Selling the Third Wave: Lilith's Legend and Commodified Feminism in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the commodification of feminist discourse in popular media, specifically the representation of the mythological creature Lilith, alongside popular feminist ideals, in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina (CAOS)*. It explores the evolution of the infamous she-demon Lilith and discusses her appearances in a myriad of historical texts to lay the groundwork for the analysis of her characterisation in *CAOS.* This thesis also contextualises socio-feminist discourses and discusses anti-feminist tropes present within the series, ultimately arguing that the misrepresentation of the feminist movement is not limited to Lilith's simplification, but is instead a structural problem within *CAOS.*

Introduction

Over centuries the mythical figure Lilith has gained a reputation of an evil woman to be feared by men, women, and children alike. Lilith, she-demon of the night, was said to lay hold of men who sleep alone and bear demons from their nocturnal emissions. Aside from her reputation as a seductress, the name Lilith has also become synonymous with abductor and murderer of children. According to Jewish mythology, Lilith was Adam's first wife, created from the same clay and thus his equal, and in other religious works Lilith is often also understood as Satan's associate. In recent years Lilith has permeated popular discourse, making appearances in many TV-shows and films. Despite the feminist movement's efforts to reclaim and reinvent Lilith's image by reinterpreting the patriarchal texts that portrayed her as an evil seductress, contemporary media still represent Lilith as a vicious demoness. To understand how Lilith's representation operates in contemporary media, it is beneficial to explore the motivations that influence the production of television programming.

A study by Jamieson and Campbell found that women between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine are the prime consumer group that advertisers wish to target because this group makes the majority of consumption decisions (qtd in. Dow 20). As a result, television executives strive to create programming that is attractive to women and have appropriated feminist discourse to appeal to this newly perceived customer category of working women (Dow 22). In their attempt to capture the zeitgeist while also aiming to attract a large audience, television executives pay close attention to the mirrors of public concern, the media. In this sense, commercial television "feeds off itself and other media and in this way its images both echo and participate in the shaping of cultural trends" (Taylor 4). A study of television's treatment of feminism, then, can be understood as a study of mass-mediated cultural attitudes toward feminism (Dow 22). As put forward by Riordan, capitalism profoundly shapes cultural production, which in turn shapes social relations (280). It is

paramount then, to explore the consequences of commodification and investigate how feminist icons and ideals are translated into public discourses that are consumed by millions of people.

As Netflix has just released the fourth and final season of the successful series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina (CAOS),* this show proves to be a perfect case study to investigate the (mis)representation of feminist discourse and its popular icons in popular media for several reasons. The primary reason is that it foregrounds Lilith as the main antagonist, thereby distinguishing itself from other series, such as *Supernatural*, where Lilith briefly appears. Furthermore, as a series specifically marketed towards young women, it has shown incredible success amongst its intended audience and is exalted for its feminist message, centring the show around the powerful young woman, Sabrina. This thesis researches the commodification and simplification of Lilith, a popular feminist icon, alongside the representation of popular feminist ideals, in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina.*

The analysis in this thesis is centred around the notion of commodification, a concept which has become increasingly discernible in and relevant to our contemporary society. Therefore, the first chapter will contextualise this notion of commodification as it appears in socio-feminist discourses, focusing on the ways in which the feminist movement has been turned into a sales strategy by the culture industry. The second chapter will explore the evolution of Lilith's reputation and explain her relevance to the feminist movement. Chapter three will contain an in-depth analysis of Lilith's characterisation in the first season of *CAOS* and will highlight other problematic representations of feminism within the series to illustrate that the misrepresentation of feminism is a structural problem in the series.

1. The Spread of Commodified Feminism

To understand the series' negligence in accurately representing feminist ideals, it is imperative to define feminism and investigate its popular rhetoric. In general, feminism is defined as the system of ideas and political practices based on the belief in social, economic, and political equality in the face of inequality of the sexes (Brunell and Burket). When considering the feminist movement, it is common practice to distinguish between three waves of modern feminism. The first wave occurred during the nineteenth and early twentieth century throughout the Western world. It focused primarily on legal issues, such as securing women's right to vote. Second-wave feminists lobbied for reproductive rights and equal pay for a group of predominantly white, middle-class women, and as a critique on their white solipsism, amongst other inadequacies, third-wave feminism arose (Archer Mann and Huffman 58). As posited by Riordan, this meant incorporating the concerns and amplifying the voices of women of colour, queer women and women from developing nations, who had been previously ignored by the feminist movement (280).

