

“Black Candles Burn:’ Ghost’s Invitation to the Occult”

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To be woman is to be gently pushed toward a variety of social and cultural parameters. Despite feminist intervention, these parameters continue to exist: though there has been social progress since *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Wollstonecraft 1792), society at large still questions whether women can ‘have it all,’ and in some ways, our ideas of what women are or should be have not moved much in the decades since Simone de Beauvoir (1949). In de Beauvoir’s perspective, the societal category ‘woman’ was very much a myth, and for modern women, to identify as such is to recognize, on some level, that woman exists outside of the ‘normal’ societal paradigm. This is visible in the way that the ‘second sex’ are held at a linguistic remove: we are ‘women in’ (women in metal, women in STEM, women in cinema). Like other monsters, held outside of normalcy (Cohen 1994) woman is an unnatural construction, a Frankenstein’s creature assembled from sanctioned pieces. Monique Wittig (1980) describes the process of being ‘made’ woman, the lifelong process of stripping away and tucking in anything that does not conform to contemporary social mores. This process should not be too obvious, of course, and must be constrained within the appropriate female paradigm. For example: while makeup must be worn, lest woman be labeled ‘tired’ or ‘ill,’ it must not be too heavy or too obvious.

Women, particularly young women, are encouraged or ‘allowed’ to like only specific things: low-calorie hard seltzer, Taylor Swift, Rupi Kaur’s poetry. Other things are off-limits, or at the least, worthy of remark: it is a tomboy who likes beer, heavy metal, or sports. Women are easily labeled over-emotional, but the emotions they are permitted end at futile tears. Ladies, smile while we condescend to you. Politely write letters as we strip away your rights to your own bodies. Rage and screaming are the reactions of hysterics. There’s no reason to get upset. You need to calm down. Leave the heavy music and the guitars to the boys. Heavy metal, after all, is the realm of the

masculine (Rafalovich 2006), and those women who try to harness sonic power to speak out against sexism are only doing it for male attention – BABYMETAL, for example, don't count as metal because they are an idol group, not a group formed out of passion for the music.

But something is calling, whispering out of pseudohistory and generational trauma. Something is rattling around the attic, creeping behind curtains, beckoning from the woods. Satan is recruiting, tempting women towards rebellion, towards a femininity that is weaponized. He is whispering tales of black magic, telling your daughters they are descended from witches who refused to burn. He lulls them towards the darkness he knows is roiling within them, a darkness that seethes as it witnesses injustice on a 24-hour news cycle. The Old One wants women, those original sinners, to scream, to rage, to break out of the illusions of choice society offers them – and he is enlisting them through a carnivalesque metal band criticized for being ABBA in corpse paint.

The Feminine Mystique

On the first day of my 100-level women's studies course, I ask my students: what is a woman? Expressions of confusion flicker across the room. Surely there is an obvious answer to a question so simple, yet the class cannot arrive at a satisfactory definition. Each time they try, I offer them another slice of Eve's apple, complicating things. They begin, naturally, with anatomy: a woman is someone with a womb, perhaps, or someone who menstruates. But plenty of 'women' have undergone hysterectomies, and plenty of trans men menstruate, while some 'women,' for a variety of reasons, do not. No one brings up clothing; my students, raised on Drag Queen Story Hours, are unfamiliar with a world in which a man in makeup is cause for Judith Butler to write an essay. Perhaps a woman is simply ...not a man? Anyone who would be welcome in a space reserved for 'women, women-identified, and nonbinary people' must be a woman. *Abbb*, the serpent coos

from under my tongue, *but aren't nonbinary people, by definition, not women?* They are drawing closer to the answer I, and the infernal majesty I represent, want them to arrive at: this category of 'woman' is constructed upon decades of myth and tradition, in direct opposition to the category of 'man,' the 'default' gender. Being a societal invention, it is therefore somewhat malleable.

