconnect with the natural world, giving way to the power inside her. While her family wishes to confine Laura in Christianity, witchcraft allows Laura all the freedom she needs, and cannot have in society at that time. The portrayal of witchcraft in *Lolly Willowes* emphasizes its ties to pre-Christian, earth-based spirituality, giving a more holistic understanding of existence beyond the confines of traditional religious structures, like Laura deciding to sleep outside at the end of the book suggesting Laura is one with nature.

“She might sleep out and not trouble to arrive till to-morrow. (...) She had quite decided, now, to do so. It was an adventure, she had never done such a thing before, and yet it seemed most natural (...) She would wander off in search of a

suitable dry ditch or an accommodatingly loosened hay-stack; or wading through last year's leaves and this year's fern she would penetrate into a wood and burrow herself a bed. Satan going his rounds might come upon her and smile to see her lying so peaceful and secure in his dangerous keeping. (...) She could sleep where she pleased," (Warner, 1926, p. 160-161)

Nature

When discussing the aspect of nature in *Lolly Willowes*, we cant discuss Sylvia Townsend Warner's upbringing as well. Warner was raised in rural Devonshire, a place that is very similar with Great Mop, the village Laura moved to after living in London, in the sense of looks. After her father's death, Warner moved to London and worked in a munitions factory at the outbreak of World War I.

I argue that with the effect of her father's death, the outbreak of World War I, the move from an idyllic nature-filled Devonshire to London, Warner felt quite distressed and wished for a happier ending to her main character. While Warner moved into a constrained life, Laura escaped from it and the rural landscape provides her with a sense of liberation from societal expectations, from her family's expectations and allows her to explore her individuality and identity.

It is in fact nature that starts Laura's journey toward empowerment and finding out she is a witch. While living in London with her brother, Laura visits a shop which holds different fruits and vegetables, homemade jams, many types of nuts, eggs, and many flowers –everything one might harvest or grow themselves. Laura is drawn in, especially when smelling the flowers. She is taken back to nature.

"She forgot that she was in London, she forgot the whole of her London life. She seemed to be standing alone in a darkening orchard, her feet in the grass, her arms stretched up to the pattern of leaves and fruit, her fingers seeking the rounded ovals of the fruit among the pointed ovals of the leaves. (Warner, 1926, p. 57)

Gender plays a significant role to consider when examining the process of reconnecting with nature. Laura finds solace and a deep connection with the natural world around her. She revels in the beauty of the countryside, takes comfort in the presence of plants, animals, and the changing seasons. Nature is a source of rejuvenation and spiritual nourishment for Laura, she does not judge it beautiful or ugly, she just exists alongside it. On the other hand, her cousin Titus appreciates the country in a masculine and possessive way, constantly claiming how beautiful it is. “It was different in kind from hers. It was comfortable, it was portable, it was a reasonable appreciative appetite, a possessive and masculine love. (...) He loved the country as though it were a body.” (Warner, 1926, p. 107) He enjoys possession of it, like a man in 20th century would enjoy a possession of a woman. Laura does not love the country in this way, she is “ashamed for the woods to see her” with Titus (Warner, 1926, p. 108).

Laura’s retreat to the countryside and her embrace of nature also represents her rejection of the societal expectations that were placed upon women. By living in communion with nature, Laura breaks free from the constraints of societal norms and gains her autonomy and individuality. Nature is often seen as independent from human rules and activity. Nature becomes a refuge where she can live on her own terms, free from the expectations and demands of family and society.

There can be many similarities drawn between nature and women or femininity symbolically. This correlates with the definition of eco-feminism which I gave in the introduction of my thesis. ‘Mother Earth’ can be unforgiving and dangerous, with different natural disasters, but it (or she) can be also nurturing and life-giving. Just as nature provides sustenance, fertility, and the conditions for life to flourish, women are seen as embodying nurturing and caregiving roles, particularly in relation to childbirth and raising children. It makes sense that Titus loving nature “as if it were a woman” irritates Laura

greatly, because nature acquires all these feminine qualities as soon as it is described how Titus loves it (Warner, 1926, p. 108).

For Laura, nature also plays an important role in her becoming a witch. As stated in the literature review, this thesis views witchcraft as a women's power to use nature for healing. Witchcraft is often associated with nature and natural cycles, for example the natural seasonal changes and the Wheel of the Year including the sabbaths: Imbolc, Ostara, Beltane, Litha, Lughnasa, Mabon, Samhain, Yule. These are festivals usually celebrated by witches and represent the cycles of nature and the changing of seasons. Through her connection with witchcraft, Laura taps into the power and wisdom of the natural world, asserting her independence and embracing her own desires.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to study how witchcraft is represented as the empowerment of women in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* (1926) with a focus on the aspects of family, religion, and nature. I argued that witchcraft functioned as a practice of independence and freedom for women in the early 20th century and *Lolly Willowes* is an example of the complex relationship between witchcraft and women's empowerment.

In Warner's book, the protagonist, Laura "Lolly" Willowes, is a middle-aged single woman who moves to a country village to escape her controlling relatives. In this village, she slowly discovers that she is a witch. She acknowledges Satan as her 'lord', but she does so to find her own freedom and empowerment. Thus, she uses witchcraft as an empowering tool for her independence. By analysing the book with feminist theories, I have shown how witchcraft functions as a practical solution for Laura to find her freedom and is Townsend Warner's way of advocating for the empowerment of women in her literary writing.

In the literature review chapter, it was found that most previous studies of the book were written on or about the aspects I have chosen to focus on: family, religion, nature. However, there has been little research done previously on Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*. I build on the research on feminism, witchcraft, and nature, to further analyse the depiction of the aspects of family, religion, and nature in the novel and my aim is to connect the previously researched aspects with the book to gain a better understanding of *Lolly Willowes*.

To diversify the literary analysis of *Lolly Willowes*, the depiction of the family, religion, and nature in the context of the book were examined further in the section

containing my own analysis. Through a close reading of the novel, it was found that *Lolly Willowes* offers a critique of the limitations placed on women in early 20th century England and portrays the transformative power of breaking free from societal norms and embracing personal autonomy.

In the chapter containing my own analysis, I discussed Laura Willowes, the main character in *Lolly Willowes*, her name, and how she distanced herself from her family to be able to reclaim her identity and freedom. Then I moved to the fact that the distancing from the family helped her to distance herself from religion, which her family follows, and which keeps women in their place – in the house, as mothers and wives controlled by their husbands and fathers.

From there I moved to nature, and how the distancing from her family and religion helped Laura to (re)discover the nature she loved as a child. Overall, I argued that her distancing herself from her family, rejecting the church, and finding a home and an identity in nature (with Satan) is a journey to her freedom as a woman. All of these aspects of Laura's journey connecting in one way or another with witches and witchcraft.

In conclusion, the analysis of *Lolly Willowes* reveals a multifaceted exploration of family, religion, and nature, providing a profound critique of the societal limitations imposed on women in early 20th century England. By stepping away from her family, Laura disrupts the traditional roles expected of women, freeing herself from the confines of being a dutiful daughter, wife, or mother.

This emancipation allows her to break free from the grip of religion, which is portrayed as a mechanism that perpetuates the subjugation of women. Religion, as practiced by her family, enforces the notion that women should remain confined within domestic spaces, obedient to male authority.

Laura's rejection of these constraints ultimately leads her to rediscover her true self and nature. In her bond with nature, particularly in her connection with Satan and the realm of witches, Laura finds liberation from societal expectations and embarks on a path towards embracing personal freedom

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Maribel Tuiken

Witchcraft as the empowerment of women in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*

Nõidus kui naiste jõustamine Sylvia Townsend Warneri raamatus „Lolly Willowes“

Bakalaureusetöö

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Käesolev bakalaureusetöö analüüsib kuidas kujutati nõidust kui naiste jõustamist Sylvia Townsend Warneri raamatus „Lolly Willowes“ (1926), keskendudes täpsemalt perekonna, religiooni ja looduse aspektile. Töö peamine eesmärk on välja selgitada, kuidas eelmainitud aspektid teoses avalduvad, ning analüüsida, kuidas need omavahel läbi nõiduse ja feminismi seostuvad.

Bakalaureusetöö jaguneb neljaks osaks: sissejuhatus, kirjanduse ülevaade, raamatu analüüs, ja kokkuvõte. Sissejuhatuses on kirjeldatud teose „Lolly Willowes“ sisu, toodud välja autori taust ja selle seos raamatu ja käesoleva töö teemaga. Samuti on sissejuhatuses kirjeldatud ajaloo kontekstis religioosset tausta, naiste eluolu, mis on seotud nende perega, ning suhtumist loodusesse raamatu ilmumise perioodil Inglismaal.

Kirjanduse ülevaade annab ülevaate varasematest uurimustest ja analüüsides, mis on ilmunud seoses raamatuga.

Raamatu analüüs põhineb teose lähi lugemisel ning analüüsib lähemalt perekonna, religiooni ja looduse kujutamist teoses.

Bakalaureusetöö kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et Sylvia Townsend Warneri „Lolly Willowes“ raamatus on hästi kujutatud soopiirangute kriitikat ja tõstab esile ühiskondlikest ootustest vabanemise transformatiivset jõudu, kinnitades lõpuks isikliku autonoomia ja eneseleidmise tähtsust naiste jaoks 20. sajandi alguse Inglismaal.

Märksõnad:

Sylvia Townsend Warner, Lolly Willowes, inglise kirjandus, nõiad, loodus

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