During the 1990s, with the onset of the third feminist wave, popular discourse shifted from being male-dominated toward "pro-girl" rhetoric (279). Pro-girl rhetoric can be understood as the discourse on girl power, "a popular media initiative of new femininity" (Bae 28). The term "girl power" was popularised by the British pop group *The Spice Girls*, who promoted a message of girl power that was both feminine and feminist, voicing their sexual desires, and celebrating female solidarity while "decked out in miniskirts, plunging necklines, and go-go boots" (Zaslow 3). This new discourse on girlhood emphasised external beauty and sexual attractiveness, teaching girls to perceive beauty as the essence of femininity, which conveys an "oppressive imperative of patriarchy" (Roberts qtd. in Bae 30). By giving in to the patriarchal demand of the female body to be made desirable for men, this new interpretation of girlhood ultimately positioned women as objects of the male gaze (Bae

30). However, since women could decide "when to be girly and when to be powerful, when to be mother and when to be professional, when to be sexy for male pleasure and when to be sexy for their own pleasure" (Zaslow 3), this modern interpretation of girl power also conveyed a source of power over this oppressive patriarchy.

The border crossings mentioned by Zaslow are characteristic of "girl power media," media produced for women after the late 1990s. As put forward by Bae, one scrutinized issue of this conceptualisation of girl power is the "aesthetically oriented consumerism that structures it, a consumerism created through mainstream commodification for economic purposes" (29). Usually, in the process of commodification, the original product or idea is diluted to appeal to a wider audience (Riordan 290), which results in an idea or icon being represented inaccurately and thereby emptied of its political significance. In this sense, the emancipatory elements of girl power rhetoric are downplayed, and instead this modern interpretation draws young women's attention to fashion and appearance. It is turned into a marketing strategy for the culture industry, which in turn uses media to further disseminate the notion of girl power (Godfrey qtd. in Bae 29). Thus, feminism and femininity are turned into sales strategies for the culture industry (Goldman, Heath, Smith qtd in. Dow 22). Before any analysis can be performed on Lilith's characterisation in *CAOS*, Lilith's past popular iterations need to be discussed, to establish the foundations upon which her character in *CAOS* has been modelled.

2. Lilith's Evolution: From Demon to Feminist Icon

To grasp the depth of Lilith's legend and the reputation she has gained throughout the ages, we need to look to the past. There is much disagreement amongst scholars surrounding the first true mention of Lilith as she is known today. This is in part because her legend dates back thousands of years and is thus hard to trace. However, another complicating aspect is that Lilith's name is derived from the Sumerian plural word 'lilitu,' which can be found in ancient Babylonian texts referring to a class of winged female demons who dwell in desert lands and open country spaces and attack pregnant women and infants (Lesses 346). Since 'lilitu' refers to a class of demons rather than an individual figure, it is challenging to pinpoint the first true mention of Lilith as the singular she-demon. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a text that survived from the ancient civilization of Sumer dating back to 2100 B.C., is often referred to as entailing one of the earliest surviving mentions of Lilith. However, it is important to note that this is a result of Samuel Noah Kramer's decision to translate 'Líláke' as 'Lilith' in his translation of the Sumerian Epic (5). While scholars almost universally agree that the contemporary figure of Lilith derives from the Mesopotamian demons, it is important to note that there is no textual evidence supporting the claim that Lilith can be identified in sources like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Kyam et al. 220), as this Sumerian text originally speaks of 'Líláke' instead of 'Lilith.'

Instead, the first clear mention of the term 'Lilith' concerning a supernatural creature dates back to 40-10 B.C., when the term 'liliyyot' or 'liliyyoth' was used in "The Dead Sea Scrolls," a collection of ancient Jewish religious manuscripts. In excerpt 4Q510-511, Lilith is named amongst demons, howlers, and the spirits of destroying angels as "those which fall upon men without warning to lead them astray from a spirit of understanding and to make their heart desolate" in an incantation for protection against demons (Chilton et al. 190). Even though the text, which functions as an exorcism hymn, is fragmented, it becomes clear that

Lilith already had her reputation as an evil figure within this ancient civilisation, as she is named among other frightening creatures in a spell used to banish evil forces.

