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George MacDonald's Frightening Female: Menopause and Makemnoit in *The Light Princess*

Jacqueline H. Harris

George MacDonald's *The Light Princess* begins with a childless king's impatient demands that his wife provide him with an heir as quickly as possible. The unnamed king compares his similarly unnamed queen to female acquaintances who reportedly bear up to a dozen children for their husbands. Thus, gendered implications of the story are quickly brought to the forefront: the men of this imagined world view women's bodies as potentially profitable commodities. Consequently, female reproductive functions are deemed either successes or failures. Social enforcement of these unwritten gender standards devalue women's bodies. Victorians often condemned atypical female bodies that failed to fulfill stereotypical boundaries of socially appropriate demonstrations of femininity and propriety. When the king suggests that though he greatly prefers a son he will settle for a daughter, the queen admonishes her husband and states, "You must have patience with a lady" (Ch. 1). Following this tone, *The Light Princess* details the birth and life of a girl whose body fails to submit to socially approved laws of nature, in this case gravity. As a result of her non-conforming body, she defies the boundaries of traditional gender roles. To child readers, the story becomes one wherein a patient prince falls for this noncompliant female and successfully tricks her into a fairy tale romance in which her tamed body can function in a happily ever after scenario. With its inclusion of an ugly witch, magical curse, royal backdrop, and marriage plot, MacDonald's story is akin to Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" (1697) and the Grimm brothers' "Briar Rose" (1812). To adult readers, the girl "without weight" is guilty of adolescent light-mindedness and eventually matures as she witnesses the lofty sacrifice of true love. MacDonald's representation of the female coming-of-age body, and aging, menopausal body reveal how his modern fairy tale both utilizes and exposes long-standing social codes imposed on females' reproductive capacity. Furthermore, in his depiction of Makemnoit—the bitter and aged woman who wreaks havoc on the kingdom's water supply—MacDonald's narrative illustrates cultural fears surrounding menopausal or reproductively atypical women. Utilizing the frightening

female archetype, the fairy tale highlights long-standing cultural fears within society while noting the pressures placed upon Victorian females to fulfill stereotypically ideological gender roles.

When the queen gives birth to a daughter “at last,” the king sends out invitations for the child’s christening and in so doing never considers inviting his seemingly unattractive, unmarried sister Princess Makemnoit (Ch. 2). Makemnoit’s offense at being slighted instigates in her decision to make her misery known throughout the kingdom. Makemnoit is considered a physically hideous but clever witch. Like the old fairy in “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” and the thirteenth Wise Woman in “Brier Rose,” Makemnoit attends the christening and curses the female child: “Light of spirit, by my charms, / Light of body, every part, / Never weary human arms— / Only crush thy parents’ heart!” (Ch. 2). The spell sends a shudder through the crowd and instantly puts the young princess into a fit a crowing laughter. The baby’s attending nurse smothers her cries—irreverent behavior for even an infant—and feels the immediate mischief of the baby’s loss of weight within her arms. Michael Mendelson writes that the curse upon the Light Princess condemns her “not only to weightlessness, but also to a prolonged period of childishness—a time analogous to Sleeping Beauty’s extended incubation” (36). Regarding Makemnoit’s choice of curse, Yuko Ashitagawa posits, “It is not clear why the witch chooses to make the baby ‘light,’ other than the likelihood that it will handicap the princess and ‘crush’ her parents’ heart . . . To some extent the witch’s choice is arbitrary, though this does not affect the magic’s power” (48). Ashitagawa also points out that the princess’ loss of gravity connects to laws of biology and nature: “Gravity is the princess’s ‘natural right,’ as she was born with it and had it until she was bewitched at the christening. The princess’s ‘light’ condition is described to be not normal” (53). Though the aberrant state of the Light Princess’ body will become a central concern for the kingdom, the princess herself will never acknowledge nor concede that there is something wrong with her condition (Palwick 16). Richard Reis collectively refers to “Snow White,” “Sleeping Beauty,” and MacDonald’s *The Light Princess* as “parables of puberty” and perhaps it is due to this condition of adolescence—the democratic rite of passage through the unregulated physical transformations of puberty—that the Light Princess remains unconcerned about the timeline placed upon her (77). Though scholars may reference or accept the inclusion of puberty, scholarship has not yet fully investigated the parable of MacDonald’s fairy tale as an in-depth examination of the female coming-of-age nor menopausal

