

Section 3

Crone

The most frightening woman of all, the wicked witch, the cackling hag, the destructive, devouring harbinger of impending death. The particular spite reserved for the crone stands at the intersection of misogyny and ageism, a corollary of the expectation that women should be young, beautiful and fertile, and a product of the modern world's deep discomfort with any reminder of human mortality. The aging woman, as Naomi Govreen points out, must accept 'the necessity of loss and death', and those who encounter her must as well. Yet there is an additional cloak of anxiety hanging over the crone. Women at this stage of life, facing 'the inevitable destruction or dissolution that must precede regeneration' (Gadon, 1989, p. 29), can also find themselves freed from responsibilities to the standards of patriarchal propriety that constrain the maiden and the mother. For what should we be innocent, self-denying, fuckable, breedable, when we stand on the brink of earth-churning change? With age come ever more opportunities to develop wisdom, self-acceptance and self-actualisation – characteristics that profoundly threaten patriarchal power structures. Naomi Govreen and Catherine Jenkins offer defences, both emphatic and empathetic, of women whose age, stage and departure from patriarchal goals have inspired terror as well as fascination from the very patriarchal power structures that they undermine.

Reference

Gadon, E. (1989). *The once and future goddess: A symbol for our time*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishers.