

FEAR FACTOR: WITCHES AND WITCHCRAFT

By Katie Wigginton
THE BATTALION

Most episodes of the 1960s and 70s popular sitcom "Bewitched" play out in a typical fashion. Samantha twinkles her nose in a cheery fashion to finish sweeping the kitchen. Her mother Endora pops in the scene to say hello to her daughter, and goes on to jokingly cast a lighthearted spell on Sam's mortal husband Darren.

Some 30 years later, at the end of a narrow hall in an office blanketed with classic art paintings and scholarly literature, Hilaire Kallendorf, assistant professor in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and avid scholar on witchery and exorcism, reads a scribbled demonic letter dating back to the Renaissance era written in human blood.

Throughout the ages, witchcraft, sorcery and "modern witchcraft" of the Wiccan religion have become eminent parts of what is considered to be scary. Their history is vast, dating from prehistoric years of the Renaissance of England, to the colonial days of America up to the increasing obsession with a little boy named Harry Potter.

The fact remains throughout the fairy tales, books and cinema, that the representation of witches their skill and their celebration of Halloween has been falsely portrayed.

According to Brandy Hamblet, a senior international studies major as well as co-chair of The Pagan Student Association on campus, the Wiccan religion is a form of worship to the Earth and the gods and goddesses that make it plentiful through harvests and seasons.

While they do perform aspects of magic, it is considered a skill that requires careful study. There is no worship to Satan, no hex rallies, and it is not just women who practice.

The exercise of witchcraft, while incredibly and closely linked to the Wiccan religion, is actually not a religion at all. It simply involves "using natural energies within yourself to make changes around you," Hamblet said.

While some people are fascinated by the acts of witchcraft, others follow their history and removal.

"I enjoy studying the positive side of removing demons and exorcism which inevitably led me to study about witchcraft," Kallendorf said. "In study-

ing numerous cases pertaining to exorcism and witchcraft from the 1600s in England, it was just a forbidden period, which didn't allow room to remedy the problem."

Kallendorf said the banning of all witchcraft and occult books forced the practicing witches of the time to be secretive about their crafts. When members of the community were noticing empty places in the church pews, the outcasts, presumed to be witches, were sought out and burned alive.

This ritual became the community's and church's way of exterminating the demonic and devil-like qualities that possessed these fascinating yet repulsive cultural icons, Kallendorf said.

As a Wiccan, witch, or both, the stereotype of the devil connected to witchcraft, dragged by stories of witches participating in orgies with the Devil, appear to be fiction traveling around a campfire.

Next stop, Salem, Ma. in 1692.

Dr. Dennis Berthold, professor for the English Department, is a specialist in the study of the Salem Witch Trials and the images of witchcraft reflected through the literature of the time. Berthold said the historic event stands as the last gasp of belief in witchcraft.

"I became intrigued about witchcraft through my reading and studying of writers like Hawthorne, Poe and the witchery connections throughout their writing," Berthold said.

Although Berthold said he has found reasonable evidence to prove that some of the women accused during the trial were in fact practicing witches, a large majority were not assumed witches under various pretenses and ostracized for being different.

"A widowed woman who didn't remarry was considered a witch," Berthold said. "Anybody who was not participating in church ceremonies was considered to be practicing magic, and even a preacher within the community that did not confess to being a witch was assumed to be so and executed by burning."

Berthold said another case of misinterpreted witchcraft occurred when a particular African toy doll brought over by children of slaves called a poppet was presumed to be an essential piece of witchcraft. The toy was used as evidence to condemn whoever owned it in her possession.

While women were being falsely accused, the backlash of Salem's actions started to surface when



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Robert Calef, a member of the community, wrote a thesis damning the Puritans for their behavior following the trials in 1701.

One of the governing officials of the town, Samuel Sule, admitted to being wrong about the women and men accused of practicing witchcraft.

To Hamblet, the Wiccan religion abides by one rule and that is to bring harm to no one.

However, the fast forward movement from print to film continues to act out a witch of a different nature — meet Harry Potter.

"While I am entertained by the Harry Potter books, there is no authenticity to magic or the use of witchcraft in it. It is more about the use of the imagination and kids growing up, not Satan," said Candace Benefiel, a graduate student who is studying English.

Benefiel said, over time, the conventional idea of the appearance of a witch has changed dramatically.

"The image of the witch has definitely changed

from the pointy hat and crooked nose you see in "The Wizard of Oz" to a normal attractive person like the TV show "Charmed," Benefiel said.

The film industry, as well as literature, certainly takes the cake in negatively portraying the image of the witch and the accompanying craft of magic.

Benefiel said movies and literature dating back from the Grimm's tale of "Hansel and Gretel" to movies such as "The Witches of Eastwick" and the popular Anne Rice novels portray witches and witchcraft inaccurately and negatively.

"The Wiccan religion and their believers are peaceful and emphatic people," Benefiel said. "They are harmless."

However, the popularity of the supernatural seems to be the main attraction for continued monetary success in the business of film and literature.

"Unfortunately, the witch as a cultural figure will always be wholly malevolent or wholly innocent due to the constant stream of stereotypes from society," Kallendorf said.

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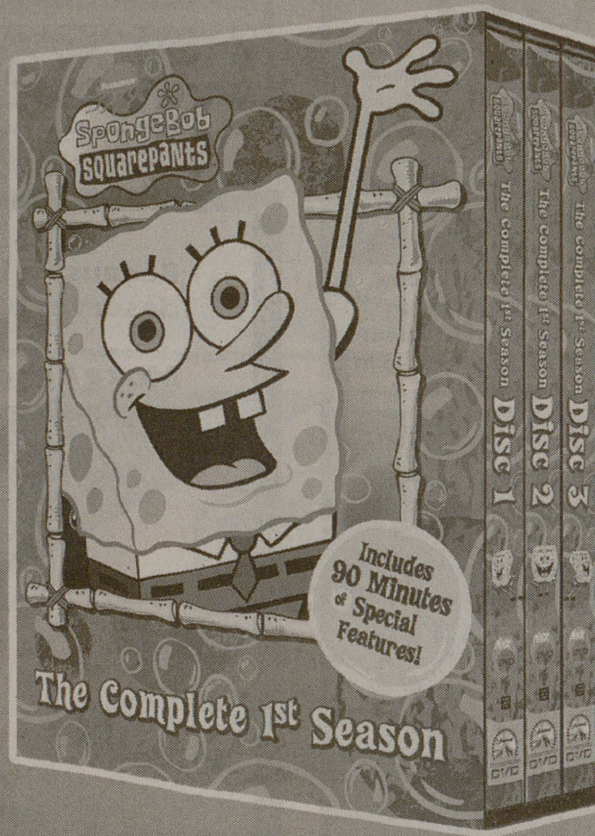
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