transition. Consideration of the specific rites, rituals, and myths regarding women's bodies reveal the fairy tale's profound reflection of the culture of contemporary Victorian society.

Literature has long portrayed barren, infertile, aged, or unmarried women as physically unattractive sources of evil or cultural deviancy. Common depictions include the three witches and Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare, Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, and the villainous females in the Grimm brothers' "Hansel and Gretel," "Sleeping Beauty," and "Rapunzel." Memorable characterizations within children's literature include the Duchess and Queen of Hearts in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Miss Minchin in *A Little Princess*, and the White Witch in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. While some authors challenge this female stereotype, most characterizations of these women function as a looming threat over their younger counterparts. Frequently, coming-of-age females serve as foils to their literal or metaphoric menopausal counterparts. The same is true of Princess Makemnoit in MacDonald's *The Light Princess*.

For centuries, mysteries about the female body's reproductive functions were associated with witchcraft. When male philosophers, scientists, and medical physicians failed to understand women's bodies, they often attributed any perceived physical irregularities to evil or sinful realms. Menstrual cessation, infertility, illness, or failure to fulfill idealized roles as wives and mothers fell within this category. In ancient Germany, the pagan goddess Holda—one of the so-called "night-witches"—served as husbandry's patroness and punished through the act of pushing. This punishment associated Holda with childbirth because children were believed to "come from her secret places, her tree, her pond" (Cohn 117, 121). The professional English witch-hunter, Matthew Hopkins (1620-1647), argued women were particularly susceptible to Satan due to their breasts (Hopkins 39). In his 1647 text "The Discovery of Witches: In Answer to Several Queries," Hopkins wrote that Satan "useth the organs of that body to speak withal to make his compact up with the witches" (39). In rendering the female body as a receptacle for evil, Hopkins portrayed women as weak and yet potentially dangerous. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, a fifteenth-century witch-hunt handbook, warned of women's consortiums with the devil and argued this connection existed due to the inherent fallen sexual nature of women's bodies. Elaine Breslaw explains,

Wherever women held sway in their society—from handling household affairs to the birth and rearing of infants—they

could be blamed for catastrophe.... it was generally assumed that women were more passionate sexually than men. The asexual female of the so-called Victorian period was a creation of that era. The earlier view of women's sexuality, as we read in the *Malleus*, was quite different. (283-284)

As Breslaw suggests, the Victorian era inherited, exacerbated, and complicated these attitudes frequently using aged women's bodies to mark them as Other. As seen in *The Light Princess*, MacDonald's narrative features an unmarried, undesirable older woman in order to contrast her body with the burgeoning sexual development of the title character. In so doing, the fairy tale aligns Princess Makemnoit with long-standing inherited beliefs regarding witchcraft.

The narrator describes Makemnoit as more wicked and sinisterly clever than the most evil of fairies. Early Celtic and English folklore depicted fairies as malicious, demonic characters. Not until the nineteenth century did fairy tales and children's literature begin characterizing female fairies as the enchanted creatures with which modern audiences are familiar. MacDonald's fairy tale, however, conforms to earlier folkloric traditions. Princess Makemnoit's demeanor is sour and spiteful, her looks are odd, her "wrinkles of contempt crossed . . . wrinkles of peevishness," and "[h]er forehead was as large as all the rest of her face, and projected over it like a precipice" (Ch. 2). In addition, Makemnoit's body possesses transformative powers: when angry her eyes flash blue, when hateful they shine green and yellow, and when happy they become pink. Greg Levonian suggests that the witch's "odd" looks echo the ugliness of her inner character (67). Even Makemnoit's name reflects her enmity and hostility: "'noit' resembles 'nuit,' which is French for 'night.' The evil aunt, then, is making night, or darkness, for the poor princess" (Levonian 67).