2.1. Lilith as a Biblical Figure

Lilith's myth was developed further in the Babylonian Talmud, dating between 300 and 500 A.D. The Talmud's representation of Lilith seems to be inspired by the earlier Babylonian legend since her behaviour reinforces the already existing stereotype of Lilith as a demon who seduces men. One Talmudic verse found in Shabbat 151b, states that "one may not sleep in a house alone, and whoever sleeps in a house alone is seized by Lilith." Following Eruvin 18b, Lilith had gained a reputation of bearing demons from the nocturnal fluids of her male victims (*The William Davidson Version*).

Another major contribution to the development of Lilith's legend stems from the biblical book of Genesis. Even though Lilith is only explicitly referred to in the Hebrew Bible once, namely in Isaiah 34:14, from 700 A.D. onwards, Lilith is largely understood in Jewish sources as Adam's first wife, created at the same time and sculpted from the same clay. The idea of Lilith as being the first wife of Adam stems from the creation stories. The first creation story, as it appears in Genesis 1, portrays men and women as equals and the pinnacle of God's creation. According to this story, God created both male and female human beings simultaneously, after the plants and animals had already been introduced to the Garden of Eden (*King James Version*, Gen. 1.27). The second creation story, as it is told in Genesis 2, portrays man as to have been created first and placed in the Garden of Eden to tend to it. Noticing the man to be lonely, God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Subsequently, God introduces all the animals to the Garden as possible companions for Adam. After he had rejected all the animals as partners, the first woman, Eve, was created from Adam's rib (Gen 2.18). In this account, man is created first

and woman last. The differences between the two creation stories posed a problem for ancient rabbis who believed the Torah to be the written word of God and thus could not contain contradictions. To reconcile the two versions, they came up with ideas such as the androgyne and the concept of a 'First Eve.' According to the latter theory, Genesis 1 refers to Adam's first wife, and Genesis 2 refers to Eve, who was Adam's second wife (Dame et al. 192).

The first written source that explicitly interprets Lilith as Adam's first wife is the anonymous text "The Alphabet of Ben Sira" that is estimated to have been written between 700 and 1000 A.D. Although this text is satirical, it illustrates that Lilith's story was well known in the oral tradition. According to this text, God created a woman for Adam from the same earth and called her Lilith. Perceiving herself as an equal to Adam, Lilith refuses to lie beneath Adam during sex, upon which he insists that the bottom is her rightful place and that she should be submissive to him. Lilith leaves the Garden of Eden and when God's angels fail to bring her back, God casts a spell over Lilith, causing a hundred of her children to die each day. Lilith explains that she has power over newborn babies and that she exists to sicken them. She swore that whenever she saw the angels' names on amulets, she would leave the child alone. In this text, the biblical figure of Lilith as the 'First Eve' is combined with the earlier legends of the female demons who have a reputation of stalking men and preying upon women and children. It also introduces the ancient practice of using amulets to protect pregnant women and newborn babies from Lilith to literature.

Other noteworthy developments to Lilith's image originate from Kabbalistic writings, such as the *Zohar,* in which Lilith is partnered with Samael, the male personification of evil who is associated with Satan (Gaines 18). In many contemporary sources such as *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,* this image is preserved, as Lilith is often seen to form an alliance with Satan.

2.2. Lilith as a Feminist Icon

The aforementioned stories of Lilith have one common denominator, namely that of Lilith as a sexual creature who craves independence. It is for this reason that she has become an icon for feminists, instead of condemning Lilith's fierce individualism and raw sexuality, feminists praise her for these characteristics. One major contribution to the feminist interpretation of Lilith is put forward by Judith Plaskow, a feminist theologian. Plaskow's textual interpretation of Lilith's rabbinic legend features an authoritative Adam, who refuses to acknowledge Lilith as his equal and demands for her to tend to the Garden. When Lilith fled, Eve was created and proved to be the ideal submissive woman, who was told fearsome stories about the demon Lilith. However, when Lilith fought her way into the garden, Eve caught a glimpse of her, and saw she was a woman like herself. After seeing Lilith's strength and bravery in battle, Eve began to think about her own limits within the garden, and often sought out Lilith and together they created the bond of sisterhood. So, in Plaskow's story, Lilith is transformed from a demon to a role model, inspiring Eve to acknowledge her own individuality (31-2). The contemporary feminist movement found an inspiration in this portrayal of Lilith and decisively changed her image to that of the powerful indomitable woman. Nowadays, feminist organisations incorporate Lilith's name to honour her legend, such as the Jewish magazine *Lilith,* or the music festival "Lilith Fair." As Lilly Rivlin writes: "In the late twentieth century, self-sufficient women, inspired by the women's movement, have adopted the Lilith myth as their own. They have transformed her into a female symbol for autonomy, sexual choice, and control of one's own destiny" (Dame et al. 392). Hailed as an icon for the feminist movement, television executives were quick to incorporate Lilith into mainstream media to appeal to the female audience, resulting in the successful American supernatural horror series, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*.

