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Teen Witches, Wiccans, and “Wanna-Blessed-Be’s”: Pop-Culture Magic in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*



(1) In an introductory scene of an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, entitled “Hush,” the character of Willow Rosenberg is sitting with a group of young women gathered in what is obviously the lounge of a busy college dorm. She struggles to maintain concentration as one of the women leads the rest in a guided meditation vaguely focusing on feminine energy. The leader then promptly breaks the meditation and begins discussing bake sales and newsletters. This is the Wiccan group of UC-Sunnydale, the fictional college that is the setting for the fourth season of the popular WB show (currently in its fifth season). Though mentioned in previous episodes, this is the only time we see the group and its members. Sunnydale’s young Wiccans toss around all the buzz words associated with the contemporary feminist spirituality movement: empowerment, energy, blessing. Yet when Willow proposes they do actual magical work, like conjuring or casting spells, she is mocked, and accused of both perpetuating negative stereotypes and “sucking energy” from the group. Afterwards, Willow relates her experiences to Buffy. The dialogue ensues:

Buffy: So not stellar, huh?

Willow: Talk. All talk. Blah Blah Gaia. Blah Blah Moon...menstrual life force power thingy. You know, after a coupla sessions I was hoping we could get into something real but . . .

Buffy: No actual witches in your witch group?

Willow: No. Bunch of wanna-blessed-bes. You know, nowadays every girl with a henna tattoo and a spice rack thinks she’s a sister of the Dark Ones.

Though the scene with the Wiccan group functions mainly as a way to introduce the character of Tara, the fellow witch who will develop a strong relationship with Willow in the second half of the show’s fourth season, the program’s creator, Joss Whedon, who wrote this episode, has taken the opportunity to comment on a strange culture of which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has unintentionally become a part: popular occultism and marketable new age spirituality. In this article, I will specifically look at how witchcraft functions as an individuation process for the character of Willow, how the series constructs “Wicca” and witchcraft, and how the series’ use of witchcraft is a part of a larger discursive field in popular media in which Wicca is presented as trendy and empowering for teenagers.

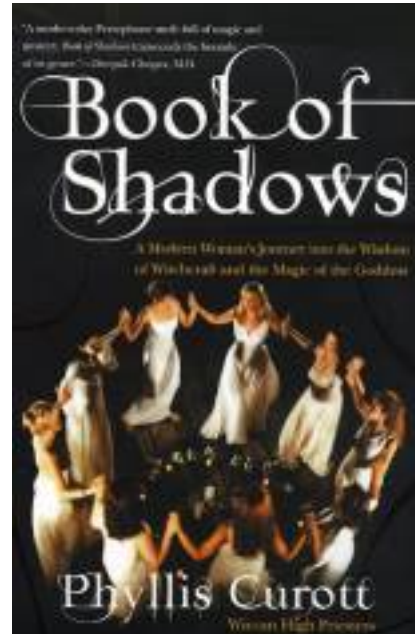
(2) A significant part of Whedon's critique involves subverting popular phraseology. Buffy and Willow's dialogue highlights the unique use of language characteristic of the show, dubbed "Slayer-Speak" by *Entertainment Weekly*. In the dictionary section of an entire issue devoted to the program, creator Joss Whedon contends "Kids can turn a phrase. . . . They can turn it into something scary" (48). Rhonda Wilcox, in her article "There Will Never Be a Very Special Episode of Buffy," categorizes several techniques employed by *Buffy's* teens. They change word order and form, transform adverbs into adjectives, and adjectives into nouns, deftly utilize metaphor and metonym, and insert pop culture references where necessary. In this particular instance, Willow takes the pejorative "wannabe" and combines it with "blessed be," the standard greeting, response and catch-phrase of the neo-pagan movement, probably culled from the instructional literature on witchcraft in the 1960's and 1970's, itself a theft from freemasonry, and put into use in Wiccan practice and ritual. Though Willow is probably not the first to coin the term, its savvy placement in the dialogue disparagingly points to those who want to claim the name but not the acts associated with witchcraft.

