WITCHES AND UNACCOMPLISHED MOTHERS: FEMALE OUTCASTS IN MELA HARTWIG'S *THE WITCH*

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Abstract: This paper deals with the construction of outcast identity in the novella *The Witch* (*Die Hexe*), which is one of the most radical literary works of the Austrian writer Mela Hartwig (1893-1967). The main character Rune is considered an outcast from birth, so her marginalized role in the intolerant and exclusionary society defines her character within her fundamentally tragic existence leading to her violent death. Her outcast position has two layers: one is societal, characterized by her belonging to the lowest societal class, whereas the second layer is gender-related, marked by female identity as the symbol of "otherness". The crime of the main (anti)heroine, i.e. the witch, is reflected in her distinctiveness, in the deviation from the socially acceptable behavior. Hartwig depicts the world of violence, suffering and destruction and warns about the difficult position of outcasts. Even though the novella is set in the 17th century, the misogynistic and racist theories she critically discusses here are reminiscent of the Austrian society at the beginning of the 20th century.

Keywords: Mela Hartwig, witch, outcast position, intolerant society, misogyny, racism

Mela Hartwig was born in Vienna in 1893 as Melanie Herzl. Upon completing her singing and acting studies at the Viennese Conservatory, she pursued an acting career in various Austrian and German theaters where she played problematic and psychopathic female characters similar to those she subsequently created in her novellas and novels (Fraisl 140). She terminated her acting career but also started a very successful writing career; in fact, in 1927 she won an award at the literary competition organized by the magazine *Die literarische Welt* (*The World of Literature*) as the first woman in history (69). She had her first book, a collection of novellas and short stories titled *Ecstasies* (*Ekstasen*), published by a Viennese publisher Paul Zsolnay in 1928 in a circulation of 5000 copies (Hall 177). Hartwig faced difficult and troublesome times where she was exposed to the consequences of the rising antisemitism and the rise of the national socialist ideology, which,

in her case, meant that she could not publish any of her works (Fähnders 162-165). The story of Mela Hartwig's life is a paradigmatic example of the influence of political exile on writers which is motivated by national socialist ideology; her name was completely erased from the literary public and, despite her efforts, she never managed to resume her once successful literary career (Fast 70). After decades of isolation, non-acceptance and societal oblivion, at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, Mela Hartwig started to spark public interest, which resulted in the reprinting of some of her works and the first printings of her other works.

This paper deals with the construction of outcast identity of the main female character in the novella *The Witch*, which is one of the most radical literary works of the author (Fraisl 193). Even though Hartwig covered the subject of a woman and femininity in almost all of her works, especially in the context of "otherness", in this novella she illustrated how the outcast position of a woman in the eyes of the patriarchal society is deemed a crime which requires (and gets) its respective punishment. Unlike the majority of other works written by the author, the novella does not take place in the present time, but in the era of witch hunt. It discusses materialistic, sexual, pathogenic and anti-feminine causes of the existing gender constellation, and it can only be assumed that the main female characters from other works written by the author would likely be burnt at the stake in that period because of their deviation from the norm of the time (Schmid-Bortenschlager 79).

In the cultural terms, the witch, actually, represents the archetypal female character which, on the one hand, represents the innate fear of the unknown and projects different societal fears and frustrations, while, on the other hand, she symbolizes feminism and a specific female culture (Echols 98). The identity of the witch as an archetypal character is primarily characterized by her outcast position; she never completely fits in with the average population, instead she breaks the societal norms with her personality or behavior. As the archetypal character, the witch represents an evil woman, a nemesis, a destructive and subversive force which is dangerous for the society. The stratification of her identity is reflected in the merging of the human world with the non-human, supernatural and demonic world (Barstow 16). The stringent viewpoints from the witch hunt era where the novella takes place were based on misogyny promoted by men as the dominant protagonists of such culture. The witch hunt at the territory of the present-day Germany commenced in the 15th century, and the last witch was burnt in 1775. Many German writers, such as Hans Jakob

Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Theodor Fontane, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Ludwig Tieck, covered the subject of witchcraft or the deal with the devil in their works (Gierlich 43-60).