3. Commodified Feminism in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*

Not unlike other social movements, feminism has fallen victim to the commodification of its ideas, values, and icons. One such instance was the commodification of the "pro-girl" rhetoric that emerged during the third wave (Riordan 279). What started as a hopeful undertaking intended to put women on the map, turned into an opportunity for, most notably, entertainment companies to conceptualise the idea of pro-girl rhetoric and turn it into tangible commodities. These commodities are most evident in popular culture including social media, hit records such as "Wannabe" by *The Spice Girls,* and television series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (289). Netflix continues this trend of commodifying feminism with the introduction of another television show indulging in pro-girl rhetoric: *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina.* Although the show is centred around a young woman and her fight for independence, the series' affirmation of traditional patriarchal feminine concerns, combined with the incorporation of anti-feminist television tropes, and the problematic use of pop feminism rhetoric and its popular icon Lilith, ultimately undermines their feminist message.

3.1. The Commodification of Lilith in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*

Similar to the commodification of the feminist movement's ideas and values, its icons also fall prey to this capitalist incentive. As put forward by Kellner, the commercialisation and commodification of culture have important consequences. If television companies produce for profit, they will seek to produce shows that are popular and will attract mass audiences (16). Given that the primary audience that television executives wish to target are young women, it is no surprise that Netflix capitalises on this and streams a supposedly feminist show such as *CAOS.* Since interest in Lilith's legend increased and the feminist movement hailed her as their icon, Lilith's complex personality has been commodified by entertainment companies to appeal to the young female audience. Where the feminist movement hailed her

as a symbol of the uncontrollable woman who cannot be told how to be or how to act, *CAOS* reduces Lilith to a cheap reproduction of her legend, portraying her as an evil misandrist seductress and Satan's concubine.

3.1.1. Lilith as Wanton Woman

As is in line with her representation in "The Dead Sea Scrolls" and the discussed religious works, Lilith is portrayed as a vicious woman in *CAOS*. In the season's pilot, she is introduced when she murders Sabrina's favourite teacher, Mrs Wardwell. She is portrayed as a sweet, caring woman, who naively rescues Lilith and offers her tea and biscuits. After executing her, Lilith transforms into a darker, meaner version of Mrs Wardwell, saying: "The great work begins, Dark Lord" ("October Country" 00:03:40 – 00:09:50). Mrs Wardwell's meek, sweet demeanour changes to that of an evil, cunning woman. Since there is such a clear contrast between the portrayal of Mrs Wardwell before and after she is controlled by Lilith, it becomes evident how the show understands and portrays Lilith, namely as an evil temptress.

From Mr Hawthorne's final conversation, it becomes evident that the figure who possesses Mrs Wardwell is indeed Lilith. "Who am I? … I'm the mother of demons, the dawn of doom, Satan's concubine. I'm Lilith, dear boy. First wife to Adam, saved from despair by a fallen angel. I call myself Madame Satan, in his honor" ("The Witching Hour" 00:59:00-00:59:50). Here, the show demonstrates an affinity with her legend, referencing the Jewish folklore of Lilith being Adam's first wife. Aside from killing Mrs Wardwell and Mr Hawthorne, in season one Lilith also murders Susie's uncle, a pizza-delivery boy, and one of the homophobic football players. Lilith's evil nature is also portrayed to the audience when she is seen smiling or laughing maniacally whenever she sabotages or manipulates Sabrina. This is seen when she hinders Sabrina on her mission in the labyrinth ("October Country"

00:52:30 - 00:55:30), and on her mission to go to the Mortal Limbo to retrieve a soul ("The Returned Man" 00:42:50 – 00:43:21).