The king uses the hideous nature of Makemnoit's body and character to justify himself in forgetting to invite her to the christening. Before bewitching the child at the font within the royal chapel, Makemnoit spins round three times and throws something into the water, both of these actions being commonly associated with witchcraft. The "atrocious aunt" is reportedly able to destroy laws of nature and gravity in relation to the child due to her studies of philosophy and her ability as a supposed witch to "abrogate those laws in a moment; or at least so clog their wheels and rust their bearings, that they would not work at all" (Ch. 3). In so doing, her curse is a "travesty of the maternal": instead of nurturing her niece, Makemnoit

casts a spell she hopes will make the young princess just as much of a social outsider as she (Knoepfmacher 135). U. C. Knoepfmacher proposes Makemnoit fears her niece will “replace and exorcise her within the kingdom with a more ‘gender-balanced alternative’” (135). The witch’s spell relegates the Light Princess’ body to the realm of female deviancy, the vilified space females inhabit when their bodies deviate from acceptable roles for women in Victorian society.

Arthur Hughes’ illustrations for *The Light Princess* include a rendering of the scene in which Makemnoit casts her curse upon the newly christened child. Inspired by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’s early magazine “The Germ,” Arthur Hughes soon became a member of their social circle (Wildman). Portrayals of witches are a recurrent theme in the art of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In 1850, “The Germ” included an essay by Coventry Patmore on *MacBeth* that discussed the role of witches in Shakespeare’s play at length (Rossetti). By 1864 when Arthur Hughes illustrated *The Light Princess*, depictions of witches appeared in the works of several PRB artists, including Edward Burne-Jones’ “Sidonia von Bork 1560” (1860) and Frederick Sandy’s “Morgan le Fay” (1864).¹ Hughes depicts Makemnoit with physical attributes stereotypically associated with witchcraft: a black cat (her familiar), a black gown, pointed boots, conical hat, wand-like staff, wild hair, contorted positioning and ability to defy nature and hover in the air, thin body and hands, and aged face. John Docherty highlights the claustrophobic nature of the Hughes’ illustration with the pirouetting, malicious witch crowded by the eight “apathetic or pompously empty” figures surrounding the font (63). While the king’s head slightly tilts back, only the expression and “withdrawing gesture” of the priest shows any fear (Docherty 63). Hughes also portrays Makemnoit as a modern witch by giving her a fashionable gown and handbag (Docherty 63). This modernization suggests witches are a contemporary threat, not just the stuff of legends.

Associating Makemnoit with rust occurs twice within the fairy tale, first during her casting of the spell and second when she reveals the “hundred rusty keys” she hides within her underground lair (Ch. 11). Makemnoit uses the keys in order to further control and disrupt nature, this time by draining the entire body of a lake of water, the only source capable of restoring the princess’ gravity. Consequently, the young girl’s loss and gain of gravity corresponds to the absence and presence of rust and water, elements suggesting menstrual blood and reproductive fertility, a stark contrast to

Makemnoit's advanced age.