Though 'woman' is a category that means something different to everyone, there is a great deal of societal and cultural weight held up in getting the answers 'correct.' So much of modern society fixates on and operates within a strict binary; 'woman' *must* be defined so that decades-old structures can remain in place. Decades of feminist history attempt to navigate these structures and this binary, finding it difficult (much like my students) to appropriately quantify. Rosemary Hill, writing in 2018, calls us 'people grouped as "women,"' offering up its own question: grouped by who? On what basis? Sojourner Truth felt so excluded by the contemporary definition of 'woman' in 1851 that she famously asked an entire convention of women if she counted. The Combahee River Collective took issue with the 'biological determinism' (Combahee River Collective 275) involved in feminist politics, continuing and expanding Truth's question from over a hundred years before. Monique Wittig, building from de Beauvoir, felt that 'woman' was a category born of heterosexuality; as a lesbian, she fell outside of that binary and that group. Judith Butler examined femininity through drag queens and trans women (1988), believing that since female gender presentation is demonstrably artificial, perhaps this whole idea of gender is made up. De Beauvoir calls woman 'the Other at the heart of a whole whose two components are necessary to each other':(9) without a concept of 'woman' as his foil, 'man' begins to degrade.. Feminist theory so struggles with definitions because we are historically attempting to create or find words to demonstrate that life is different outside of the norm: 'woman' as a social class exists because it *has* to, much like social classes like 'neurodivergent,' 'transgender,' or 'queer' have to. We need words to define difference, so that we can use them to bolster normalcy, the status quo.

My students would argue that life for woman is different in 2022 than it was in 1949. On some level, they are correct. There are certainly more ways to ‘be woman’ in the modern age, especially after remote work and school allowed us to hide from the public eye in many ways. Makeup seems less important than it ever did. Very few of my students show up to class in skirts. But I see the way they sit, tucked in on themselves. I see the way they enter my classroom in huddled pairs or trios. We discuss the idea of ‘personal safety,’ the methods they have been taught: hold keys between their fingers in dark parking lots, never lose sight of a drink at a party. There is a great deal of labor, conscious and unconscious, that goes into creating and maintaining womanhood. I ask my students how they sound at work; they are retail employees, hotel desk clerks, waitresses. They laugh as they recognize the artifice in their ‘work voices,’ in the smiling, higher-pitched tones they use to placate guests and customers. I know the way the pleasant smile slides off of my own face at the end of a Zoom call. It takes a great deal of effort to keep this mask up, day in and day out. To release it, even for a short period of time, is freeing, and more than that, it’s powerful. To *deliberately* let down this mask, to spit in the face of everything one has been taught, to do what feels natural and not artificial, is its own kind of black magic. As a feminist professor, I embody Satan and his teachings. I invite my students to participate in dark rituals (such as taking up public space), teach them powerful spells (‘no,’ ‘I just said that,’ ‘don’t interrupt me’), and instruct them in occult languages – prose and poems designed to identify and call out the smoke and mirrors of social constructs.

If womanity is artifice, let us uncover reality. Slough off that woman-skin, release the selkie underneath. Gaze at yourself under moonlight and decide, unbound by the restrictive rules you have so far followed, what you will become. Look closely enough at feminist theory texts and one will notice patterns: references to ritual, to magic, to Medusa, chapters on nature and the wilderness. Women are darkness, are dangerous, are forests, are labyrinths (Cixous 878); women are wild,

untamed, are wolves (Pinkola Estès 1995). For some women, the figure of the witch is the natural extension of this question of woman, an opportunity to stretch this classification of ‘other’ to its edges, to revel and relish in it. Every village needs a witch, and claiming this mantle is a means for women to do femininity ‘wrong,’ a way of claiming ‘freedom of will, sexual desire, and power.’ (Shadrack 116) Witches might wear makeup, but not in nude or soft tones. They retreat to the wild, but they do so nude, under the moon, to forage mushrooms or animal bones or meet with their Master. Witches’ jewelry is not understated or subtle, and it is imbued with dark power. Witches wrest control away from the male gaze or threaten it – Circe turned men to pigs and dogs. ‘Go ahead and look at me,’ black lipstick sneers. ‘We *are* the weirdos, mister.’ Witchcraft dabbings or witch aesthetic function as a ‘survival tool,’ (Adler 227) a means to make (female) sense of a world that still holds women as other. We’ll other ourselves, thank you very much.

We are experiencing a resurgence of witchcraft, through clothing brands like Killstar or ‘starter witch kits’ sold at makeup retailers, through *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* and Florence + the Machine. On a recent strip mall outing, I found an entire shelf of magical books and tarot/oracle decks, utterly ransacked, with only a few copies of titles like *Herbal Tea Magic for the Modern Witch* and *The Black Arts* left. Only a few years ago, an aspiring sorceress would have had to venture into a dimly lit head shop in a dark corner of a college town to find a limited selection of tarot decks and books preaching a single approach to the craft. Today, she can stroll into her nearest Target and pick up a Britney Spears themed oracle deck while she sips her pumpkin spice latte. The occult, unlike femininity, provides options. There is certainly a tradition in black lace and chains, but aesthetics like ‘cottagecore’ or ‘kitchen witch’ are equally popular. Tarot and astrology apps grant sparkly, emoji-enhanced access to arcane knowledge. It is easy to attempt to gatekeep, to try and keep out the dabblers, the Instagram witches, the crystal collectors, but to do so is a disservice to those invoking the name and the power of the witch. Even Lucifer himself rejects duality: though he is commonly

depicted male, he is performed by Gwendolyn Christie in 2022's *The Sandman*, and Baphomet has shown us their intersexed (and interspecies) body for decades.

Previous New Age authors (many of them men) want to tell us how to be witches. They will tell us we must practice Wicca (or one of its many variants), with its strict rules and its Rede: 'An' it harm none, do as ye will.' (Buckland 13) Wicca books aimed at beginners direct their readers towards love and light, towards spells designed never to infringe upon the autonomy of another person. True witchcraft, they scold, is benevolent and structured – it adheres to a recognizable pattern, and it relies on correspondences and symbols that have, allegedly, been passed down since the ancients. True witchcraft is never used for personal gain or to impede on the autonomy of another person. This defangs the use of witchcraft as survival and destroys its significance to the downtrodden. Satanic witchcraft, atheistic witchcraft, or a built-from-the-ground craft break the rules and don't qualify. Witchcraft, writes Peter Grey, is 'the recourse of the dispossessed, the powerless, the hungry and the abused.' (Grey 16) Maranda Elizabeth tells us she writes intentionally for 'misfits and solitaries...traumatised fuck-ups, the abandoned.' (Elizabeth 23) There is a heritage to the word "witch" that Wiccan authors, particularly of the 1980s and 1990s, seem quite keen to distance themselves from (Buckland 2001, Conway 2001). It is precisely this heritage that the witch aestheticists I write about wish to draw upon: the witch as terrifying, as frightening. The witch is someone not to be crossed, who decorates her fence posts with skulls, for whom the crows act as spies. The witch is a 'patriarchally loathed female archetype,' (Shadrack 116) and she likes it that way. The women I write about are women who go seeking Lucifer in all her forms, but this paper will focus on one in particular: the Swedish heavy metal band Ghost.

Othering the "Other:" Heavy Metal and Women

Heavy metal has a decades-long association with the occult, from the Satanic Panic to church burning and shock rock. Metal is its own trickster god; the metal community seems to pride itself on its transgressive rebelliousness (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, and LeVine 2012), which often refers to an inherent masculinity (Jones 2018, Vasan 2011, Hutcherson and Haenfler 2010). Metal can feature grotesque and/or violently misogynistic lyrics (Kahn-Harris 2007, Vasan 2010) and use women as objects (Sollee 2015). While liberating for some, this genre may create a divide between ‘the audience’ and ‘women,’ othering and excluding the (already othered) female audience member. It is a special kind of disappointment to attempt to transgress by praying at the altar of heavy metal, only to discover that one must do so on men’s terms (Riches 2015). But there is a reckoning on the horizon: can you hear the rumble?

From Elvis to *NSYNC to One Direction, the mainstream music industry and its surrounding media make millions from girls waiting to qualify as adults, girls caught up in tropes of chastity and the precarious Madonna/whore balance. Like the girls who drove Beatlemania, these fans may not, on the surface, cause screaming mayhem for a particular purpose, but they certainly find meaning in ‘the act of rioting.’ (Ehrenreich 1992) Metal, unlike pop rock in its various historical forms, gives clearer thematic and sonic purpose to riot. A metal show is unlike most other genres of music in that there is, inevitably, a mosh pit front and center near the stage. This pit, and the moshing within it, a ‘sensuous example of transgression,’ (Riches et al 2014: 87), allows and encourages a manner of behaving that obeys no rules and gives one completely over to the body. To witness live metal is to feel the beat in your chest, to feel energy building in a manner that other concerts do not provoke. Throwing one’s body into a mosh pit is a release, a way to fuse with the other people in this community, to leave the problematic female body and to simply exist. The moshers of today might identify with Beatlemaniacs of yesteryear and the witches of Wiccan texts (Buckland 2001); moshing uses the body to redirect and expend energy. There are not many venues

in which it is socially permissible to scream, to throw oneself into a frothing sea of humanity, to ‘corporeally articulate’ (Riches et al 2014: 90) the emotions that polite society asks us to tamp down.

There are certainly many forms of release at concerts; walking out of a Florence + the Machine show last week, I heard two women behind me comment that it was ‘oddly spiritual.’ Laughing, I turned to them, asking ‘Was it?’ I had spent the entire encore in body-shaking sobs, evidenced by the comically huge mascara mess all over my face. Florence Welch, on stage that night, had asked the congregation before her to ‘give it all to her,’ to ‘leave with nothing.’ Welch offered herself up as the focal point of our arena-wide spell, a sort of Tinkerbell figure ready and willing to receive our energy. At Welch’s show, I saw women spinning, swaying, floating on the floor. The music is suited to this type of dreamy dancing – Welch asked us to dance ourselves to death, and like the Wilis and Giselle before us, we did. It is this invitation to participate, this acknowledgement that the show is a sacred space, a liminal space, that moshing serves for metal. It’s difficult to sway, twirl, or dance to metal, so we throw our bodies against those of our fellow concertgoers to become part of the music in the same way. The witch-feminist is aware of society’s injustices, on some level. She has turned to the darkness to rebuke the society that has set her apart, labeled her inferior. She has a lot to be screaming about, and the mosh pit gives her the space to do so. Dark female rock will often directly acknowledge this skewing of rights and public space; Florence Welch directly spoke about the right to choose, Sleater-Kinney used music to write about objectification, and at a dreamy Purity Ring show the day the Roe overturning came down, Megan James opened her show by announcing ‘this is fucked.’ Though metal provides the venue to scream, it does not often acknowledge women’s specific reasons to be screaming.

An Invitation to the Occult: Ghost

In 2010, Swedish band Ghost arrived on the scene, comprised of a troupe of ‘Nameless Ghouls’ clad in dark robes and masks and led by a skull-painted ‘Papa Emeritus.’ The band kidnapped journalist Richard Lagergren, whisking him off to conduct an interview. Perhaps unwisely, given his infernal company, Lagergren asked after the identity of the band’s members, but Papa Emeritus neatly quashed this line of inquiry: ‘We are but ghosts, hollow and diffuse.’ (Lagergren 2010) Ghost’s singular purpose was to spread the word of Satan, the word of fornication and general naughtiness, through its most convenient and time-honored vessel: rock music. There was no need to complicate this message with frivolities like earthly identities. The band’s first album, *Opus Eponymous*, is straightforward in this purpose, featuring songs with titles as unsubtle as ‘Satan Prayer.’ The theming of *Opus* clearly follows in the footsteps of bands like Venom (whose 1982 album *Black Metal* features, like *Opus*, songs about Elizabeth Bathory, witches, and Satan), but musically reflects earlier occult rock like Coven or Black Widow. This sonic difference is crucial: Ghost’s music is danceable, and despite its dark stylings, it is nowhere near as sonically challenging as other contemporary metal with similar themes. Although *Opus* does lyrically invoke human sacrifice, it also refers to ‘procreat[ing] the unholy bastard,’ and several of its songs (‘Elizabeth,’ ‘Stand By Him,’ ‘Prime Mover’) address the role of women in this nebulous Satanic cult. They are magic makers and crucial consensual partners in the bringing of the Antichrist – a far cry from the brutalized or scorned women in other metal songs. Ghost’s theming serves as more than a gimmick; the man behind Papa Emeritus referred to his original idea for Ghost as an act ‘closer to a musical or theater’ (Blabbermouth, 2018) This musical theater approach makes a Ghost ‘ritual,’ as the band refers to its concerts, feel nothing like other metal shows: a ritual is a carnivalesque topsy-turvy world, a place where ‘symbols of fear [are] defeated by laughter,’ (Bahktin 394) in which Satan and his female servants are symbols of renewal and hope, not scapegoats or evildoers. As a theater production with a groovy style of metal on top, Ghost seems more *Hadestown* than Cannibal Corpse.

Here is a skull-painted Satanic clergy, the musical equivalent of a starter witch kit: ready-made for the women prepared to dance themselves to death, the witch-feminists ready to dive bodily into liminal space.

I went to devil church on a Saturday night, with a full moon high in the sky. Bathed in blood-red light, I watched a man in very tight pants sing ‘infernal psalms’ (‘Con Clavi Con Dio’) to a crowd of more women than I’d ever seen at a metal show. Weeks after that show, Ghost’s single ‘Mary on a Cross’ would break the Billboard Hot 100, propelled in part by its popularity on TikTok. Ghost does very, very well in women’s online spaces, away from men’s memes that they are merely ‘goth Coldplay’ or ‘Scooby-Doo chase music.’ It is exactly this playfulness, this lighter approach to metal, that helps women move toward darkness, emboldened by a metal space that prioritizes them instead of excising them (Shadrack 117). Riches posits female moshing as one space wherein heavy metal identities can be viewed on bodies outside of the male paradigm (2015, 265); I am interested in what happens when male becomes the minority in metal space. For the last few decades, there have been ample genres in which witch-feminists may dabble in (male-made) music *just* angry enough to annoy their mothers, music that reflects that maligned Other within them, without the perhaps-too-frightening anger and unrelatable masculinity of the wider genre. The Cure segued into Good Charlotte, who gave way to My Chemical Romance, and the decline and breakup of My Chemical Romance was timed rather fortuitously (as if ordained by Beelzebub) with the rise of Ghost.

The official ‘canon’ of Ghost is arcane, meandering, and is dispersed widely across a decade of music magazines, music videos, YouTube shorts, and throwaway comments in interviews, which lead to extensive ‘fanon,’ or ‘fan canon,’ around the characters. Through explicit references in interviews and implicit nods in lyrics and staging, band founder Tobias Forge seems entirely aware of and responsive to (at least some of) this fanon.

'So [Papa Emeritus] represents everything that is sacred, powerful, and authoritative. It is very humorous as well, because not only is he our own Eddie [Maiden], he's also Freddie Mercury, Adolf Hitler, Dracula, Marlon Brando, and the Pope rolled into one.'

Anger rouses Papa Emeritus from his near slumber: 'Don't forget John Holmes!'

The Nameless Ghoul sighs and corrects himself, throwing the 13-inch-cocked porn star into the mix: 'He's like Freddie Mercury, Adolf Hitler, Dracula, Marlon Brando, the Pope AND John Holmes rolled into one.'

'Thank you,' says Papa E...

The Ghoul laughs raucously beneath his hood: 'You'd be surprised at how many women flirt scandalously with him from the audience...I think it is not so much his looks as the idea of him being whoever they want...'

Papa cuts in with a lascivious leer: 'Whatever makes you think that I do not engulf myself in the carnal aftermath of our masses?'

In this exchange, from an interview with *Metal Hammer UK* in 2012, Papa interrupts his own description by a Nameless Ghoul as 'sacred, powerful, and authoritative' to be sure it includes some element of sexual prowess and laughs at the interviewer's suggestion that there is nothing sexy about a decrepit old Satanic pope in a 'dress.' Already, Forge is making explicit room for fan interpretation of Papa, despite whatever intentions he had set out with. Two years previously, Papa had solemnly told a journalist that he had no desire to 'shed light' on anything but the unholy message the band was tasked with; by 2012, Papa is indignant if light is *not* shed on his member and propensity for

carnal pleasures. Never straying far from his original musical theater vision, Forge often cites Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Phantom of the Opera* as an inspiration, but he adds *Cats* in later interviews – it's 'just pure sex,' after all. (2019)