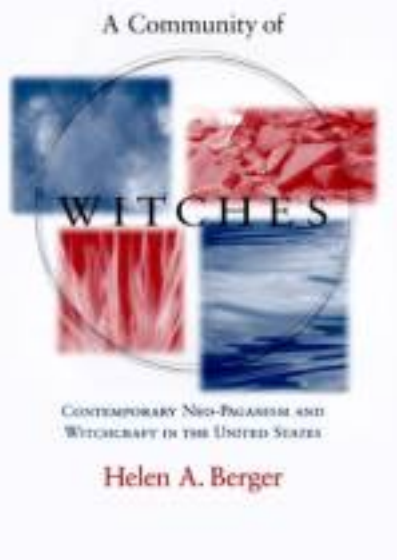
(3) Yet not only does the language of *Buffy* "reinforce the theme of adult ignorance" and "embody one element of the heroism of the teen characters" (Wilcox 23); it functions as a magical tool for the powerful teen who wields it. Unlike the graduate student level vocabulary of the teens in the WB's *Dawson's Creek*, the language and phraseology of the *Buffy* adolescents is much more economical and can be quite performative. In a television show that continually tackles the theme of acting out of bounds and using extraordinary abilities to deal with mundane situations (and vice versa), magic as both narrative fodder and performative metaphor seems perfectly apt. Language works on the ground here as both cultural marker and streetwise skill. In her study of the contemporary witchcraft scene in England, T. M. Luhrmann (1989) refers to the process of adapting in-group linguistic skills as "speaking with a different rhythm," in which a particular language and symbolism is shaped and adapted based on experiential knowing (12). *Buffy's* teens are immersed and experienced in both an everyday world and an occult world, and the differences between the two have become increasingly blurred as the show has progressed. Not surprisingly, clever phrase-turning is part of this blurring. In the liminal space of Sunnydale, words take on magical properties both as powerful incantations and as weapons used by the teens to cope with and gain power over their exceptional situations. Taking the metaphor one step further, the development of the Willow character has relied heavily on the use of both kinds of magic as a way to define and take charge of her initially unstable identity.

(4) Magic as a narrative device has been present in the program almost at its inception. In addition to the wordy rituals favored by the Master in "Welcome to the Hellmouth" and "The Harvest," the first non-vampire episode of the series was "The Witch." Here we start with the basics. We have here the Hollywood witch story complete with a black cat, spells, and a cursory knowledge of the witch's best friend: Frazer's law of sympathy and contagion (like attracts like, as in stealing a bit of hair from a brush in order to work magic on a person). As the series progresses, we witness various and sundry incantations, usually in Latin or Sumerian, or some other unintelligible language. At first, Giles plays the role of armchair necromancer. Later, Jenny Calendar, gypsy turned computer teacher and self-designated "techno-pagan" (she stores her spells on disk and performs magic over the Internet), tries her hand. We also have chaos magician Ethan Rayne, who uses a two-faced Janus sculpture to wreak havoc on Halloween just to have a little fun. Even the cynical, Sid Vicious-loving Spike, the vampire who proclaims at his entrance that there was

going to be “less ritual and more fun”, tries his skeptical hand when restoring his ailing love, Drusilla, finishing the spell with a wisecrack : “Right then. Now we let them come to a simmering boil, then remove to a low flame.” It is the untimely demise of Miss Calendar, however, that opens the door for Willow to begin training in the magical arts, by inheriting Miss Calendar’s disks, borrowing a few of Giles’ books under his nose, and dabbling while no one’s looking. Before we know it, she’s floating pencils and throwing around the W word: “Wicca.”