Menstrual taboo and myths were recorded as early as the first century A.D. Roman natural philosopher Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) recorded copious menstrual myths within his book *Naturalis Historia*. Ancients believed menstrual blood could dull steel and ivory, rust bronze and iron, dim mirrors, give off noxious fumes, sour wine, destroy crops, dry up seeds and gardens, cause fruit to fall from its tree, kill bees, infect dogs with incurable poison and drive them mad, cause mares to miscarry, and even offend the taste buds of ants (Zanger 369, Frazer 702).² People in early modern England perpetuated these myths: menstrual blood had a “poisonous nature” that could “perform alarming magical feats,” including the destruction of food, plants, animals, and metals as recorded above (Read 2). Due to widespread beliefs concerning menstrual bleeding, Sara Read argues it “occupied a peculiar position in that it was both public and private, and it occupied a further contradictory status in being both mundane and taboo” (13). Read suggests contemporary embarrassment and taboo in speaking about sanitary protection is something society inherited from the early modern era (20). Menstrual taboos are ranked among the “most inviolate in many societies” (Delaney, Lupton, and Toth 7).³

The divisive taboo nature of menstruation persisted throughout the nineteenth century. Men in the 1800s commonly thought they could contract gonorrhea from any type of physical contact with a menstruating woman (Delaney, Lupton, and Toth 20). The taboo nature of menstruation, however, did not prevent the dissemination of these myths. In 1890, Scottish anthropologist James Frazer (1854-1941) wrote that numerous menstrual blood myths were still held throughout the European continent: “it is still believed that if a woman in her courses enters a brewery the beer will turn sour; if she touches beer, wine, vinegar, or milk, it will go bad; if she makes jam, it will not keep; if she mounts a mare, it will miscarry; if she touches buds, they will wither; if she climbs a cherry tree, it will die” (702). Nineteenth-century inhabitants of Brunswick, Germany believed that if menstruous women participated in the slaughter of pigs the meat would putrefy, and at the same time people living in Kalymnos, Greece forbade menstruating women from drawing water from wells, crossing a running stream, swimming in the sea, or boarding a boat because they believed she would raise storms (Frazer 702-703). Efforts to seclude, isolate, or “neutralize the dangerous influences” of these females during their menstrual cycle influenced men's actions, including forbidding girls to touch the ground

or see the sun during menstruation to “keep her suspended, so to say, between heaven and earth” (Frazer 703). The belief that these girls and women were unclean prolonged stereotyping behaviors and attitudes (Zanger 369).⁴ Thus, a witch—a woman depicted as being in tune with the laws of nature and yet able to manipulate these forces for devious purposes—correlates with the utilization of evil women in folkloric literature and Makemnoit within MacDonald's fairy tale. Furthermore, Makemnoit's depiction as an aged, likely menopausal woman would enhance contemporary fears of aberrant female bodies.

MacDonald's inclusion of these historical and cultural climates within his fairy tale invites scholars to address the mistreatment of women according to the perceived attractiveness, health, or uniformity of their reproductive bodies. To the metaphysicians, king and queen, and kingdom of MacDonald's fairy tale, the Light Princess' inability to submit her body to regulated demands makes her “impossible to classify” and “a fifth imponderable body, sharing all the other properties of the ponderable” (Ch. 7). Most nineteenth-century physicians feared irregular female bodies or sexuality could cause irreparable harm to Victorian dictates of female propriety, modesty, decorum, and duty.

It is only when the Light Princess' body comes in contact with a specific source of water—the waters of Lagobel, the “loveliest in the world”—that her body for the first time possesses gravity and exhibits outward signs of femininity (Ch. 8). The first line of the chapter fittingly titled “Try a Drop of Water” connects the Light Princess' need for gravity with reproductive development and marriage: “Perhaps the best thing for the princess would have been to fall in love” (Ch. 8). The symbolism of Lagobel's waters as the menstrual waters of reproductive maturity facilitates this possibility. When a woman married and bore children for her husband and the good of England, she fulfilled ideological roles; when a woman did not marry, did not bear children within marriage, or in any other way deviated from society's gendered demands regarding the purpose of the female body, she threatened the very fabric of society. Thus, the first line of this chapter—the very midpoint of the entire fairy tale—begins moving the Light Princess' body from outside to inside desirable societal realms. Marriage, love, gravity, and female reproductive health all play a role in this corporeal compliance. When the Light Princess' body touches the lake's waters, “she recovered the natural right of which she had been so wickedly deprived” (Ch. 8). Initially, water was the means of Makemnoit's curse. Now, water is the mode of giving

the princess' body that which it lacked—submission to the laws of nature. Because Makemnoit's menopausal body no longer possesses the menstrual waters signaling reproductive fertility for childbearing within marriage, her sexuality is increasingly troublesome to both the kingdom and contemporary Victorian readers.

The narrative warns that unbridled female sexuality can disrupt nature and pose a dangerous threat to society. When Makemnoit learns her niece's "pleasure in the lake had grown to a passion"—pleasure in her newfound reproductive fertility, a condition Makemnoit has lost—she intensifies her revenge by attempting to fully drain the water of Lake Lagobel. In the most sexualized scene of the fairy tale, Makemnoit retires to her secret cave beneath the lake. Attended by her black cat, the witch brews a magical potion in a large tub of water, muttering incantations of a "hideous sound, and yet more hideous import" (Ch. 11). The witch's spell produces a huge, gray snake that grows and slithers out of the tub. The phallic creature, named the White Snake of Darkness, rests its head upon the witch's shoulder and Makemnoit draws it toward her for a kiss before winding it around her body. Taking the one hundred rusty keys, she descends further and further into the underground belly of the lake through dark, narrow passages, successively unlocking one hundred doors until she enters a vast cave. Both the witch and the snake begin circling the perimeter of the cavern until they reach its center. Makemnoit then lifts the snake over her head and with a sudden dart, it clings to the roof of the cave with its mouth and for seven days and nights hangs "like a huge leech" and sucks at the stone, draining the lake dry (Ch. 11). Recalling the same term of affection the prince used for the Light Princess, the witch praises the snake and calls it "my beauty" (Ch. 11). She watches the snake drain the waters until "the serpent dropped from the roof as if exhausted, and shriveled up till it was again like a piece of dried seaweed" from which it had been created (Ch. 11). The witch notes that the lake will soon disappear in conjunction with the "last shred of the dying old moon" (Ch. 11). Both the Greek physician Hippocrates (460 – 370 B.C.) and the Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder (23 – 79 A.D.), believed menstruation related to the lunar cycle (Mullin 498). Similarities between the timing of the moon's cyclical phases and the menstrual cycle, led to menstruation being referred to as the "moon-change" or "lunar cycle" (Mulvey-Roberts 82). Though biologically independent from the full moon cycle and not always definitively occurring every twenty-eight days, this association of calendar time is also seen in the translation of the term "menses" from the Latin

"month" (Grahn 6). Once again, the transformation of the Light Princess correlates with female reproductive transformations. Having succeeded in draining the lake's waters, Makemnoit's enchantment trickles across the entire kingdom resulting in all the "fountains of mother Earth ceas[ing] to flow" (Ch. 11).

The Light Princess' inability to maintain her emotional gravitas stems from the consequences of the drained lake—she is once again reduced to physical, biological immaturity. Mendelson calls the draining of the lake "an objective correlative for the princess's emotional sterility" (37). While the absence of the lake will ensure the princess' liminal condition, this scene also reaffirms society's fears concerning women like Makemnoit that functioned outside the realm of domesticity. Hideous, unmarried, and past the point of childbearing were qualities seen as a dangerous triumvirate of female evil. Though women who married and bore children would likewise experience the cessation of their bodily "waters" during menopause, they would have first properly fulfilled their roles as wives and mothers. Women who did not bear children in marriage, did not marry, or otherwise failed the dictates of acceptable Victorian society were fearsome creatures. In a story replete with imagery suggesting the female coming-of-age transition, it is natural to include images reflecting its counterpoint, the "cessation of flowers" signaling older age (Crawford 67). When Scottish pediatrician William Buchan wrote his late eighteenth-century best-selling British health manual, *Domestic Medicine* (1769), he referred to menopause as a difficult and "dangerous" period of life (Smith 253-54). The nineteenth-century inherited this perception and imbued women's bodies with perilous mythology. Young girls were fragile and unsafe when they came of age and consequently monitored with rules and stipulations regarding all facets of their life, manner, and appearance. Menopausal, atypical, or sexually deviant women like Makemnoit were similarly scrutinized.

Overcome with worry regarding the cessation of the lake's waters, the Light Princess confines herself to her room, haunted by the *memento mori* of a dry lakebed: "she felt as if the lake were her soul, drying up within her mind, first to mud, then to madness and death. She thus brooded over the change, with all its dreadful accompaniments, till she was nearly distracted" (Ch. 12). The prince mourns the absence of the princess, his "Nereid," who "like a true Nereid, was wasting away with her lake" (Ch. 12). Nereids, female sea-nymphs in Greek mythology, are often noted for their luring beauty to sailors and travelers ("Nereids," "Nereid"). Moreover, nereids

are directly associated with specific aspects of nature and their ability to function and live depends upon the particular form, such as hamadryads or tree nymphs with the life and death of a tree (“Nymph”). If Lagobel fully dries the Light Princess will not die, but she will be forced to endure society’s definition of a female “living death,” having lost the waters associated with female reproduction. The prince’s love for the Light Princess hinges upon her ability to permanently benefit from the powers of the lake water, since he never considers loving or staying with her if they are not restored.

The only cure for Makemnoit’s curse is if a man in love offers himself as a sacrifice and “fill the deepest grave” of the dry lakebed with his body (MacDonald Ch. 12). Critics note the continued use of sexual euphemisms throughout MacDonald’s fairy tale, here in the prince’s need to “stanch [sic] the flow,” stop the hole, and as the prince states to the king, “I will cork your big bottle . . . I will put a stopper—a plug—what you call it, in your leaky lake” (Ch. 12, 13). The Light Princess’ inability to save herself and her dependence upon the prince to rescue her and give himself to her by stopping the waters of her magic lake with his body stresses the sexual nature of the story while endorsing women’s socially necessitated dependence upon men for any possibility of a fairy tale happy ending. Furthermore, her happiness within marriage is contingent upon her sexual desirability. Waller Hastings proposes if *The Light Princess* reflected feminist ideologies and defied social norms, the protagonist would have played the role of partner to the prince instead of serving as his reward (85). Roderick McGillis argues that princess is caught between male and female codes of conduct and the “woman out of her place . . . can spell death for a man” (40). The prince risks his life for her, but she can never risk her life for him. Instead, the Light Princess must be found “reproductively whole” for her to be worthy of the traditional fairy tale ending. In so doing, she gains gravity and learns to cry, both conditions suggesting the necessitated Victorian transformation of her body and manners are finally complete and she is ready for marriage. Similarly, Makemnoit’s reproductive failings—at least within the eyes of contemporary audiences—underscores why she cannot have a happy fairy tale conclusion. As a reproductive Other, Makemnoit is relegated to the shadows of Victorian society.

In 1864 when George MacDonald first published his fairy tale *The Light Princess*, he had five daughters, the eldest of which was fourteen years of age and nearing the nineteenth-century’s average age of female reproductive maturity. In an imaginative mythopoeic tale that seemingly

shuns the realm of reality, MacDonald writes a tale on lightlessness weighted down with repeated allusions to the physical components of female sexuality, demonstrating his recognition of the demands placed upon young girls and women. The evil witch Makemnoit embodies long-standing cultural myths and fears regarding the reproductive capacities of women's bodies, fears regarding unmarried, barren, or otherwise sexually deviant women, and the perceived dangers associated with menopause. Threats of death and looming danger echo societal concerns about deviant female behavior and the need to harness female sexuality within marriage. Repeated references to the moon align with historic beliefs in menstruation's "lunar cycle" while Makemnoit's underground, phallic snake, and draining of the waters of the lake implicate contemporary fears regarding unrestrained female sexuality. MacDonald's fairy tale illustrates social fears stemming from misperceptions regarding the female reproductive body and the demands placed upon women's reproductive roles within society.