The Witch is set in the 17th century during the Thirty Years' War. It begins and ends with the imagery of radical violence, and the triumph and total dominance of death at the symbolic and factual level. The main character Rune is considered an outcast from birth, so her marginalized role in the intolerant and exclusionary society defines her character within her fundamentally tragic existence leading to her violent death. Her outcast position has two layers: one is societal, characterized by her belonging to the lowest societal class, whereas the second layer is gender-related, marked by female identity as the symbol of "otherness". Both layers are blended with the physicality of the main character which completely dominates her existence, eventually leading to her tragic death, due to her inability to (self)define her identity. The crime of the main (anti)heroine, i.e. the witch, is reflected in her distinctiveness, in the deviation from the socially acceptable behavior. The clerical and militant social structure within which Rune tries to build her own identity (to no avail) is very rigid about accepting any deviations from what it perceives as normal and acceptable. Such culture is exclusionary and reacts to the distinctive nature of the main character with contempt, stigmatization and ostracism. By creating a lynching environment, this culture transforms into a collective criminal/assassin and an executioner without personal conscience, awareness or accountability. She is sentenced to death by the clerical and militant societal structure, as a delusive way of avoiding personal accountability, which marks the end of her tragic life path and a craved satisfaction for the masses. The actual innocence of the main character, her genuinely uncorrupted and deeply human nature do not metamorphose into a metaphysical notion or save her from her tragic destiny.

Hartwig creates a world without human or divine goodness, where the illusion of love disperses in the radical denouement, in the blaze of hatred which will symbolically and actually devour the body of the main character. The author depicts a cruel and a violent world devoid of love and emotions where the dying body of a mother gives birth to a new life, which, paradoxically, emerges from the death itself. The world reflected in the novella *The Witch*, as well as the other literary texts written by Mela Hartwig, does not leave any room for maternal love and protection; it renders them practically unattainable. In the culture of war, conflicts and misogyny, the life of a woman is sacrificed in the triumph of death, which symbolizes a complete defeat of

humanistic values, nihilism, hopelessness and inability to continue life in another, parallel and/or (super)human dimension.

The novella starts with an extremely bizarre simultaneous scene: the birth of a baby girl and the public execution of her father, who was an assassin and a criminal: "Rune was born just as her father's head jumped over the executioner's hatchet into the gray sack" (Hartwig 203). The protagonist is born into this world as the head of her father rolls into the executioner's bag, with loud shouts and the cries of approval of the blood-thirsty mob. Childbearing pain is juxtaposed with the gushing torrents of her father's blood, so, at the symbolic level, death as the final oblivion is intertwined with the new life as a delusive ray of hope: "In the middle of the market place, her mother broke into labor, her pale face rushed by the blood of the dead" (203). Birth and death are reconnected in the following scene: the mother of the protagonist dies during childbirth, while the body of a tiny baby remains trapped between her legs. The life of the baby girl is saved by a gravedigger who, intending to rob the dead body, discovers a newborn baby hidden between the clothes of a woman that "no one knew or mourned" (203). At the beginning of the novella, Hartwig emphasized the lack of identity of the protagonist's mother, her non-existence in the societal sense, because the person who is not known or not mourned by others is deemed non-existent in the eyes of the society. Her life is only an illusion dispersed at the moment of her death when it becomes clear that her vanishing from the reality of life has no effect on the world whatsoever. The only proof of her existence and the transience of life, but also a warning sign, is a fragile female baby left behind. The mother dies at the beginning of the novella, so her role is reduced to the act of childbirth: the mother, an outcast, gives birth to a daughter, also an outcast, who will perish from the harsh reality as equally as unnoticed as her mother, revealing only the pathology of the society, not its meaning. The indirect influence of the mother, her sin and some sort of tragic bizarreness of her character, especially her vanishing from the plot, will define the tragic fate of the main protagonist Rune. The circle is closed when the daughter, in some cosmic way, follows the outcast model of her mother and ends her life in as equally as bizarre death. In general, the poetics of Mela Hartwig is pervaded with the motif of a missing mother, her physical absence or problematic relationships of the characters (mostly female) with their mothers, which is why they are partly or completely subjected to the masculine power. In her works, the mother is either dead, not mentioned, or casually mentioned in order to indicate the problematic/dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship (Fraisl 239-241). In her works, Hartwig trivialized, questioned and

redefined the myth of motherhood, which represents a radical critique of the dominant model of femininity and the unmasking of the weaknesses of the patriarchal culture.

The names of the gravedigger and his pregnant wife remained undisclosed in the novella, while their identity was exclusively constructed in relation to the baby which suddenly came into their lives. The wife insisted that they dispose of the baby as soon as possible, because she refused to provide refuge to the child of the assassin and a fornicator who made her feel anxious and nauseated: "You don't feel it: this toxic exhalation from the flesh and blood of the murderer and his whore" (Hartwig, 203). The expectant mother was repulsed by this tiny baby, because, in her eyes, it radiated the poison of its origin. Motherhood is depicted as an extremely disputable category, open to question and critique, hence it can be concluded that a woman was not born as a mother nor defined by her maternal instincts through the mere femininity-masculinity dichotomy. In her novella, Hartwig tears down stereotypes; she opposes the widely accepted perception of motherhood with the aim to unmask the true face of male culture based on patriarchy. The woman who will soon become a mother herself, contrary to the myth of equality of motherhood and the feminine ideal, requests from a man to bury a newborn child thus exhibiting a bizarre enthusiasm and thrill at the thought of someone else's pain and death. The gravedigger's wife exhibits an almost demonic cruelty, whereas he shows some traces of humaneness and refuses to murder the child. He wraps the child in double wraps, showing a certain level of (maternal) care, and takes her on a trip with the intention to leave her at the doorstep of a woman he refers to as mother Lisa. The author, undoubtedly, ironically tackles the concept of Christian love and mercy, only to have the gravedigger robbed by an unnamed traveler who saved his life. When the traveler realizes that the stolen bundle does not have any material value, but that it contains a newborn baby, "the good Samaritan" leaves the baby near a Catholic monastery. This entire story contains some elements of fiction and the author does not strive towards credibility; she deliberately deviates from reality in order to emphasize the absurdity of her world.

The Catholic monks perceived the appearance of this baby girl as a sign from God. A woman symbolizes everything that the monks avoid in their lives consecrated to God, including the renunciation of all secular and carnal pleasures. They are particularly fascinated that they found a female child, since femininity is, at the symbolic level, perceived as a potential lure and temptation, which is confirmed by the fact that they baptized her as Rune, which is an old Germanic non-Christian name

reminiscent of the pagan era. The baptism of the girl represents a symbolic act; she is accepted into the Christian community, which represents “normalcy”, whereas the choice of her name reflects the paradigmatic “otherness” (Fraisl 195). Even though the author refers to them as “the deprived men”, the girl entirely changed their lives. Paradoxically, the girl becomes the common property of these men, who, in the author’s words, willingly renounced the concept of personal property.

The child brought joy to their monotonous daily routine, because the monks lived in isolation from the outside world, bound by the vow of silence and completely devoted to the preservation of their micro-cosmos. The trouble started when Rune, growing up to be a playful and curious girl, tried to fight for her autonomy. The living joy of a girl and her need to inadvertently articulate her own identity in the world of silence is contrasted to the seriousness of the men who opted for silence as a conscious choice. Rune’s development is primarily determined by the fact that she is unfamiliar with regular speech patterns, hence she combines the Latin parts of homilies and the choir singing into an unintelligible language which the author describes as an exhilarated childlike intoxication. The passion for life exhibited by the person outside of that circle, an outcast, is necessarily contrasted with the clerical order. Rune speaks with her body because she is unfamiliar with speech as a system of verbal signs; her movement, her playfulness, her hiding and running become the means of her communication and expression (197).

The first conflict between Rune and the Prior of the monastery occurred when he witnessed her enthusiastically suckling on a cow’s udder at the age of seven. This act could be interpreted as Rune’s need for a maternal figure and closeness with a female element, whereas the Prior considered it an obscenity. The turning point in her life was marked by a random event: an unannounced visitor came to the monastery, and it was the first time that the thirteen-year-old Rune, who was hiding in a secret room, heard articulated voices and speech as a vocal and auditory element intended for communication. The first encounter with verbalized words caused a turmoil of emotions in her, so she was extremely hurt when she had to return to her world of monastic silence. In that state of agony, Rune frantically flapped her arms, cried inconsolably, articulated the sounds of despair and howled like an animal, which emphasized a certain beast-like trait of the main protagonist caused by the lack of speech as one of the dominant human features. The monks initially failed to understand her reaction, which actually represented her yearning for human speech and the words that