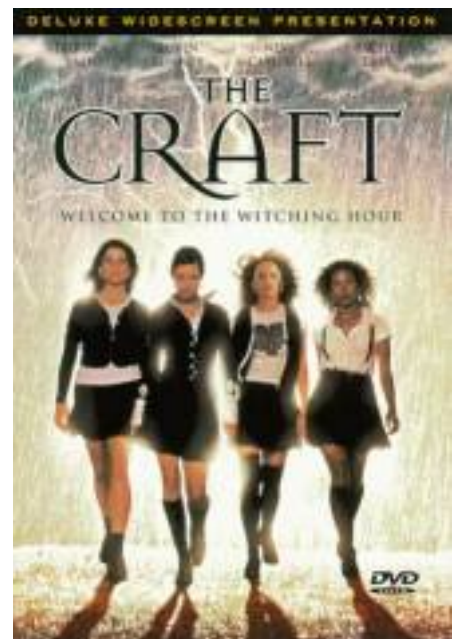
(5) Perhaps you’ve somehow avoided exposure to the pervasive market explosion of products on Wicca, like Phyllis Currott’s bestselling (25,000 copies in its first 8 months) *Book of Shadows*, an autobiography that proved that magic isn’t just for the metaphysical section anymore. Or maybe you hadn’t been paying close attention to 1999’s controversies over witches practicing on a Texas military base and Congressman Bob Barr’s attempt to challenge the military’s stance on religious freedom. In case you haven’t heard, Wicca is the name preferred by witches to describe their religion, or the name given to the most prominent, visible, and media-friendly branch of the neo-pagan goddess-oriented spirituality movement, depending on whom you talk to. Practitioners of Wicca, on some of their more imaginative days, claim to be the followers of a matriarchal, pre-Christian religion that revered the earth as a mother goddess figure, a concept not too far from the ideas of Margaret Murray, who proposed a Western European underground witch cult that survived the persecutions of the 16th and 17th centuries.





(6) The first public witch of the 20th century, Gerald Gardner, made such a statement after the Anti-Witchcraft laws were repealed in England in 1951. Those who approach their practices a little more critically acknowledge that their faith is really a creative reconstruction based on sketchy archeological and anthropological evidence, mythological literature, the works of late 19th/early 20th century occultists, and a good deal of environmental politics and feminism. However, what one realizes after studying the vast amount of material available, talking to a few people, and maybe even witnessing a few rituals, is that this at times blatantly fictional reconstruction is quite irrelevant when considering the effectiveness of the basic tenets for those who follow them.[1] Helen Berger, in her recent sociological study *A Community of Witches*, tells us that the fictional history associated with Wicca “provides models of behavior, of responses to adversity, and of a sense of community. . . . The community created by Witches, like all communities, constructs a past that is applicable to their present and that helps them create a future” (72).

(7) Despite the emphasis on community in the Wicca literature, Hollywood usually finds it much more interesting to focus either on the solitary practitioner or the very small coven that together suffers from isolation and ostracism (or larger groups with much more nefarious purposes). For instance: *The Craft*, a film that has inspired both the *Buffy* series and the WB’s other popular young occult program, *Charmed*, involves a small group of disenfranchised teenage girls aggressively wielding power over the society that spurned them.[2] Similarly, in keeping with *Buffy*’s theme of youth isolation, Willow rejects her Wiccan group to continue her studies both as a solitary practitioner and, at the end of the episode, as a magical partner with Tara. As we see Willow and Tara’s magical and romantic relationship grow, we are witness to a few of their rites. Understandably, the rituals on *Buffy* are very goal oriented and plot-driven: restore the vampire Angel’s soul, retrieve a magical object that can place Buffy and Faith back in their own bodies, invoke the power of the first Slayer in order to defeat Adam, etc. They don’t seem to be consistent with the usual Wiccan rituals of self-transformation, rites of passage, or activist-



oriented activities (Berger 35).

(8) Rather, the magic in *Buffy* is more in tune with a particular early modern type of magic, the kind that would involve chanting Latin, invoking spirits or demons, requiring exotic ingredients, talismans, or other magical objects (Kieckhefer 1998). Another major difference is that Wicca is unmistakably goddess-oriented, while the only specific reference to goddess (outside the Wiccan group) in the magic of *Buffy* is when Amy (daughter of the witch from episode #3) invokes Diana and Hecate in her love spell ("Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered"). The problem here is that these Greek goddesses, while strongly a part of contemporary Wiccan practice, are also the goddesses most often mentioned in materials on the late medieval witch trials, thus preserving the unfortunate Satanic connection. In fact, not until we hear about the mysterious Powers That Be and the *Xena*-esque "oracles" in the *Angel* series, do we have any evidence that there are anything but chthonic entities in the *Buffy* mythos. It is no wonder that we don't see Willow participating in an actual religion.

(9) Willow, however, does develop through her magic. In "Wild at Heart," when she discovers her werewolf boyfriend's infidelity, she confronts a challenge faced by most young practitioners of the magical arts: whether or not to curse the person who has wronged you. In a striking scene, the profoundly hurt young witch, ready to consign the picture of Oz (the boyfriend) to the flame, ultimately resists and stops the spell before its completion. In the *Buffy*verse, the spell may have had deadly consequences. In the Wicca universe, the temptation is very real—thus the need for a simple ethic: do what thou wilt but harm none, a code given ancient roots but invented by Gardner and his cronies, equally ripping off St. Augustine, Rabelais, and Aleister Crowley. It makes sense. Nevertheless, Willow must acknowledge that, as a witch, even her words and thoughts have consequences when she realizes that the chaos she has unknowingly caused has garnered the notice of a vengeance demon who offers her a top spot on his team ("Something Blue"). What Whedon is demonstrating through the combination of teen angst and magical metaphor is exactly what Wiccan practitioners are trying to impress on young women interested in their art: that adolescence is an extremely powerful and volatile time where actions have consequences and magic itself cannot be taken lightly. Unlike the dark fantasy of *The Craft*, the confusion of Whedon's witches, though involving supernatural elements, results from a genuine search for identity and recovery from painful relationships. Indeed, in the series of dream sequences that ended the fourth season ("Restless"), we see from Willow's dream that the great secret that she fears will be revealed is not that she has a same-sex romantic relationship, or even that she's a witch, but that deep down she feels that she is a nerd, a geekily dressed social outcast.

(10) Willow's study of magic is also consistent with the show's theme of the outcast developing a special talent to protect herself from both the adult world and the demon world. The show consistently highlights its social negotiations between the "real" human world and the world of demon slaying. These negotiations often demonstrate a savvy use of a particular type of postmodern occultism, in which the occult is not only a narrative construct with resonant psychological tropes, but a significant, continually contested discourse involving the characters' conflicted desire for both a stable and fragmented identity. Not unlike the desire of many of Whedon's demons to survive, even assimilate, in human society, the young characters of *Buffy* struggle to maintain a normal life while developing secret and powerful alter-personas. These personas are not just Clark Kent/Bruce Wayne comic book secret identities (to which Buffy's beau Riley and Angel, respectively, are often compared on the program) but fragmented constructions that are constantly being redefined.

Indeed, the instability of these constructions is one of the main strengths behind the program's unique and successful character development. These characters' struggle with selfhood usually involves either the negotiation of a dual identity or a search for one. The most obvious examples are the lovers: Angel must constantly battle between his lusty, violent vampire self and his human soul, Buffy with her calling and her desire for a "normal" teenage life. The character of Riley, though he is accustomed to a secret identity himself - psychology T.A. by day and commando leader against demons at night - is thrown into considerable turmoil when he is confronted with Buffy's grey, morally ambiguous world ("Goodbye to Iowa)." Xander, in one of the few episodes focused on his character ("The Zeppo"), struggles to create a secret life for himself so that he can feel confidently empowered to fight the dark forces, and ironically, obviate exclusion from his friends' world-saving activities. Buffy's maturation process is deeply inflected by her street knowledge that not all demons need to be slain and that there are no clear cut answers to life's (and vampire slaying's) dilemmas. Indeed, the Initiative, the more technologically advanced paramilitary organization dedicated to demon experimentation in season four, is a threat to Buffy's world primarily because it wishes to solidify the blurry boundaries she negotiates.