But perhaps *The Light Princess* is not wholly anti-feminist, either. Literary scholarship commonly consents that reference to or depiction of the physical changes of female puberty and menopause are absent within nineteenth-century literature. Including such details would implicate authors in deviating from or defying the codes of Victorian propriety they likewise enforced upon their characters. However, analysis of *The Light Princess* reveals replete reference to Victorian ideologies surrounding women's reproductive capacity. In figuratively depicting female reproductivity, *The Light Princess* gives modern audiences a highly valuable rendering of the stereotypes facing aging Victorian women in the mid-nineteenth century. In his essay "The Fantastic Imagination" that prefaced this famed fairy tale, MacDonald argued that fairy tales have meaning and that true works of art contain multiple meanings; it is the duty of scholarship to find what is there and as MacDonald put it "what matter whether I meant them or not? They are there none the less" ("Fantastic"). While *The Light Princess* conforms to the social ideologies of its era, it also provides uncensored discussion of the physical and social experience of Victorian female puberty and menopause.

Endnotes

1. Edward Burne-Jones' (1833-1898) 1860 two-part series "Sidonia von Bork 1560" and "Clara von Bork 1560" depicts characters from Johann Wilhelm Meinhold's *Sidonia von Bork: Die Klosterhexe*, a story of the crimes of an evil witch Sidonia who later burns at the stake. In Burne-Jones' watercolor paintings, Sidonia is dark

and brooding while a black cat circles Clara, and like Hughes' familiar depiction, appears in the lower left-hand corner of the painting (MacCarthy 156). Witches would later prove instrumental in the late nineteenth-century art of Pre-Raphaelite artist John William Waterhouse, including *The Magic Circle* (1886), *Circe Invidiosa* (1892), and *The Crystal Ball* (1902).

2. James Frazer describes Pliny's writings as containing a longer "list of dangers apprehended from menstruation...than any furnished by mere barbarians" (702).

3. Within the Polynesian language and culture, menstrual ritual repeatedly connects with taboo. The word "taboo" derives from the "Polynesian *tapua*, meaning both 'sacred' and 'menstruation,' in the sense, as some traditions say, of 'the woman's friend'" (Grahn 5). Though a friend of women, menstrual taboo is extensive. Beyond the connection to the sacred, "taboo" also means "forbidden, valuable, wonderful, magic, terrible, frightening, and immutable law" (Grahn 5). Thus, while for some menstruation might be understood as a miraculous, magical, and sacred event for the female body, these characteristics are buried by overriding terrible social anxieties. Taboo topics operate in a black and white system, that which is forbidden and that which is not: "Taboo is the emphatic use of imperatives, yes or no, you must or you must not. Taboo draws attention, strong attention, and is in and of itself a language for ideas and customs" (Grahn 5).

4. While the literature of this discussion focuses on the nineteenth century, the spread of these myths into the twentieth century is worth noting. Jules Zanger writes that the view of menstruation as a "blight upon growing things and upon male enterprises" can be seen in the superstition and "popular currency" of the 1920 experiments of Bela Schick (creator of the famous diphtherian Schick test) (369). Schick conducted tests wherein he studied the effect of menstrual blood on plant life. One of the ways this was done was in the rapid conclusion that after giving a menstruating girl a bouquet of roses, the roses began to fade the next day. Zanger explains, Schick "concluded that there existed 'menotoxins,' exuded through the skins of menstruating women, which killed plants and, incidentally, kept dough from rising and beer from fermenting. The experiments were repeated some years later, but without confirming Schick's results" (369).

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