Ghoulish Perversions: Sex and Anonymity in Ghost Fanfiction

Like My Chemical Romance before them, Ghost does quite well in fanfiction. Band fanfiction is nothing new; as noted above, there is money to be made in budding female sexuality, and the media can only dangle young, attractive band members as boyfriend material for so long before women take matters into their own keyboards. 'RPF,' or 'real people fic,' takes a few forms: slash fic, wherein writers make queer meaning of all those nights on the tour bus (Roach 2018, Hagen 2015), or of band members' perceived close relationships. Other RPF is self-insert, or reader/band member fic. There is much fandom discourse surrounding RPF as compared to character fic: Spock and Kirk are never going to Google themselves, and they have no real-life careers or relationships that explicit gay fic can threaten. RPF, on the other hand, spawns questions of ethics that Ghost, with its cast of anonymous characters, has tidy solutions for. From 2010-2018, 'no one' knew who was under those robes, and the characters of Papa and the Nameless Ghouls were merely characters. But they afforded a luxury that other fictional characters didn't: while it was possible to meet Mark Hamill or Alan Rickman at a convention, it was impossible to meet Luke Skywalker or Severus Snape. Through VIP meet & greet packages, interviews, and more, it was and remains entirely possible to meet Papa Emeritus in the flesh, without infringing upon the privacy and real life of Tobias Forge. Forge winkingly acknowledges this over and over again in interviews, even as far back as 2012. (Doran 2012)

Ghost's styling as mere puppets, empty vessels designed to spread the word of Satan sets up an in-depth backstory most other bands can't compete with. Green Day, for example, is the invention of three teenagers who grew up steeped in East Bay punk and had a message to share, and at that point the band's story ends. Ghost piques more curiosity than just 'who's under those masks?' – they reference a Satanic clergy, an unseen unholy master holding the strings. What is the structure of this clergy? If fornication and women as powerfully infernal witches are so important lyrically to this band, are they important in other ways? Every time the band answered one question, more popped up. Interviews were either given by Papa himself or, more often, by a 'Nameless Ghoul,' typically played by Forge (Forge did not conduct interviews out of character until 2018). Immediately, explicit fanfiction sprung up around Ghost, encouraged and teased by the band's masked representatives. Papa Emeritus I shared a link to the (now defunct) fanfiction tumblr 'Ghoulish Perversions' on the official Ghost Facebook page, remarking approvingly on this type of fannish behavior. As the years passed and the amount of erotic fanfiction grew, things in the clergy began to shift ever more towards the sexual. One of Ghost's first music videos, 'Secular Haze,' featured full-frontal male nudity, and in 2013 the band released the Phallos Mortuus 'ritual box set,' which included a dildo in the shape of Papa Emeritus II. Ghost's second album, *Infestissumam*, leans even more into the power of the feminine. Aside from its myriad references to lust and sexual turns of phrase ('I am the son who comes into the daughters of men'), *Infestissumam* gave Ghost fans the term 'Ghuleh,' which became a popular pet name for Papa to call his partners in fanfiction.

Forge's vision for Ghost included a sense of legacy or eras. Each album represents a different moment in the history of Ghost, complete with a new Papa Emeritus (though each Papa is played by Forge, the audience is meant to interpret them as different people). A stern female figure introduces Papa Emeritus III via a video on Ghost's official YouTube channel. She refers to Papa II as being 'washed up' ('The Summoning' 2015) and articulates the need for a younger leader. Papa III

embodies both a reaction to sexual fanfiction and a reaction to the wider Ghost audience – Tobias Forge noticed that his audience dances, and five years into the ‘Ghost project,’ gave Papa pants rather than a long papal robe, so that Papa can dance, too. Papa III is a dandy in spats, and he won Ghost their first Grammy. Cardinal Copia, later Papa IV, follows in III’s footsteps. He is younger still, he is introduced via YouTube as being ‘a firm leader, with youth, stamina, and sexual charisma,’ (‘Chapter One: New Blood’ 2017) and his pants are so tight a tumblr post referred to them as ‘vacuum-sealed.’ And though it may disappoint Papa to hear it, sexual attention is not reserved for him alone.

Though the ‘true’ identities of the Nameless Ghouls wouldn’t be publicly known until 2022, fans refused to leave them ‘nameless.’ To distinguish them from each other (and to link each Papa to his Ghouls, since the backing musicians tended to change between album cycles), fans gave them nicknames based on sacred alchemical elements or symbols (early Ghouls were referred to by names like Ifrit, Mist, Alpha, and Omega). Each troupe of Ghouls are costumed to match their Papa, and until 2018, every Ghoul in the band wore the same mask. Identical masks do not identical Ghouls make, however. Each Ghoul has his (or her) own personality, discernable through body language and the rare slices of skin they choose to show. Aether Ghoul, for example, wears two thick rings, one on each hand, and Swiss Ghoul (so named because he plays multiple backing instruments; ‘Swiss’ is a shortening of ‘Swiss Army Ghoul’) tends to roll up his sleeves to his forearms. The masks and robes (and later, elaborate costumes) make performing somewhat fraught: it’s difficult to see, maneuver, or play instruments through small eye holes. As a result, Ghost’s stage show is extremely choreographed. On the surface, this might seem boring, but in practice – especially given the highly active online fanbase – it serves Ghost’s audience and mythos remarkably well. Like any other tumblr fandom, Ghost fans pass gifsets and images around; but the images and gifsets of various rituals will nearly exactly match any other ritual on that tour. Mannerisms, lighting cues,

pyrotechnics, even ghouls' individual stomping to the beat will reflect what a fan can see live, and further cements which tour the original video came from. Before (and after) the ritual a fan physically attends, she will be able to see the set list, the various costumes, and the exact mannerisms yet to come. If attending a ritual is out of her reach (financially, geographically, or otherwise), or if something canonically significant happens at one ritual only (such as the transitions between Papas, or Cardinal Copia's ascension to Papa Emeritus IV), she will be certain to see seemingly endless footage of it online. This constant remixing and reproducing of what is ostensibly the same content allows fans an extremely in-depth way in which to scrutinize the Nameless Ghouls. Entire PowerPoint slide decks circulate, helping newcomers understand the minute differences between the various Ghouls.

Although there are many spaces in which to write fanfiction, this paper focuses on tumblr. Tumblr is an anonymous social media with its own culture, distinct post style, and history. With a meta-fandom of its own (Tiidenberg et al 125), tumblr is specifically equipped to create an anonymous community of like-minded Ghost fans, and to easily share and circulate fan works (whether they be fic, art, or anything in between). Popular Ghost fic authors can choose to receive anonymous messages, including short writing prompts. This closeness to the producers of content invites very particular types of fanfiction, spawned by request by fans who do not themselves write fic. These requests reflect the varied identities and degrees of 'Otherdom' that Ghost fans inhabit; they ask how Papa (or their favorite Ghoul) would treat a partner who is a victim of previous abuse, a partner recovering from various gender affirming surgeries, a partner who isn't body confident, a virgin partner. *Opus Eponymous'* track 'Stand By Him' cites the *Malleus Maleficarum*, calling witchcraft an extension of 'carnal lust, which is in women insatiable.' Peter Grey (2013: 15) tells us 'in witchcraft it is the woman who initiates.' This act of initiation, of asking directly for what we want and need, is the black magic Ghost gives us access to.

As anonymous characters, as heavily choreographed figures on stage, the various Papas and Ghouls can represent whatever we'd like them to. Papa Emeritus III's tendency to trip onstage and the demeanor fans interpret from Forge's performance is transfigured into the idea that he is a 'disaster bisexual,' often interpreted with ADHD. Cardinal Copia, depicted in the 'Chapter' videos on Ghost's YouTube as a bumbling and inept mama's boy promoted through sheer nepotism takes on an underdog mentality amongst the fans. Through identical masks with identically neutral facial expressions, fans scry facial gestures on the Ghouls, drawing them entirely differently to each other in fan art. Witches are possessed of arcane and eldritch knowledge, passed down from witch to witch. Sitting in the audience in the nosebleeds of an 18,000-seat arena, I look at three guitar-wielding Ghouls and distinguish them the way a foraging witch can discern herbs or mushrooms. Even from this far away, I get a sense that Papa IV has no skill for ghoulish management or, indeed, commanding a powerful Satanic organization; he allows several ghouls to meander directly in front of him during 'Year Zero,' eventually giving up to slink behind the stage for another costume change. Satan knows he's giving it his best shot, and at the least, he has clearly spent as much time crafting and cultivating his image as the women in the audience, all of us 'sparkling like Bowie in the morning sun.' ('Vampire Money,' My Chemical Romance)

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