(11) For Willow, magic becomes a way for her to gain true empowerment, rather than the lip service of her so-called Wicca group, and to help her cope with her particular experiences of isolation and rejection. Yet she also negotiates boundaries between community and isolation. In the third season's "Gingerbread," where the social issue of witchcraft is tackled head-on, Willow uncharacteristically becomes associated with a community of young practitioners. Here, writer Jane Espenson revisits *Craft* territory, by placing Willow in a group with Amy and the stereotypically "Goth," Michael. When two young children bearing occult symbols are found murdered, the usually oblivious town goes into an uproar and suddenly we've entered the territory of media-frenzied incidents of "occult crimes." Even though we later learn the two children are manifestations of an ancient demon associated with the Hansel and Gretel stories, the episode is both amusing and chilling as the mothers of the town (the aptly titled MOO – Mothers Opposed to the Occult) turn on their own children and provoke a literal witch hunt. In some of the most salient scenes of the episode, we see for the only time Willow's mother, a psychologist and intellectual, who admonishes her for taking part in silly practices. We realize that the scene being enacted is probably common in many households where the children are involved in activities grown-ups consider "strange." In a direct implication of academia's narrow view of social phenomena, Espenson writes a scene in which Sheila Rosenberg explains away Willow's attraction to witchcraft in condescending psychological terms taken from the papers she has written rather than seeing the importance of these practices to her very real daughter. In addition, this break from the family, not uncommon in those who take on the practice of magic, marks a movement from Willow's somewhat liberal Jewish background to a new community of both magical practitioners and demon slayers that the program has chronicled. This community is established by a dynamic in which people "in the know" acknowledge the supernatural goings-on in Sunnydale. The core group is often expanded by the characters that the original members (Buffy, Willow, Xander) date. In fact, mirroring the college experience, the fourth season concentrates mostly on the splits within the core group, until, in the amusingly titled "Yoko Factor," those divisions are manipulated by Spike, who because of his powerlessness and charm has actually become an unofficial member of the group.

(12) The Yoko factor in Willow's case is Tara. Since their meeting in "Hush," the two witches have grown quite intimate. In one of their early spell casting scenes, Tara

looks at Willow with deep, imploring eyes, asking her what they'll be doing, and we know the question isn't limited to just magic. They speak of experimenting, and at this point, Whedon makes it clear that magical experimentation is a close metaphor for sexual experimentation. In "Who Are You," Tara and Willow perform one of their most elaborate spells to rectify the Faith/Buffy body switch. The scene is beautifully shot with 360 degree camera movement and slow dissolves, and the ecstatic looks on the character's faces pushes the magical/sexual metaphor to its limit. If that wasn't enough, in "New Moon Rising," the return of Oz prompts Willow to finally become open about the fact that her relationship with Tara is undeniably romantic. Regarding the treatment of the relationship, Whedon explains, "On a [bigger] network, you don't have an opportunity with a same-sex relationship to show the kind of graphic coupling that you do with, say, Buffy and [boyfriend] Riley. So you have to use your imagination, and to me it's the best thing that could have happened to us. It forces you to come up with something that is a little more primal and I think much sexier than if we were allowed to do anything we wanted" (*Cinescape Online*, 5/8/00).

(13) Fan reactions on the official website's posting board were strong after this particular episode. While most "Bronzers" – the board is called "The Bronze" after the main teen hangout joint on the show – supported the risky choice, some aggressively voiced their objections, claiming that they would no longer watch the show, some even resorting to insulting the actress playing Tara, Amber Benson. Whedon, in his usual style, entered the forum with what seemed a long apology, saying that he took a risk but he should have known better to represent a minority of the population, and that as a result, Willow will no longer be Jewish. In more formal forums, Whedon defends his choice: "To me it feels just right. ALL the relationships on the show are sort of romantic (Hence the B Y O Subtext principle) and this feels like the natural next step for her" (*Cinescape Online* 1/31/00). Interestingly enough, the program skillfully avoids using the "L" word (lesbian) and simply presents it as what Buffy calls "an unconventional relationship." Moreover, in the program, "lesbian" could be seen as the shadowy, unspoken other of "witch." Both words are charged with cultural expectations and fears, just as the two groups are often associated with each other in areas of feminist spirituality. Indeed, much of the politics surrounding Wicca seem to parallel the gay and lesbian movement, even down to Wiccans borrowing a few terms, including the performative act of "coming out of the broom closet."

(14) Helen Berger makes the comparison most aptly: "Both communities [witch and gay/lesbian] are defined by their participants' position outside the mainstream, sharing a life world, and participating in some aspect of politics" (66). In addition, the use of the closet trope by both homosexuals and witches speaks to the fear of negative repercussions of their revelation. These communities offer visibility for their members through festivals, gatherings, and rituals. Also, the community provides modeling for its younger members, which involves teaching ways to interpret life experiences. Finally, Berger borrows the term "life world" from Alfred Schutz (1964) to describe a community based not on geography but on experiences, concerns, and world-view. She concludes, "Both the Neo-Pagan and homosexual communities have permeable boundaries. People may be considered members who do not have face-to-face interactions and who, in fact, do not know one another. Both communities involve people who are dissimilar from one another in many of their beliefs and practices" (69). To take the comparison a step further, the word "witch" has some of the strange power that "queer" has, as a derogatory term reclaimed as an epithet of power by those who have adopted it. The Wiccan activist Starhawk, one of the most prominent writers on the subject, tells us "The word witch should rub us the wrong

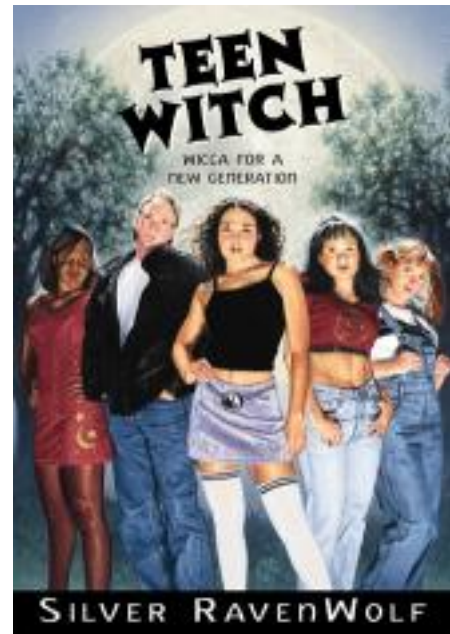
way" (1982: 25). Indeed, during the witchcraze of the 16th and 17th centuries, muttering the word "witch" in the right place could guarantee the accuser the lands and possessions of the accused, and it could obviously mean certain torture and death for the unfortunate victim. Thus, a certain sort of dangerous performativity occurs.

(15) In Judith Butler's discussion of the term "homosexual" in relation to military policy, she writes about how the utterance of the word is mistakenly seen as producing the act: "In effect, a desirous intention is attributed to the statement *or* the statement is itself invested with *contagious* power of the magical word, whereby to hear the utterance is to "contract" the sexuality to which it refers" (113). Invoking both Frazer's law of contagion and Freud's application of such in *Totem and Taboo*, Butler claims that the term takes on a certain magical power working beyond rational constraints: "The utterance appears both to communicate and transfer that homosexuality (becomes itself the vehicle for a displacement onto the addressee) according to a metonymic rush, which is, by definition, beyond conscious control" (115). She further avers that the performative act of coming out itself can be "intended as a contagious example, that is supposed to set a precedent and incite a series of similarly structured acts in public discourse" (124). Applying these discursive principles back to witchcraft, one can see how naming oneself "witch"[3] confuses the name with the act, that talking about, writing about, and institutional recognition of, witchcraft, "is not exactly the same as the desire of which it speaks" (Butler 125). Thus, the "witches" in Willow's Wiccan group become caught up in witchcraft as a discursive production rather than as a set of ritualized acts. Finally, in "Gingerbread," one can see the contagion principle in full swing, since we are shown how the word "witch" historically contributes to communal madness: through its use both in the magically contagious sense, and in the sense that guilt by association leads to further accusations and a larger sense of evil conspiracy.