The show's intent to portray Lilith as a seductress is blatantly clear, as it often hints at her reputation as a man-eater. When Faustus disrespects Lilith, she threatens him: "Do not disrespect me. High Priest or not, you are still a man, and I feast on male flesh" ("The Trial of Sabrina Spellman" 00:11:10 – 00:12:36). This statement is conceptualised later in the series when Lilith, as Mrs Wardwell, is invited to a dinner by Mr Hawthorne. She refuses and says she has her own tradition, and in the next scene Lilith is seen ordering takeaway. She opens the door, wearing an extremely low-cut dress, and openly flirts with the carrier boy, asking him to come in. She says: "I can't tell you how starved I am. Famished" ("Feast of Feasts" 00:42:00 – 00:42:40).

Not only does Mrs Wardwell's personality change after she is possessed by Lilith, so does her appearance. Before she is possessed, Mrs Wardwell is portrayed as a shy, kind teacher, who wears glasses and ties her hair up in a neat bun. She looks old, wears covering outfits, and is pitied by her students. After the possession, she is seen confidently strutting down the hallway in heels and a tight black dress, sporting a red lipstick. She also wears her long, voluminous hair down. Throughout season one, we continuously see Lilith, as Mrs Wardwell, wearing revealing clothes. She wears tight dresses that outline her slim figure and sports low plunging necklines to accentuate her breasts. She also speaks more confidently and seductively. It is striking that Mrs Wardwell is portrayed as a modest and kind motherly figure before being possessed by Lilith, since these qualities are precisely what Lilith lacks. After being consumed by evil, Mrs Wardwell suddenly wears skimpier clothes and is sexually assertive. By altering Mrs Wardwell's portrayal, *CAOS* hints at an age-old patriarchal understanding of female sexuality, namely that women are supposed to be sexually passive and modest (Groneman 342). During the Victorian age, sexually assertive

women were labelled nymphomaniacs and deviants. Female sexual desire was believed to be particularly dangerous: "[W]omen were more easily overwhelmed by the power of their sexual passion ... and thus more volatile and irrational than men" (353). The series supports this idea, by depicting the modestly-dressing woman as kind and the seductress as inherently evil.

3.1.2. Lilith as Misandrist

The show attempts to portray Lilith, in the shape of Mrs Wardwell, as a feminist woman. She becomes faculty advisor for WICCA (The Women's Intersectional Cultural and Creative Association) and later engages in a conversation with Sabrina saying that there is a culture of puritanical masculinity in the town and the school, further stating that the head of the school, Mr Hawthorne, is the most misogynist man of all and that women should be in charge of everything ("October Country" 00:20:20 – 00:21:20). Polemical statements like these, however, are exactly why the feminist movement is often wrongfully made out to be misandrist. Lilith thinks lowly of the opposite sex and often makes statements that reflect her contemptuous view of men. An example of this comes through in a conversation between her and Father Blackwood, where Lilith says she cannot leave Sabrina's fate in lesser hands. She continues by saying, "High Priest or not, you are still a man" ("The Trial of Sabrina Spellman" 00:11:10 – 00:12:36). Lilith also rejects Blackwood's authority, saying: "I do not need you to tell me my business" ("Witch Academy" 00:27:36 – 00:28:03). Furthermore, when Lilith accompanies a group of young witches into the woods, they see a shot deer, that used to be a witch's companion. Upon being asked who would perform such a horrendous act, Lilith contemptuously says "Men" ("Feast of Feasts" 00:30:01 – 00:30:23). Such statements house and perpetuate misandry and hint at an ideology that women believe themselves to be better than men, which has unfortunately made its way into popular

interpretations of feminism. By portraying Lilith as a misandrist, the series deploys the spurious definition of feminism, implying gender superiority rather than equality, and in doing so, undermines their feminist message.

3.1.3. Lilith as Satan's Concubine

Where Lilith is praised by the feminist movement for being a powerful, individualistic woman, in *CAOS* Lilith's seemingly pro-feminist nature is undermined by her total submission to the Dark Lord. Through her behaviour and by referring to herself as "Madame Satan" instead of "Lilith" she reveals her internalisation of gender-based hierarchy.

