

Willow and Which Craft? The portrayal of witchcraft in Joss Whedon's *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer*

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It could be witches! Some evil witches!
Which is ridiculous, 'cause witches they were persecuted, Wicca
good and love the earth and woman power and I'll be over here.
Xander: *Once More with Feeling**

These opposing representations of witchcraft, so eloquently described in song by Xander, give a cursory insight into the numerous ways in which witches and witchcraft are portrayed in Joss Whedon's *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer* series. While the presentation of witches and their craft found in today's society has evolved substantially from those found in the folklore and popular culture of earlier centuries, within the confines of Sunnydale witches apparently encompass all available stereotypes. These include the evil, black cloaked hag of times gone by; the spiritual, nature loving, female energy empowerment figure commonly promoted by today's media; and the dark alternative occult mode, identified with the gothic sub-culture and other outcasts of society. Other facets of contemporary popular culture demonstrate a fascination with magic and the supernatural which rejects the traditional witches of fairy tales such as *Snow White* and *Hansel and Gretel*, offering instead the wand-wielding boy wizard Harry Potter, and the cool and sophisticated Halliwell sisters of the television series *Charmed*. *Buffy*, on the other hand, presents a more complex and varying model in which witches and the craft they practice can be good or evil, socially acceptable or outcast, human or demonic; there rarely are black and white definitions in *Buffy* as Sunnydale seems to be a nexus of varying shades of grey. This paper will argue that in *Buffy*, context is all and the fluidity of values attached to vampires, witches and other magical phenomena reflects the contemporary Western tendency to apply 'floating signs' without any 'overarching meaning' as circumstances

* Transcripts of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be found at <http://www.buffy-vs-angel.com/guide.shtml> last accessed 18th May 2005.

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dictate.¹ Therefore, analyzing witchcraft in *Buffy* is a frustrating process, as Whedon fails to anchor his representation in any authoritative discourse, whether historical or practical.

The aptly named episode (three of season one) *Witch* is the viewer's first encounter with witchcraft in the *Buffy* series. Here we are introduced to the figure of the witch (and witchcraft) in a manner that dovetails pre-existing concepts of witchcraft found in broader society. She may not be the old, grey-haired, pointy hat wearing hag of fairy tales and *Macbeth* fame, nor the beautiful but ice-hearted White Witch of Narnia but Catherine's selfish nature and her manner of casting spells in front of a cauldron certainly fit the traditional perception of the dark and evil witch. C S Lewis explains that the use of this classic image to represent all that is wicked and foul within both his Narnia chronicles and other forms of popular culture, stems from the fact that these evil witches, especially his White Witch, are 'reminiscent of Circe, Alcina and the archetypal witch of all fairy tales, a character ... almost know [n] by instinct.'² He introduces two witches in the *Narnia Chronicles*, white and green. Today 'white' witches are considered to be the practitioners of 'good' magic, as opposed to the black or dark arts, but for the Christian Lewis, the white witch is the embodiment of all evil, being the daughter of Lilith, Adam's first wife and as such a 'vampire,' [a] drawer of life from things to herself.³ In Lewis's novels she gains a tyrannical hold over Narnia by 'simply spread[ing] herself over all Narnia in the form of a dead white frost, allowing nothing else independent life: [thus her title as the 'White Witch' as] the monotony of winter is her symbol.'⁴

Buffy's first presentation of a witch obviously plays on these themes discussed by Lewis, but employs the more modern ingredients of a 'Hollywood witch story, complete with a black cat, spells'⁵ and the idea that you can work sympathetic magic on people by stealing a strand of their hair. The witch in question is Amy's (a character who

¹ David Lyon: *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*, Malden, 2002 [2000], 42.

² D E Glover: *C S Lewis: The Art of Enchantment*, Ohio, 1981, 173.

³ C N Manlove: *C S Lewis: His Literary Achievement*, London, 1987, 131.

⁴ *Ibid*, 130 – 131. The White Witch also clearly resembles the Snow Queen of Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale, who is identified with ice, snow and chill, and Lily Owens, editor, *The Complete Hans Christian Anderson Fairy Tales*, Gramercy Books, 1993 [1981].

⁵ J Lawton Winsdale: 'Teen Witches, Wiccans and 'Wanna-blessed-be's,' *Slayage* 1.1, January 2001, <http://www.slayage.tv/>

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later goes on to become a witch herself, raising the issue of the hereditary witch) mother, Catherine. Her use of witchcraft, which is entirely selfish, is firstly to swap bodies with Amy, so she can become a cheerleader again and then to take out the competition, the girls who actually make it onto the team. Unsurprisingly, the 'Scooby gang'⁶ saves the day using a magic spell of their own concoction, which traps 'the witch in her own cheerleading trophy.'⁷

Where Catherine is reminiscent of the evil fairy-tale witch, her daughter Amy initially appears to be in the mould of a typical teen-movie practitioner. Amy reappears in a season two episode, *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered* and is shown using clichéd talents that include casting love spells, turning Buffy into a rat and brainwashing a teacher into believing she had completed her homework. However Amy's love spell, cast on behalf of Xander, backfires causing havoc as all the women in town fight for Xander's affections, suggesting that Whedon is aiming to present a 'progressively more relativistic approach to the morality of magic,'⁸ educating his viewers to the possibility that while these magical talents may seem cool and exciting, they do have the potential to go awry, causing more trouble than good. Where fairy-tales are used by adult to transmit knowledge to children about the ways and nature of the world, Whedon hides deeper meanings within the framework of *Buffy*, using concepts such as witchcraft to impart important information about reality and the multifaceted nature of the real world.

Whedon also used fairy-tales directly within various episodes of *Buffy*. In an episode entitled *Gingerbread*, the power of fear based on ignorance and the hysteria it can create is explored. Once again witchcraft features predominantly within this episode, but the focus is on some of its darker aspects. Amy appears once more, joined by other member of the Sunnydale community, Michael Czajak and the 'Scooby Gang's' own Willow Rosenberg and during the course of the episode they are shown practicing some form of magical ritual:

⁶ 'Those who assist the Slayer,' the name affectionately given to Buffy and her friends, namely Willow and Xander, who help her in her fight against evil. See Michael Adams: *Slayer Slang*, New York, 2003, 208-212.

⁷ Keith Topping: *Slayer: The Revised and Updated Unofficial Guide to Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, London, 2000, 40.

⁸ Tanya Krzywinska: 'Hubble-Bubble, Herbs, and Grimoires: Magic, Manichaeans, and Witchcraft in *Buffy*,' in Rhonda V Wilcox & David Lavery, editors, *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Lanham, 2002, 179.

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The camera is centered on a skull with a hole at the crest of the cranium. It is resting on a throw rug next to a burning candle. A hand reaches over the hole in the skull and drops in a short string of beads. The camera pans up to Michael, a witch draped in a black, hooded cloak. He folds his hands intertwining his fingers and glances up at another cloaked figure as it steps around him. The figure kneels to pick up the skull and it's Amy. She stands back up and carries the skull around the rug to a position opposite Michael. The camera follows her, panning low across the rug, where there are other candles, cups of powders and potions, and a small cauldron. Amy sets down the skull and sits. She takes a cup of powder and hands it to a third figure, who takes it from her and pours the contents into the steaming liquid in the cauldron. The camera pans up to reveal the third figure as Willow, also cloaked in black. She stares silently down at the boiling mixture. Cut to a shot from above. The camera pulls up from the cauldron, taking in the array of things and the three witches around it, and continues until it's high enough to see the pattern in the center of the throw rug: a large triangle with a U-shaped symbol in the middle, its ends extending out of the triangle and bending in a sharp arc at the tips.⁹

Here their practicing of the craft is depicted with obvious dark overtones, invoking the negative and wicked connotations so often associated with witchcraft. This episode shows a ritual that is more appropriately identified with ceremonial magic than any modern form of witchcraft (for example the presence of the skull, the lack of an altar and quarter candles, items commonly used by modern witches.)¹⁰ This representation is quite consistent throughout the

⁹ Script notes to *Gingerbread: Episode 11. Season 3*, <http://uk.geocities.com/slayermagic/Scripts/Episode45Gingerbread.html>, last accessed 9 May 2005.

¹⁰ In contemporary witchcraft, the majority of magical workings take place inside of what is known as a circle, a sacred space that is created by the process of 'casting the circle,' during this process the personifications of the four elements are invoked, or asked to be present, thus the lighting of the quarter candles, one in each of the cardinal directions to represent the four elements. An altar is also found within the 'circle,' normally containing various magical tools, including a chalice/goblet, an *athame* (magical knife), candles to represent deity (the God and Goddess), a saucer of water, a container of salt, an incense burner or censer and a pentacle. For more information on circle casting and so on see Vivianne Crowley: *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium*, London, 1996, Chapter 4.

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entirety of the *Buffy* series, raising the issue of Whedon's continuing failure to accurately portray witchcraft, or distinguish it from other forms of occult practice.

For example, Amy invokes the goddesses Diana and Hecate when casting her love spell in *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered*, which is interesting as neither of these goddesses has any historical associations with love, both being moon goddesses (Diana the Roman huntress, who protects virginity and Hecate a Greek goddess of pathways and crossroads).¹¹ Venus or Aphrodite, renowned goddesses of love, would have been the obvious choices for such a ritual. Amy invokes Hecate again when casting her shape-shifting spell, which she used on both Buffy and herself, once again an unusual choice possibly based on her later position as the patron of witches,¹² as she has historical or mythical connections to animals and shape-shifting.

Gingerbread explores the common negative conceptions of witchcraft both in history and the present. The discovery of the bodies of two children murdered in the local park is blamed on witches and the dark arts. This is due to the presence of an 'occult symbol' on both of the children's hands and the town explodes into an anti-witch frenzy reminiscent of the hysteria that reached a peak during the late sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, in which an estimated 500,000 people were burned as witches.¹³ The witch-hunt is led by Buffy's mother Joyce Summers, founder of the amusingly named MOO: Mothers Opposed to the Occult. Buffy, Willow and Amy are targeted (Buffy because of her status as the slayer, Willow and Amy because they use the same symbol found on the children in their practices)¹⁴ and, as suspects, they are sentenced to be burned at the stake. However Oz, Willow's boyfriend, comes to the rescue, discovering that 'these same children have been repeatedly murdered every fifty years back to their origins in the 'Hansel and Gretel' fairy tale'¹⁵ and

¹¹ Michael Jordan: *The Encyclopedia of the Gods*, London, 1994[1992], 76 & 116.

¹² Ibid, 116.

¹³ Andrew Sanders: *A Deed Without a Name: The Witch in Society and History*, Oxford, 1995, 170.

¹⁴ It turns out the symbol found on the children's bodies is in fact a symbol associated with protection, which Amy, Michael and Willow are using to cast a protection over Buffy. Sarah E Skwire: 'Whose Side Are You on, Anyway? Children, Adults, and the Use of Fairy Tales in *Buffy*' in Rhonda V Wilcox and David Lavery, editors *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Lanham, 2002, 200.

¹⁵ Keith Topping, op cit, 203.

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their presence is the work of a demon who feeds on the hysteria and hatred causes by their murders.

This episode brings into play not only the negative historical associations of witchcraft (burning at the stake and so on) but also modern ideas concerning the stereotyping of individuals and sub-cultures. Michael, a classmate of Buffy's who practices magic with Willow and Amy, is presented as a typical Goth boy; black spiky hair, white skin, dark eye make-up, black painted finger-nails, dark clothing and spiked accessories. He is the rebellious teen outcast, who conforms to the 'dark-and-dangerous- image'¹⁶ commonly presented by today's media, in opposition to the other common media representation of the female-empowered hearth-witch. As as both a member of the gothic-subculture and a practicing witch, he is the obvious scapegoat for all evil happenings in the world, such as the murdering of the two children:

Everyone knows that witches killed those kids and Amy is a witch. And Michael is whatever the boy of witch is, plus being the poster child for yuck. If you're gonna hang with them, expect badness. 'Cause that's what you get when you hang with freaks and losers. Believe me, I know.
(Cordelia : *Gingerbread*)

Interestingly enough, the character of Willow, described by Dawn Heinecken as 'sweet, goofy and loveable'¹⁷ actually plays upon the darker connotations and typical stereo-types of teen rebellion associated with witchcraft in an attempt to get her mother's attention.

Mom, I'm not acting out. I'm a witch! I-I can make pencils float. And I can summon the four elements. Okay, two, but four soon. (Her mother doesn't react) A-and I'm dating a musician.
(Willow: *Gingerbread*)

Bored by her 'geek' status within the schoolyard community and influenced by her connection to the strong feminine powers of vampire slaying Buffy, Willow's character uses witchcraft as means to exploring her feelings of isolations and rejection, while also gaining a sense of purpose and empowerment. Through her association with

¹⁶ Carly Chynoweth: 'Forget the Hocus Pocus, Witchcraft is all about Focus and Philosophy' in *The Daily Telegraph*, 28th August, 2002.

¹⁷ Dawn Heinecken: *The Warrior Women of Television: A Feminist Cultural Analysis on the New Female Body in Popular Media*, New York, 2003, 94.

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Buffy Willow has been allowed to explore her individual side, her techno talents have been cultured and nurtured, and used to help Buffy in her fight against the evil radiating from the Hellmouth,¹⁸ thus cementing her place in the 'Scooby gang'. Buffy's presence has also introduced her to the supernatural world, opening the metaphorical door that leads into her initial dabbling and eventual fulltime practice of witchcraft.

Willow's initial flirtations into magic, such as the creation of the spell used on Catherine in *Witch* discussed, are simple spells and incantations, used to help fight the vampire and demons and are created under the instruction of Buffy's watcher,¹⁹ Giles. As the show progresses, Willow's interest in the craft deepens and her computer teacher, Jenny Calendar introduces her to a seemingly pagan based tradition. Jenny represents yet another brand of witch, the contemporary techno pagan, who uses technology to further her craft and has a spell folder on her computer, rather than a hand crafted grimoire or book of shadows. Her beliefs are presented as similar to those found within the wiccan traditions, as they are earth based, however there is never any evidence that it has anything in common with, or actually follows, wiccan principles.²⁰ Jenny also happens to be a gypsy, thus introducing another witch stigma, the idea of the gypsy curse, one of which has been laid on the vampire Angel (Buffy's lover), as revenge for killing a young gypsy girl. Once again Whedon is creating shades of grey. By blending the old and new, he presents a character who incorporates both the pre-conceived image of gypsies, who have been presented as untrustworthy magic users in popular culture for decades, as well as the modern, yet unfamiliar concept of the techno-pagan who actually embodies a growing number of the true pagan community. Whedon continues to sit on the fence, presenting both the negative and positive sides of witchcraft and those who use it, or as Heinechen puts it, presenting 'all

¹⁸ 'Opening into Hell on which Sunnydale, California sits,' Adams, op cit, 86.

¹⁹ 'Mentor to the Slayer,' a person appointed to guide and instruct the Slayer. Michael Adams, op cit, 272.

²⁰ The principles of Wicca include: a reverence for/of deity, the goddess and the god; ritual observances of the Full Moon and the eight festivals found on the circle of the year; the practice of magic, and the construction of a circle in which magic is worked; and adherence the Wiccan Law or Rede, 'and it harm none, do what thou will.' See Raymond Buckland: *Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft*, Minnesota, 1999, pp.8-10 and Scott Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, Minnesota, 1999, passim.

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characters as possessing the power of choice and action and needing to accept the responsibility that comes with this power.²¹

Jenny is instrumental in the development of Willow as the witch protagonist within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. After Jenny's death, in *Passions*, mid season two, Willow inherits her laptop, thus gaining access to her spells. Willow then continues Jenny's work, performing her first major magic work. This is a spell that gives Angel, presently in his evil incarnation of Angelus, his soul back, in *Becoming Part II*. This is the turning point for Willow, it is here that she finally realizes her calling and discovers her natural talent for the craft. From this point on Willow's place in the 'Scooby Gang' slowly changes from techno-geek to practicing witch and her assistance during the groups encounters becomes less computer based and more spell orientated. However it is interesting to note that even as a techno-geek Willow was adept at hacking illegally into local and national computers, suggesting that her love of power and the exercising of her skill,²² is an inherent part of her true nature.

By mid third season Willow is actively practicing 'magic,' but whether or not it can be termed witchcraft is the question. Apart from the scene in *Gingerbread* – mentioned above, which presents what could be classified as a form of quasi-ceremonial magic, Willow is show buying ingredients for a love spell, well actually a 'kind of de-lusting. The supplies are basically the same, right?' (*Lovers Walk*) The shopkeeper greets Willow with a 'Blessed be,' a typical pagan/wiccan greeting and while Willows choice of ingredients (skink root, essence of rose thorn, canary feathers) are interesting and could arguably be viewed as valid components for pagan workings, once again we are shown what can only be described as magic, performed in a dark candle lit room under the pretence of 'chemistry,' and not witchcraft. Other interesting spells cast by Willow in this series include a clouding (the creation of a fog or cloud to obscure vision) and a demon binding spell which she works with Giles (*The Zeppo*), Eryishon's Spell of Recall (*Doppelgangland*) and a dissolution spell to break down magical barriers (*Choices*).²³ The majority of these spells

²¹ Heinecken, op cit, 123.

²² Roz Kaveney: 'She Saved the World. A Lot,' in Roz Kaveney, editor, *Reading the Vampire Slayer: The New, Unofficial Guide to Buffy and Angel*, New York, 2004 [2001], 34.

²³ A complete listing of spells used by Willow and other characters of the *Buffy* series can be found on several webpages dedicated to the dark arts used in *Buffy*, including

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involve various ingredients and equipment (a candle the focus for the clouding, which will only last as long as the candle is lit) some artistic circles and symbols painted on the ground and some ominous sounding incantations, usually in Latin:

*vente, ignis et pluvia. Cuncta quattuor numina, vos obsecro.
Defendete nos a recente malo resoluto.*

Translation: Earth, wind, fire and rain. Linger four gods, we implore you. Defend us, immediately after I will release you. All things... the vessel... of truth!

Giles (*The Zeppo*)

But once again there is nothing that could be construed as actual witchcraft. Willow talents at making a pencil spin in the opening scenes of *Doppelgangland* are reminiscent of the magic used by the girls in the popular teen magic movie *The Craft* (1996), the levitation of objects being a talent often assigned to witches in popular culture, once just has to recall the numerous items forever flying around in the Stephen's household in the long running series *Bewitched*.

Willow continues her studies into the dark arts as the *Buffy* saga unfolds, against the advice of Giles who has warned her that explorations into the supernatural would open doors in herself best left closed.²⁴ In season four Willow and the rest of the 'Scooby Gang,' leave Sunnydale High and enter into a new phase of life at collage. Still avidly pursuing her magical path, with several disasters along the way,²⁵ Willow decides to join the UC-Sunnydale wiccan group. In what proves to be an amusing poke at those individuals who 'want to claim the name but not the acts associated with witchcraft,'²⁶ Willow is confronted by an all female group of 'wiccans,' but her dreams of finding a cosy coven to work with are dashed. Instead of finding a group of practicing witches, Willow finds herself amidst a group of what can possibly be deemed hearth witches, girls more interested in working towards saving the environment, dance recitals and swapping baking recipes than actually casting spells and

<http://www.darkshire.net/~jhkim/rpg/buffy/spells/byseason.html>, last accessed 10 May 2005; and <http://www.geocities.com/deedeebobo2003/spells.html> last accessed 10th May 2005.

²⁴ Roz Kaveney, op cit, 34.

²⁵ In an episode called *Something Blue*, she cast a spell to help her deal with the departure of her boyfriend Oz which backfires, making everything she says come true and throwing the gang into turmoil.

²⁶ J Lawton Winslade, op cit.

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practicing magic. When Willow suggests that the group do some actual magic rituals she is told that such a stereotypical views of witches are 'not very empowering' and that her negative energies have the potential to 'suck the power from an entire circle' (*Hush*). It would seem that the 'daughters of Gaia, sisters to the moon,' are Whedon's tongue-in-cheek portrayal of the feminist spirituality movements that have sprung up around the globe, tossing around pagan buzz words like empowerment, energy, blessings and power-shrines,²⁷ but never practicing acts of magic. Willow's explanation of her disappointment in the group also echoes the voices of other pagan communities, who are at odds against the material and fluffy-bunny aspects of the craft²⁸ and the rebellious teenage outlet angles so often presented by the media of contemporary society.

Buffy: So Not stellar, huh?

Willow: Talk, all talk. Blah Blah Gaia, Blah Blah Moon ... menstrual life force power thingy. You know after a couple of 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.

(*Hush*)

The one benefit Willow receives from joining the 'wiccan' group is that through it she meets Tara, who goes on to be both a magical working partner and lover. Together Willow and Tara follow what can be seen as a more solitary path and while the female to female relationship that also occurs is not really important to this paper, it also highlights the feminist and lesbian associations commonly associated with some witchcraft movements.

As mentioned before, Willow and Tara do not actually practice Wicca or any other formalized tradition of witchcraft. While the show continually uses the term 'wicca' and Willow might claim an aspiration to be a 'baad-ass wicca,' it is never accurately practiced. There are no seasonal rituals: Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain; no

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ For example the popularity of books such as Deborah Gray and Athena Starwoman's *How to Turn Your Ex-Boyfriend into a Toad & Other Spells*, Sydney, 2003.

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solar or lunar celebrations of the full moon, solstices and equinoxes, no circle casting, nothing that can be actually pinpointed as remotely wiccan, or even pagan. What we are shown are fragments of spell work, not linked to any formalized witchcraft related religion. Willow's magic is 'more of a benign combination of "recipe" witchcraft and mind-based concentration', that serve to keep magic in *Buffy* 'neatly in the realm of Fantasy'.²⁹

Spells are both highly complex and simple. When Buffy dies at the end of Season Five, Willow casts a long and complex spell to bring her back to life, requiring a blood sacrifice, an invocation to Osiris, who is the Egyptian God of the Underworld (for once the writers got it right!) This is followed by a 'testing' of her power and will from the god she has summoned which includes gashes to her arms and snakes coming out of her mouth (*Bargaining* Part I). In *Once More With Feeling* Willow causing Tara to forget a fight, by holding a sprig of a plant (we are told later its Lethe's bramble – used for augmenting spells of forgetting and mind control) and saying the word 'forget.' After resurrecting Buffy from the dead, the strength of Willow's magical powers goes to her head. This fifth season goes on to explore themes of addiction and morality. Willow begins to use magic as a part of everyday life, using her immense powers to complete mundane tasks, while also losing sense of the moral and ethical reasoning of her actions. She begins taking 'increasing risks with her often dangerous magical spells. She exhibits all the characteristics of an addict, even casting mind-control spells upon her friends.'³⁰ This leads to animosity between both the other members of the 'Scooby Gang,' and her lover Tara.

When Willow manages to finally change Amy back into human form (Amy changed herself into a rat in *Gingerbread*, season three), Amy encourages her to flaunt her magic, using it alter her surroundings to her benefit (*Smashed*) and introduces her to the seedier members of the supernatural community, such as Rack, who in turn gets Willow addicted to his magic power trips (*Wrecked*). Later in the series, when Tara is killed by a stray bullet just as she and Willow have reconciled their differences – Willow having gone without any magical use for a period of time – Willow gives herself over completely to the seductiveness of the dark. She loses control of both her moral and

²⁹ Krzywinska, op cit, 188.

³⁰ Heinecken, op cit, 107.

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ethical faculties when her attempts to invoke the Osiris to restoring Tara to life are refused, she becomes the embodiment of all that is dark and evil, embracing all the terror and wickedness assigned to the witches of children's fairy-tales as she 'adopts a magic that comes from the darkest chasms of her being, a magic that is completely wayward in its focus.'³¹

But even here her manner of acquiring these powers shows no real connection to Witchcraft as Willow is able to gain eons and eons of occult knowledge, by absorbing the contents of a hundred magic books through her skin, an act which turns her hair black, to match the color hatred has turned her eyes, symbolizing her complete metamorphosis into a being of dark essence. There's no warm and fuzzy feminist portrayal of witchcraft here:

Willow walks over to the table and looks down. Shot of the open book with the pages covered in tiny writing. Willow lifts her hands and puts them on the open pages. Her hands sink into the book as if melding with it. The words of the book start to move off the pages and up her arms, curling and scrolling up under her sleeves. We see the words also coming up her chest and moving up her shoulders to her face. She lifts her head and her eyes are black again. The words move to the top of her head and into her hair, turning her hair black. Willow lifts her hands off the book. We see that the pages are now blank. Anya stares. Close on Willow's face with eyes completely magic-black and her hair also dark black and moving in a nonexistent wind. Willow: That's better.
(*Villains*)

Willow becomes the 'Big Bad' of the series, going on a rampage to first kill those she deems responsible for Tara's death, (she skins Warren alive in *Villains*) and then destroy the world in order that she might be free of her pain and life's injustice. Willow's presentation as the stereotypical witch of evil and darkness appears in stark contrast to Tara who can be seen as embodying the good witch icon. Once again Whedon is offering a more than one image of the witch, with Tara showing one with an affinity for the craft can move beyond the realm of hearth-loving, wanna-blessed bes, actually working real magic without being seduced by its power. This suggests that perhaps Willows forays into the dark side are just a presentation of

³¹ Andrew Mellas: 'Monstrum/Mysterium Tremendum in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Re-Mythologising the Divine,' *A Journal for Greek Letters: Modern Greek Studies*, V.11, 2003, Australia and New Zealand, 359.

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the evil found within all humanity, as Whedon explores his shades of grey, the ability of one's nature being able to oscillate between good and evil. In the last episode of the series, Willow, now in control of her magical powers once more, invokes the goddess, asking her help to change the slayer prophecy of 'to each generation a slayer is born' to allow every potential slayer to be a slayer. This request of great magic, performed in a magic circle, surrounded by candles and involving chanting in some ancient tongue. Because this request is totally benevolent it is granted and Willow is presented as being, this last and final time, the embodiment of the goddess.

An aura of pure white light surrounds Willow. Her hair has gone completely white, an expression of pure rapture on her face. Willow is transcendent, forever altered. Cleansed, forgiven... purified. Then the spell ends, the light fades and Willow slumps forward panting, her hair back to its normal red.

Kennedy: (in awe) You... are a goddess.

Willow: (breathless) And you're a Slayer.

She hands Kennedy the scythe.

Willow: Get this to Buffy.

Kennedy leaps to her feet, hefts the blade and runs out of the room.

When she's gone, Willow slumps over on her side, giggling quietly.

Willow: That was nifty...

There is magic and spell craft in *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, but it is not the witchcraft found in historical accounts or practiced by contemporary wiccan, pagans and witches. Instead it is a means of exploring stereotypes and classic images assigned to witches and their craft within popular culture, from age-old fairy tales to the box office. Whedon's witches embody everything from rebellious, gothic teenagers, to occult magicians, to feminist wiccan-wanna-blessed-be's. The series alludes to the presence of practicing witches in contemporary society, but refused to define them in any way shape or form. Like all other forms of monsters and vampires with his series, Whedon has refused to cast witches into any definitive mould, never definitively labeling them as either good or evil. Instead, he lets the individual choose how to use their supernatural powers, allowing them to float in greyness, somewhere between black and white poles. Witchcraft in *Buffy*? There isn't any, but there is a choice for characters to choose which-craft and path they wish to follow, as Willow's trajectory throughout the series shows.