(16) In a series about vampires and magic, where words have visible magical effects and vampirism itself is based on a quite literal contagion, *Buffy* seems a perfect text to explore such linguistic and performative productions. Yet, the series is only a fraction of a larger discursive field, where "witch" and "Wicca" are constantly thrown about. Because of the media attention and popularity of the movement, Wicca has been presented in various lights. In the first season of the popular CBS series, *Judging Amy*, a child custody case is brought to trial over the mother's Wiccan beliefs. In one of the few instances when television has presented a somewhat realistic view of the neo-pagan community and its inner politics, a representative of the Wiccan Anti-Defamation League - a real organization started by well-known witch Laurie Cabot (Berger 77)—decides not to defend the mother because of fear of negative publicity. Intriguingly, *Scooby-Doo*, one of *Buffy's* spiritual forefathers, and the source for the core group's nickname - the Scooby gang—features Wiccan themes in its full-length video, *Scooby-Doo and the Witch's Ghost*. In the *Scooby-Doo* movies, the monsters are *real*, as the advertisement is fond of saying, and this witch is a real witch. However, she is initially presented as a Wiccan, a midwife and town healer during Salem times. The cartoon's anachronistic use of the term is further complicated by the fact that the so-called "Wiccan" is actually the evil witch, and the intimidating fang-wearing local girl band, the "Hex Girls" who call themselves "ecogoths" ("and we don't need your approval!") are the real Wiccans, only becoming aware of their powers at the climax of the film. In the closing credits, when the sexily animated "Hex Girls" are singing about casting spells and respecting the Earth, the message is clear. In these instances, along with whatever identity defining characteristics can be derived from such works as *Charmed*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and *The Blair Witch Project*, among others, the form that the

contemporary witch takes based on media representations is quite a strange one. What media adds to popular folklore, then, is how the witch is constituted as a subject through language, or, to borrow Butler's borrowing from Althusser, how the witch is "interpellated," thus "given a certain possibility for social existence" (2).

(17) Has the term "witch" become more palatable with more exposure? One might think so, with the trends changing rapidly, especially in publishing. A *Publisher's Weekly* article cited Carol Publishing as a house that prints first runs of 25,000 for its Wicca titles, about 10,000 more than for its non-Wicca offerings. Magic is hot property these days. What Phyllis Currott's *Book of Shadows* has done for women, Silver RavenWolf's *Teen Witch: Wicca for a New Generation* has done for teenagers, as has the *Harry Potter* series for children.[4] According to Von Braschler, director of trade sales for industry leaders Llewellyn Publishing, a significant trend began "when the company started repackaging 'classic' pagan titles with more youthful covers, and sales often jumped tenfold as a result" (Kress 25). In fact, RavenWolf's book, with pert, sexy, and stylishly drawn teenagers on the cover— no more scary goth outcasts clad in black – is in its fourth printing and has sold more than 50,000 copies [5]. Willow and Sabrina seem to be in good company.