When Lilith speaks about the Dark Lord, it is always with praise, saying that he is wise and that she was sent to ensure his work will be done ("October Country" 00:24.00 – 00:24:34). She positions herself beneath him, referring to herself as his "foot soldier" and "concubine" ("The Witching Hour" 00:59:00-00:59:54). When Lilith's attempt to manipulate Sabrina into signing her name in the book of the Dark Lord proved to be in vain, she cries, saying that she failed the Devil and deserves no mercy. When the Dark Lord enters, Lilith is frightened and kisses his feet upon him granting her mercy. She thanks him, saying she is not worthy of his love, promising him that she will not stumble again and that he shall have Sabrina ("The Dark Baptism" 00:49:05 – 00:50:17). So, rather than embodying individuality she supports the ultimate patriarchal figure, illustrating that by willfully positioning themselves beneath men, the show's patriarchal structure is facilitated by women.

It becomes clear that instead of portraying Lilith as the powerful uncontrollable woman that the feminist movement hailed her to be, *CAOS* reduces her to the sum of her parts, placing emphasis on her viciousness and sexuality instead of her individuality. Since all female characters in *CAOS* contribute to upholding the patriarchal system, it is important to

look at the series in a broader sense, and not just at Lilith's portrayal, to understand the problematic mechanisms present in *CAOS.*

3.2. The Problematic Use of Pop Feminism Rhetoric in *CAOS*

In the previous section it became evident that Lilith's portrayal in *CAOS* is problematic, since the series highlights her viciousness and sexuality instead of her individuality, thereby hinting at a patriarchal understanding of female sexuality as something to be feared. Since this thesis proposes *CAOS* as an ideal case study to investigate the (mis)representation of feminist discourse in popular media, it is vital to look past Lilith's representation and discuss the representations of other female characters, as they demonstrate that the misrepresentation of feminist icons and ideals is a structural, rather than incidental, issue within the series.

When analysing season one, it becomes apparent that *CAOS* borrows the most prominent rhetoric of pop feminism as a marketing strategy to appeal to a feminist audience. Already in the first episode, the show's explicit feminist nature is hinted at, when Sabrina and Rosalind introduce their friend Susie to WICCA. Rosalind explains that WICCA is an abbreviation for "The Women's Intersectional Cultural and Creative Association" ("October Country" 00:47:07-00:47:45). The club was founded as a reaction against the misogynist culture present at their school and is meant as a place for women to support other women, "a club to topple the white patriarchy" (00:22:50 – 00:23:50). The fact that the WICCA-club claims to be intersectional shows that there is an awareness amongst the scriptwriters about the current feminist agenda. The term "intersectionality" is highly prevalent in feminist discourse. It was first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, in a paper arguing that traditional feminist ideas and antiracist policies exclude Black women because they face overlapping discrimination unique to them, stating that "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (140). The term intersectionality, in this sense, is to be understood

as “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage” (Intersectionality). While *CAOS* promotes intersectionality by refraining from racial preferencing and by casting the non-binary actor Lachlan Watson as Susie, the series’ storyline falls short in its intersectional promise, highlighting issues of white feminism and committing discursive violence using anti-feminist tropes.

3.2.1. Sabrina as “White Saviour”

As put forward by Moon and Holling, feminism has traditionally centred white women’s experiences (253). By centring white feminist narratives, the experiences of women of colour are silenced and marginalised. “The erasure of women of color, whether through marginalization or neglect, from social views of (white) feminism points to ‘discursive violence’ (i.e., “harm committed in/by discourse such as through erasure)” (255). In this light, *CAOS* commits discursive violence, as the non-white characters all take up a secondary role and are often used to glorify Sabrina’s character, a privileged white girl. By portraying Sabrina as the heroine of the show who challenges the racist and patriarchal society and fights her friends’ battles for them, *CAOS* falls into the all-too-common trope of the white saviour, “a genre in which a white messianic character saves a lower- or working-class, usually urban or isolated, non-white character from a sad fate” (Hughey 1).

An example in which this mechanism becomes evident is in episode seven “Feasts of Feasts” when Prudence, an orphaned Black witch takes part in the coven’s annual ritual. Every year, a witch is hailed queen of the feast after participating in a lottery. Prudence is revealed to be the queen, which means she must sacrifice her life and offer her body to the coven to be feasted upon. Although Prudence ignorantly perceives being queen of the feast as

the greatest honour, throughout the episode, Sabrina continually attacks Prudence's beliefs and goes to great lengths to persuade Prudence to leave the coven. A dinner hosted by Sabrina reveals that Prudence is the bastard child of Father Blackwood (Faustus) and that his wife arranged for Prudence to win the trial, attempting to eradicate her so that her children could claim succession to the throne. In the end, Sabrina forces Father Blackwood's hand and has him renounce the Feast of Feasts, thereby saving Prudence and future witches. By saving Prudence from being sacrificed, Sabrina saves the non-white, lower-class character from a sad and cruel fate, thus playing into the white saviour trope.

3.2.2. Prudence and Constance Blackwood as "Angry Black Women"

Another problematic trope present in *CAOS* is that of the "Angry Black Woman." It is "the physical embodiment of some of the worst negative stereotypes of Black women – she is out of control, disagreeable, overly aggressive, physically threatening, loud and to be feared" (Jones and Norwood 2049). When Prudence is introduced, she threatens and curses Sabrina, saying they do not want 'half-breeds' like her at the university ("October Country" 00:16:50-00:18:24). In this scene, the audience meets an aggressive and overbearing Prudence, opposed to the innocent and kind Sabrina.

Constance Blackwood is also represented as aggressive when she is depicted as a cunning woman in "Feast of Feasts," willing to sacrifice another woman to aid her own family. Lady Blackwood, whose name, like Madame Satan's, hints at the hierarchical nature present in *CAOS,* is a flat character and dies during childbirth in the first season. As a willingly submissive woman who births Faustus an heir to the throne, Lady Blackwood is the embodiment of the patriarchy's expectation of women. The fact that Faustus, or any white character, shows no sign of remorse at her death reflects the inherent racism present in the plot of *CAOS.* By representing Black women in the series as aggressive and overbearing the

show plays into the stereotype created by the white-dominated patriarchal society. Furthermore, by limiting Constance's screen time and by having Sabrina fight Prudence's battle for her, the show commits discursive violence by marginalising and erasing women of colour by centring the show around white narratives, such as Sabrina's and Lilith's storylines.

3.2.3. Female Characters' Lack of Individuality

Aside from using problematic tropes, *CAOS* also fails in its promise of centring the show around independent women. Feminists fight for female empowerment and although Sabrina and Lilith are portrayed as powerful individualistic women, when analysed in-depth, all female characters reveal to facilitate the patriarchal structure and show dependence on other, usually male, characters.

It becomes clear from Sabrina's dark baptism that all other women from her coven have signed their name in the Book of the Devil. By signing, Father Blackwood states: "You swear to obey without question any order you may receive from the Dark Lord or from any figure he has placed in authority over you. ... You swear to give your mind, body, and soul unreservedly to the furtherance of the designs of our Lord Satan" ("The Dark Baptism" 00:43:33-00:45:58). All women in the coven have thus pledged total submission to the Dark Lord, ridding themselves of their free will and independence. In *CAOS,* the Dark Lord should thus be interpreted as the ultimate patriarchal figure. He is tyrannical, jealous, and possessive, and insists on the inferiority of women.

His jealous and possessive nature comes forth in the dark baptism when Faustus asks Sabrina: "Are you willing to place our Dark Lord above all others in your life?" (00:44:22), thereby demanding her utmost devotion. Another instance that further illustrates this point is the Devil's insistence that the women from the coven be virgins at the time of their dark baptism ("October Country" 00:42:10). For the patriarchy to operate effectively, women must

be convinced that they can benefit from it, which is why the Dark Lord grants them great power in return for signing their name in his book. However, by signing their name, they are upholding a regime that forbids women from having both freedom and power. Even Sabrina ultimately gives in to the Dark Lord's demand. In *CAOS,* then, the patriarchy is not necessarily represented as the order of men, but instead as the desires of men willingly fulfilled by women.

The extent to which the women of the Church of Night crave praise and recognition from the Dark Lord becomes evident during the Feast of Feasts, as it portrays the women's desire to become the queen of the feast, because then their "spirit will reside in the Dark Lord's heart," even though this means they will be sacrificed and eaten by the rest of the coven ("Feast of Feasts" 00:17:43 – 00:18:13). From the discussed scenes, it becomes evident that in *CAOS*, women support, enable, and glorify patriarchal institutions, by showing acceptance at their total subordination, thereby facilitating the process of robbing women of their rights.