create various possibilities of magical communication, but also a space to create her own identity through the verbal articulation of her thoughts: "The silence of the monastery lay on her chest like an elf" (Hartwig 211). Her encounter with actual speech represents a pivotal turning point in her mental state devoid of identity, hence she instinctively starts to feel deprived of the one thing that could help her escape her unconscious existence (Fraisl 201). The monks noticed her utter despair and decided to organize a big celebration to make her feel better. Their preparations lasted for six days, and on the seventh day they rested and invited Rune into the ceremonial room: "The monks had prepared the feast for six days, but on the seventh they rested and led Rune into the hall" (Hartwig 213). This was the author's unequivocal allegory to the God's creation of the world, but the denouement and the ensuing horrendous crime showed the degenerated world of mankind contrasted to the idealized divine world.

At the beginning, Rune is shocked and frightened at the scene unfolding before her; the mystical aromas and the unknown tastes of food and wine, so she coped with the adaptation to these new circumstances by loudly laughing, clapping hands and subsequently dancing. The ambiance and the wine affected her transformation from a girl into a woman; her dress slipped from her body and unveiled her naked female body. Enchanted by the moment, Rune began dancing followed by the flaming gazes of the monks who started pouring wine over her body encouraged by that orgiastic atmosphere: The girl - woman continued with her erotic naked dance completely soaked with wine, a red liquid reminiscent of blood, contributing thus to the dramatic moment which would soon turn into a tragic event/death: "Wine like blood colored Rune's breasts and thighs, seeping into her lap" (216). The celebration soon transformed into a complete obscurity of human conscience and moral, so that Rune's previous guardians now started observing her as sexual prey, which resulted in the total degradation of their identity as protective guardians and substitute mothers. This new identity created in that utter degradation of humankind is an identity of predators lurking their new victim driven by the orgiastic atmosphere. This transformation can be observed as a conflict of male and female libido: suppression leads to the degradation of male libido and the consequent implosion, while the woman becomes a victim of her released destructive energy. The monks, i.e. God's servants, are suddenly overpowered by the demonic forces as a symbol of destruction caused by their suppressed and denied sexuality, which results in the loss of common sense and the lack of awareness of the good and evil dichotomy. "Jumping as if the devil played on them, the

holy fathers pushed and staggered one against the other” (217). The monks transform into this girl's adversaries; the world is completely twisted in that orgiastic atmosphere, human values are trivialized, moral and ethical norms are annulled. In that way, Hartwig is trying to tell us that God is losing his battle with the devil. The monks rape the girl accompanied by the horrific sounds of the organ resembling human cry: “Paralyzed with horror, Rune let the ghost of flesh and blood and lust come close, freezing with fear” (217). Rune becomes the victim of male sexuality and aggression, which could be symbolically construed as the ritual sacrifice of a woman to the male libido or, in the broader context, a complete subordination of the woman, her submission and demonstration of male power: “Then the animal rushed over her, choking off her screams with hairy fists, until she choked with the weight of his will while the organ suddenly fell silent” (217). The novella explicitly describes the nauseating scene of gang rape where the girl is juxtaposed against a collective dark force, so she can only let out a sound of hysterical laughter as a loud demonstration of her suffering: “A ball of fighting, panting bodies rolled against Rune. Gripped with horror, she started laughing with her teeth bared. One hit her in the face with his fist. But she was still laughing, in a spasm of laughter [...]” (218).

The monks are never identified by name in the novella, they are mentioned only by ordinal numbers in this scene: monk number one or monk number two. They are nameless, devoid of their identities and human faces, they only represent their rank, their power which is declaratively so close to God, but, in reality, they are transformed into the archetypal model of evil. The monastic Prior, as the representative of higher/supernatural and human/political power, is the only one refusing to participate in the orgy. He breaks the vow of silence and invokes a curse upon the monks. This results in a complete disclosure of the clerical and militant society; an entire ideology is revealed as a lie, compromised by a non-Christian act, therefore the Prior severely accuses his fellow brothers, yet emphasizes that the woman, as a symbol of evil and temptation, is the main culprit for their sin and their relapse from faith. The Prior assumes the role of the righteous One, God himself, and pronounces the God's judgment. God that he represents, with whom he identifies and whose message he conveys, is a vindictive and strict God, and not the Christian God of love and forgiveness, but the Old Testament God who is cruel in his punishment of humans for their sins. The Prior, and, symbolically, God who speaks through him do not care about the victim; they do not try to help her or deal with her condition or trauma, instead they are obsessed with punishing the men who succumbed to temptation.

The male perception of the woman is that of a fornicator who seduces with her body to drive men farther away from God; she brought rape upon herself, and the man is not guilty of violating the woman but of betraying God, faith and ideology. Such a constellation of guilt contains the author's harsh critique of the clerical and militant society. Prior, as the Church representative, accuses the monks of fornicating and drunken behavior but not of violating the woman, hence, in the rush of righteous rage, he threatens to maim their genitalia because they have to pay the price on Earth with the body part which made them commit the sin against the spirit. After his heated speech perceived by the monks as the revelation of God and a form of exorcism, they kneel down and suddenly, as in a trance, transform into obedient and deeply pious humans. Men start collectively praying for God's forgiveness, completely disregarding their victim Rune. Their punishment appears in the form of the enemy Protestant army breaking into the monastery while they are lying naked on the floor, with only the main representative of power, i.e. the Prior, standing upright like a "flame of prayer over the naked bodies of his pious fellow men" (219). The novella emphasizes the transformation of their identity: they turn from pious people into a sexually aggressive mob, only to reclaim their identity of God-fearing monks, while the woman is perceived merely as an object throughout this entire process. Without a doubt, Hartwig ironically tackles the fact that, according to the theories of the time, the female protagonist is devoid of her actual identity, hence she can only materialize through her relationship with a male subject and by assuming the role of a victim.

The clerical male world turns against Rune: what once symbolized the substitute maternal affection is transformed into hatred, hence the religious authority invites the Protestant soldiers to participate in the public execution of the alleged witch/fornicator. However, the military commander who, like the Prior, represents the political power or the military part of its structure, demonstrates his superior authority by ordering the maiming of the monks' genitalia and their subsequent capital punishment, whereas he takes the girl, presented to him as a witch, as the spoils of war (Polt-Heinzl 221-222). The character referred to as the "commander" in the novella is the next man in line to take care of Rune, whereas his pregnant wife, who waits for him in the tent, is another female character hostile towards Rune. In order to protect Rune, the commander uses his male/military authority and chases away his pregnant wife in front of curious onlookers. The humiliation experienced by the anonymous wife of the commander will play an important role in the denouement, because she will encourage

the public lynching at the end of the novella. There is an evident similarity with the situation at the beginning of the novella: a pregnant woman, who is soon to become a mother herself, perceives the main protagonist as a direct threat (Dornhof 74). Despite a strong identification of the commander's character with the military position, which is reflected in the novella through the construction of a dominant militarist identity, he shows certain signs of humaneness and tries to protect Rune from external dangers.

In her novella, the author propels the stereotypical representation of female sexuality into absurdity by depicting characters of seductive girls and erotic women from lower social classes, which is a common feature of the Western literature and culture at the transition from the 19th into the 20th century (Gilman 119). After an erotic dance where she exposes her naked body to the eyes of the gazing men, and the subsequently violent loss of virginity, the author describes a clear development of the main protagonist from a child into a childlike femme fatale. The internal and the external transformation of the main protagonist happens as she is unconsciously lying on the floor, so the awakening, after a long trauma-induced sleep, reveals entirely new life circumstances to her. Rune wakes up in the commander's tent completely shocked, however the unknown man calms her down with his friendly approach: "I am used to commanding, Rune, but I want to be a gentleman to you: I want to be father, brother and friend to you. I won't touch you, Rune, if you don't want to" (Hartwig 221). The unidentified male character, who is referred to as the commander by the author, assumes various roles in the novella; he is a warrior and a military commander, but also a father, a brother and a friend who does not perceive Rune only as a sexual object. The commander now assumes the role previously held by the monks and is ready to sacrifice his own life in order to protect her. He concludes that the childlike femme fatale is a "victim of the ludicrous vow of silence" (222). Owing to his recounting of numerous stories every day, she became familiar with speaking, the meaning of words, but also with the world around her. In that way, Rune slowly started to understand life from the male perspective. After her experience of living in a monastery among men, she grew up without comprehending the elements of her own femininity: "Rune celebrated festivals of sound, orgies of the ear, did not leave her camp and began to recover" (222). The commander became her tutor; his fascination with the childlike femme fatale led to the transformation of his identity from a military commander/warrior/politician into a caring father/friend/teacher: "He had forgotten what war meant. He no longer knew what hatred was" (223).

Rune received various precious gifts and was particularly fascinated with golden objects. She engaged in a bizarre game: at night she would bury her gold everywhere around the camp, and the following night she would look for it with eyes closed and arms stretched out in a trance, thus exhibiting her supernatural abilities. Her passion for gold soon turned into her need to discover the hiding places of others in the camp, so she secretly entered in the military tents. When they would catch her stealing, she would compensate for the damage by surrendering her own body, because she was unaware of what her own and other people's sexuality actually represented. Thus Rune once again became the victim of other people's urges and desires: "Stunned and dissolved in a feverish frenzy of smell, she felt neither pleasure nor pain, eager to fill her hands with the strange treasures" (224). The sexual act to which she succumbs cannot be deemed consensual, despite not being forced: she surrenders herself in a sort of a trance, she does not feel any pain or pleasure, and she somehow spiritually transcends her body. In the context of this novella, gold can be observed as a symbolic projection of the main character's unsuccessful quest for happiness that she tries to materialize as a person with no actual identity. Rune exploits her body in exchange for the gold; every night she succumbs herself to unknown soldiers but she instinctively hides the gold she thus earns from her benefactor. The childlike femme fatale hides her treasure, unaware of the value it holds for others, because she is unfamiliar with the rules of the actual world. She resembles an animal-like instinctive creature, whereby Hartwig ironically tackles the misogynistic theories about women which were popular at the beginning of the 20th century (Catani 12). Because of her miraculous ability to find the hidden gold, others start suspecting that she has supernatural powers: "How does she find the gold? Does she know our secrets? Does she know more than other people? This is dangerous" (Hartwig 225). The soldiers expressed their fear of the unknown, which, in the context of the discourse about women of the time, can be interpreted as the fear of women.

When the water sources dried up in the camp, Rune discovered some underground springs with her eyes closed and her arms stretched out, while the soldiers followed her in a thirst-induced delirium: "How did she find the source? Does she also know the secrets of nature? Does she know more than other people? This is not good!" (225). Despite their fear of the supernatural powers of the childlike femme fatale, they celebrated the discovery of water sources and they carried her back to the camp on their shoulders, which marked the first time that Rune got the popular approval. The men praised her, while the women touched

and kissed the hem of her dress, perceiving her at that moment almost as a deity.

Rune discovered some hidden barrels of wine in the cellar of the city destroyed in ashes, which sparked another wave of joy among the soldiers, but it also instilled them with a certain fear of her inexplicable powers: "The devil is in the game" (227). In the belly of the abandoned city, the main protagonist also discovered some hidden golden coins from different countries and periods, which emphasizes the symbolism of timeless/universal value as opposed to the transiency of human life. Rune expressed her joy by rolling naked on the golden coins, putting them in her mouth, ecstatically laughing and crying on the stacks of gold. She experiences the world around her and expresses her emotions with her body, which indicates a certain cult of the body and physicality (Fraisl 193). The image of the naked female body ecstatically dancing on the stacks of golden coins makes the soldiers' blood curdle and provokes their fascination at the same time: they believe that this is even more beautiful, miraculous and barbaric than the warfare, so they conclude that it must be the act of the devil himself. The author tackles taboos such as death, rape and war, which is why the ecstatic female body frightens the armed men. They fear the woman, who is an outcast, alien, unknown, incomprehensible, and thus mystical in their perception of reality: "But this ghostly hustle and bustle of flesh and gold, this frenzied dance of vanities, this haunted obsession sucked out the marrow like a vampire" (Hartwig 228). Despite discovering water, wine and gold, they start perceiving her as a witch.

The rusted arms and the tents covered with weed symbolize the undesirable passivity at the camp, so people, naturally, try to find the culprit for the lack of action, warfare and looting. The author's unmasking of the mechanisms of persecution and lynching of those perceived by the society as outcasts, and the people's need to compensate for their own frustrations by harassing others who are different can be interpreted as an allegory of the antisemitic atmosphere in Austria at the beginning of the 20th century. The famine that spread across the camp additionally fueled the soldiers' frustrations and encouraged the gruesome wife that was once chased away by the commander to recount the stories of Rune's witchcraft. Soon the childlike femme fatale became the main protagonist of the stories depicting her as a witch, a creature that can live without food or water, as someone who poisons water and turns bread into stone and covers the arms with rust. The commander's gruesome wife fueled the fears of her superstitious fellowmen by affiliating the girl with the occult; she constructed the narrative in line with the beliefs and projections about

the witches of the time: "She made a circle around the camp and muttered bad words. It binds your tents to the ground with spells. She laughs at you!" (231). Hartwig, without a doubt, unmasks the manipulation mechanisms; the processes which force people to perceive a certain person either as a saint and a hero or to demonize them and blame them for all their hardship. The scene, in fact, is reminiscent of the antisemitic movement in Austria at the moment of this novella, but it also acts as a prophecy in the context of the forthcoming political changes that would force the author and many other artists and intellectuals to exile.

Rune starts envisioning blood and her own death at the camp affected by the plague and famine: "Blood, I feel blood, much, too much blood. It springs from the heart; it cries from the eyes [...]. I burn!" (233). The commander still nurtures a deeply humane, fatherly/brotherly/friendly attitude towards her and wants to protect her. Despite his warnings, Rune secretly abandons the tent and wanders among the dead bodies observing "the faces with the mask of death" (233). Hartwig indicates the emergence of the ensuing tragedy by creating the atmosphere of terror and the main protagonist wanders through the piles of dead and semi-alive bodies up until the dawn. As she passes by the bodies destroyed by illness, their maimed and disfigured faces, she is unaware of the fact that she had lost her dress and was left completely naked. Because of her horrific visions, she desperately tries to persuade the people against going to war, as the smell of blood and death spreads around the camp. The naked female body symbolizes her bare, naive and genuine nature, but it also represents her communication mechanism because, at this moment, the words cannot adequately verbalize this truly horrendous scenery. While the women in the camp are bothered by the beauty of her naked body and thus refer to her as a devil-worshipping fornicator, the men recognize her as the reason for the commander's passivity. It now becomes evident, in such a constellation of events, that Rune is going to be sacrificed, as the commander's gruesome wife calls for her lynch: "Burn the witch!" (Hartwig 235). Hartwig again unmasks the manipulation mechanisms, more or less subtle ways which lead to the spreading of negative attitude towards the outcasts and, eventually, to a crime. According to the author, despite the fact that at the end it does not matter who was the first who called for the lynch and the burning of the witch at the stake, all accomplices in the crime will eventually have to face the consequences of their horrific actions: "Who spoke the word first? Later, when the guilty party was sought, no one could remember who called the fateful word, who piled the wood to the stake, who had lit the pile of wood"

(235). Hartwig reminds us that, despite the fact that collective guilt is composed of individual faces, after the crime has been committed it is impossible to individualize guilt, which can be interpreted as a reflection of the rising antisemitic movement, but also as a premonition of the tragedy which will once again affect the Jewish people.

Rune as an outcast is forced to face the baser human instincts and traits, so she consequently becomes the victim of mass hysteria. While she feels the arms of unknown people reaching for her body while eerily laughing, she begins silently praying to God who is oblivious to her suffering, despite being a supreme moral authority. Her powerless, fragile and perishable body becomes an object in the hands of the howling mob; they punch her with their fists, throw her on the ground and drag her over the rocks in a semi-conscious condition as she feels a bitter taste of her own blood in her mouth. This moment symbolizes the ultimate decay of humanity, which symbolically resembles the gang rape scene. Tied to a stake, Rune looks at the eyes of death with her eyes wide open, so the scene from the beginning of the novella, i.e. her birth coinciding with the death of her mother, gets a tragic sequel and/or ending. Hartwig introduces her readers to yet another violent scene, where Rune screams as the flames devour her legs and the smoke silences her newly found voice, which may be interpreted at the symbolic level. Her ill fortune is celebrated by other women who loudly laugh as she disappears in the flames, which is a symbolic demonstration of the utter lack of empathy contrasted with the stereotype of sentimental femininity. After her body has completely burnt down and turned to ashes, the men walk away taking off their hats as a sign of a certain respect towards death, while the "blood-thirsty laughter of the women" still strongly resonates in the silent aftermath of death: "Only the bloody laugh of the women, gruesome singing of the grave, went on for a long time through the delicate stillness of death" (235).

In her novella *The Witch*, which is, without a doubt, one of her most radical literary works, Mela Hartwig depicts the world of violence, suffering and destruction and warns about the difficult position of the outcasts who are different and distinctive. Even though the novella is set in the 17th century, the misogynistic and racist theories she critically discusses here are reminiscent of the Austrian society at the beginning of the 20th century. Despite the fact that Hartwig can be considered a pioneer of some sort of a radical literary feminism in depicting the reality of women (Grubišić Pulišelić 102) and their societally conditioned subordinated position, this text requires the decoding of other symbolic meanings as well. In that sense, the novella *The Witch* can be interpreted

as a warning against antisemitism in the form of mass hysteria reflected in placing the blame on a potential victim.

The focal point of this novella is the motif of a witch as a symbol of the oppressed woman, fear of her sexuality but also of the possibilities and potentials of female metamorphosis and freedom. Certain patterns of behavior of female outcasts can also be found in the literary works of other authors. As the female characters' reactions to their outcastness is silenced, and reduced to ineffective futile attempts, the women themselves are generally perceived as insane, mad and hysteric, although the symptoms are actually the products of their repression. (Güniz Sertel 16). What literary texts that deal with rape and its consequences have in common is that legal proceedings against the perpetrator only occur in exceptional cases (Dane 13). An analysis of the topic of rape in literature requires a change of perspective (14). Rape can be interpreted as a political crime, since it is an expression of the patriarchal form of society (Brownmiller 15). The complex consequences of the crime, the psychological and physical suffering as well as the social stigmatization of the victim come into view only secondarily (Dane 15). Hartwig introduces us into the world of violence and hatred, silence and suppressed libido, warfare and the plague as the paradigmatic examples of evil in order to show us the absurdity of her own world which would completely collapse several years after the publication of the novella. In the subtle studies of different cases of women and their destinies, the author ruthlessly sheds light on the obscure abysses of repressed dreams and traumas. That is why the subject of the novella *The Witch* is still a current issue at the beginning of the 21st century when the witch hunt or the persecution of outcasts as a societal phenomenon is executed by different, often perfidious means. The author's literary narrative still has a shocking effect on the present-day reader despite the fact that they are probably used to explicit scenes of violence across different media. She certainly uses a very provocative form of critique in order to construct the literary world of her characters – the outcasts, and their mental and physical states beyond the limits of the societally acceptable norms (Rinke 34). It can be concluded that, in this novella, Hartwig covers the subject of witches and (non)mothers and different aspects of outcast identity through the narrative about the non-existent crime, yet a real and frightening and far-reaching punishment as a constant in an ideologically constructed world of history, present and future.

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HEXEN UND UNERFÜLLTE MÜTTER: WEIBLICHE AUßENSEITERINNEN IN MELA HARTWIGS *DIE HEXE*

In diesem Beitrag beschäftigen wir uns mit der Konstruktion von Außenseiteridentität der Hauptprotagonistin in der Novelle *Die Hexe*, einem der radikalsten literarischen Texte, die Mela Hartwig (1893-1967) je geschrieben hat. Rune gilt von Geburt an als gesellschaftliche Außenseiterin, daher definiert ihre marginalisierte Rolle in der intoleranten und ausschließenden Gesellschaft ihren Charakter und ihre grundlegend tragische Existenz, die zum gewaltsamen Tod führt. Ihre Ausgestoßenen-Position wird auf zwei Ebenen verdeutlicht: Eine ist gesellschaftlich, gekennzeichnet durch ihre Zugehörigkeit zur untersten gesellschaftlichen Schicht, während die zweite Ebene geschlechtsspezifisch und durch die weibliche Identität als Symbol für „Andersartigkeit“ gekennzeichnet ist. Das Verbrechen der (Anti)Heldin – der Hexe – spiegelt sich in ihrer Verschiedenartigkeit, in der Abweichung vom normalen, verständlichen und akzeptablen Verhalten wider. Mela Hartwig schildert die Welt der Gewalt, des Leidens und der Zerstörung und warnt vor der schwierigen Position der Ausgestoßenen. Obwohl die Novelle im 17. Jahrhundert spielt, erinnern die frauenfeindlichen und rassistischen Theorien, die hier kritisch diskutiert werden, an die österreichische Gesellschaft zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts.

Schlüsselwörter: Mela Hartwig, Hexe, Außenseiterposition, intolerante Gesellschaft, Misogynie, Rassismus