(18) Through tropes like witchcraft, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* speaks to current trends of identity construction, particularly with Willow's pursuit of empowerment through magic and involvement with Wicca. In this context, Wicca and its current popularity among young teens exemplifies an existence that demands the secrecy and hiddenness already part of adolescent culture and applies it to occultist practice. The pervasiveness of the occult in the everyday life of the characters and their remarkable nonchalance towards the horrific events they experience strongly parallels the trials of adolescents searching for identity and belonging in their peer groups, be they social or magical. A. Susan Owen claims that the program utilizes an "uncritical embrace of American capital culture" and that this cultural view, combined with Buffy's desire for normal adolescence (complete with boyfriend) somehow co-opts its transgressive potential (30). However, despite Buffy's protests to the contrary, she and the other young characters are well aware of the contingency of their constructed "normal" identities, displaying a self-awareness increasingly common among youth at the end of the millennium. As the show continues its successful run, many fans wonder, "Will Tara and Willow last?" or "Is Tara secretly evil?" [6] Joss Whedon answers, "I can only promise you two things for sure: We're not going to do an *Ally* or *Party of 5* in which we promote the hell out of a same sex relationship for exploitation value that we take back by the end of the ep, and we will never have a very special *Buffy* where someone gets on a soapbox..." (*Cinescape Online* 1/31/00).

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[1] In this article, I will only cover Wiccan beliefs and practices insofar as they relate to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. For more information, I recommend the works I have cited.

[2] One of the few exceptions, the recent Sandra Bullock/Nicole Kidman vehicle *Practical Magic*, targeted a slightly older crowd and dealt with issues of communal acceptance amongst women. Though the film concentrates on the family of hereditary witches, the scene with the women of the small New England town welcomed into the main characters' household to assist in an exorcism, mixing both horror film seriousness and playful female bonding, does leave open the possibility of a coven or community of witches forming.

[3] The popular etymological theory among practitioners is that witch comes from the Old English *Wic*, to bend or shape, and that the terms *Wicca* or *Wicce* are Middle English derivations of *Wic* (Berger 11).

[4] My colleague at DePaul University, Wiccan author Patricia Monaghan, recently offered advice to authors at New York's yearly pagan festival, Starwood. She explained that children and Wicca, once a taboo combination, is a hot buy for publishers thanks to *Harry Potter*. She also informed us that publishers were scrambling for the next *Book of Shadows*, so pagan memoirs are also in demand.

[5] RavenWolf's products and their associated market strategy are not without their controversy. The appearance of the *Teen Witch Kit*, an instructional set complete with teen-oriented spells and tools for working magic, caused quite a stir on the message board, *Wiccan Ways*, for instance, among concerned Christians for obvious reasons, but also among pagans who felt that presenting magic outside of its religious and communal context could be ethically suspect.

[6] The implication that Tara may be evil is explored in the fifth season episode "Family", written and directed by Joss Whedon. Her backwoods family visits Sunnydale and has apparently brainwashed her into thinking that she will turn into a demon on her 20th birthday, since that's what happened to her mother. In another intriguing Whedonesque take on feminism, we learn that the demon story is a lie merely used to control the powerful, independent women in Tara's family. At the end of the episode, the Scooby gang fully accepts Tara's break from her family, her place in the gang, and her romantic relationship with Willow.

Pop culture obsessives writing for the pop culture obsessed. Home Latest Film TV Club Music Games Video TV Reviews Reviews And more. TV Reviews. Angel. Season 1. So he braves the labyrinth of the UC Sunnydale psych department—like Theseus with The Minotaur in the, uh, labyrinth—and stands face-to-face with Walsh, to declare his importance in Buffy's life. It was her high school librarian! Walsh, meanwhile, has just learned that Buffy's "The Slayer," something she thought was only a demon world myth. ("You were myth-taken," Buffy jokes nervously.) I wrote last week ago about how I liked the contrast between The Initiative's high-tech methods and Buffy's version of evil-fighting, which involves, according to Walsh, "poking them with a sharp stick." Buffy the Vampire Slayer is now over 21-years-old, and it's recently been announced that series creator Joss Whedon is going to reboot the iconic show. This is a pretty bad idea for a number of reasons, including the fact that Whedon has been established as a fairly premium ballbag, and we should be pretty suspicious of all his projects. The first episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer opens up with a teen couple breaking into a dark high school. There's just so many iconic moments in Buffy—they can range from the dramatic—such as Buffy's leap into another dimension, or the time she lost her virginity to a vampire—to the incredibly silly, like the episode where she couldn't stop reading minds, or the time magic beer turned her into a literal neanderthal.