3.2.4. The Male Gaze: The Sexualisation and Destruction of the Female Body

In 1985, feminist critic Laura Mulvey coined the renowned concept of the male gaze, positing that in film women are depicted as sexual objects for men to receive pleasure from, whether the men are characters, creators, or viewers (62). Where the feminist movement openly fights for female bodily autonomy and against sexualising women, *CAOS* completely disregards this by also being dominated by the male gaze. There is an uncomfortable focus on teenage nudity and the show further hints at misogynist tendencies by fetishizing, controlling, and destroying the female body, thereby sexualising and objectifying the women in the series.

Arguably, "Feast of Feasts" contains the show's most literal delineation of misogyny, namely the fetishization, control, and destruction of the female body, as a woman's body is

destroyed for cannibalistic purposes. In horror television, “women are brutalized in ways that come too close to real life for comfort” (Clover 42), whereas “men are killed quickly while the women are forced to suffer” (Rockoff 9). Evoking visual pleasure from the objectification, victimisation, and physical violence on women, then, seems to be typical of the patriarchal structure present in the horror genre, and hints at a problematic masculine tendency to derive pleasure from violence towards women.

Furthermore, by casting Sabrina as a pretty, skinny, white girl with blond hair, *CAOS* falls into the same pitfall as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a show previously criticised for relying on a “beautiful babe as superhero who does not necessarily model empowerment so much as sexuality” (Goodale qtd. in Riordan 292). As put forward by Mulvey, television frequently uses slow close-ups of women and subjective camerawork and places women in a to-be-looked-at position (62). As a result, women are objectified and sexualised for the sake of eliciting visual pleasure from the audience. Already in the first episodes, there is a focus on Sabrina in various states of undress. Since Sabrina is sixteen and it is not always her own decision to appear undressed, it feels exploitative. An example of this is when Sabrina is undressed in front of hundreds of people at Father Blackwood’s command during the dark baptism. Another instance of unnecessary focus on teen nudity is seen respectively in Sabrina and Prudence’s bathing scenes, where the camera lingers over their figures, implicitly turning them into objects of desire. These depictions position the female body as an object of the male gaze, which presents “the female in a binary relationship in which the female is a powerless, passive object and the male, an empowering subject” (Bae 30). Thus, through its male gaze, the series affirms traditional patriarchal feminine concerns by emphasising physical beauty and the acquisition of heterosexual male attention, which ultimately undermines their feminist promise.

The exploitation of women, then, reveals itself to be inextricably interwoven throughout *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. As previously argued, Lilith has been simplified and stripped of her feminist significance to appeal to a wider audience. By portraying the other female characters as facilitating the patriarchal society, the series' feminist promise is undermined. Furthermore, the female actors are exploited by being sexualised on screen to benefit the male gaze. Thus, all female characters in *CAOS* serve to advance Netflix's financial gains, which ironically costs them their agency and feminist potential.

Conclusion

When analysing *CAOS* in-depth, it becomes clear that incorporating feminism into mainstream television is highly problematic when television executives are driven as much by economic goals as by cultural awareness or sensitivity. By commodifying Lilith, *CAOS* simplifies the mythological creature that feminists hailed as their icon. Where the feminist movement attempted to reinvent Lilith, *CAOS* unfortunately renders her an evil seductress, and strips her of her individuality by having her service the ultimate patriarchal figure, Satan. By highlighting her seductive and malignant nature, the show supports the patriarchal Victorian belief that female sexual desire is to be feared. Furthermore, by centring the show around Sabrina's fight for independence, *CAOS* commodifies the pro-girl rhetoric that originated in the third wave and seems to support a feminist message. However, the show undermines Sabrina's independence by having her give in to the Dark Lord's demand, thereby upholding the patriarchy. Additionally, by implementing problematic anti-feminist tropes, *CAOS* commits discursive violence and fails to support the intersectional message that is typical of the third wave. By commodifying and thereby misrepresenting Lilith and feminist discourse, *CAOS* ultimately reduces feminism to an aesthetic. Because of the restrictive scope, this thesis had to limit itself to an analysis of Lilith's appearance in the first season of *CAOS.* Further research could investigate her portrayal and her character growth in the remainder of the series and articulate a more complete analysis of her character.

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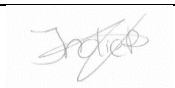
Signature*	

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