

*“Sabrina, you’re not yourself.”*  
*The Borrowings of Sabrina Spellman*

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**Abstract:** This article examines the contradiction between shallowness and silliness in the television series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* from the perspective of creative piracy. I argue that the show adopted the superficiality of the 1960s comics. Despite substantial hijacking of elements from series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or a movie *Something Wicked This Way Comes* the writers failed to lift this new Sabrina to a better quality. The borrowed elements simply made it more chaotic.

**Keywords:** Sabrina Spellman, witchcraft, *ChAoS* series, sources, *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, cultural borrowings.

I have always had problems making sense of the television series *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003). Sabrina has been called the “bubblegum witch,” or to be accurate: “a bubblegum tween version” of commodified witchcraft and that summed up my own reservations: she was easily blown apart and the sticky stuff ended up in all kind of unwanted places.<sup>1</sup> I don’t like bubblegum anyway nor the specific version of pop-culture which it referred to. I found that analysing the Sabrina series was too much of a challenge because it did not have any depth. But the recent remake looked

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Hopkins, “Sabrina, the Teenage Witch,” in *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Claudia A. Mitchell & Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2008), 513-514.

more promising: after careful consideration a Christian critic still found it “a dark, disturbing tale.”<sup>2</sup> Taking apart what were not only from a Christian point of view “satanic” witches is at least an option. Or so I thought. It appears that the new series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (ChAoS) is open to scholarly scrutiny, but that the outcome is not always very exciting. The fledgling Sabrina scholarship is shown by studies on gender and race, though not (yet) on witchcraft.<sup>3</sup> One can presume that students give the subjects of their studies due time and thought. Critics, on the other hand, need to air their opinion at the spur of the moment. Sometimes they make an interesting observation, more often they miss things.<sup>4</sup> I have nevertheless framed this paper by the remarks of two critics, who agreed on the content of the show, but assessed its quality diametrically differently. To be fair, they dealt with different parts. The critic Alison Keene, applauded the tension between the witch and the human side of Sabrina in the first part, expressed her uneasiness with the second part as follows:

There really isn't much exploration of anything, including what was the core conflict of Sabrina feeling like she must balance her natures. That, again, leads to the new season [meaning part 2] feeling a little lost. The world the show has created is one worth spending plenty of time in, and the fantastic actors brought in to populate it have boundless potential. But this time around, it all feels a little empty.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> S.D. Kelly, “The Problem of Evil in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*,” *Christianity Today*, 5 April 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Among others: Danielle Steinke, “#MeToo and the Witching Hour: Contemporary Feminist Discourse on the Representation of Witchcraft in the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*,” Student paper MacEwan University 2019, <https://roam.macewan.ca/islandora/object/gm:1815>; Hector Manuel Franco, *Season of the Witch: The Externalization of Feminine Powers*, Master thesis San Francisco State University 2019. See also: Anna S. Rogers, *Appropriation of the “Witch” Stigma as White Women’s Self-Empowerment*, Doctoral dissertation University of South Carolina, 2019, <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/5395>. See also note 24.

<sup>4</sup> See for critical English reviews: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/chilling\\_adventures\\_of\\_sabrina](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/chilling_adventures_of_sabrina).

<sup>5</sup> Alison Keene, “*Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* Part 2. Review: A Marginally Magical Return,” *Collider*, 1 April 2019.

The review of the third part in the same journal struck a different tone. Haleigh Foutch wrote:

And it's weirder, wilder, and more absolutely ridiculous than ever. Don't get me wrong, I mean that as a compliment. One of *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina's* most endearing qualities has always been its embrace of camp, which gives the series a delicious spark of irreverence and appropriately devil-may-care je ne sais quoi. Anything goes, really, in this silly-meets-deadly-serious world of Satanic witches.<sup>6</sup>

Against the emptiness of part 2, she emphasised the "jam-packed (...) very busy Season 3." "At times," she continued, "it feels like it's too ambitious in its breadth, too downright silly and indulgent, and overall just too much". The two opinions are not necessarily contradictory; they address different aspects. Full visual impressions can still mask an empty plot. In this article, I want to discuss the viewing of *ChAoS* in the light of its frequent borrowings which are here primarily related to witches.

It turns out that *ChAoS* is a case of televised comics, but a quite different caliber than for instance the Marvel comics and their film and television versions. The Sabrina comics conformed to the American Comics Code which, since 1954, forbade excessive violence, sexual perversions (as defined at the time), and horror. In 2011 Archie Comics, the publisher of Sabrina, was one of the last publishers to abandon the code.<sup>7</sup> Although they subsequently progressed into horror themes they retained their superficiality and silliness.

A last introductory remark: I make frequent use of Wikipedia articles below, but only those I found trustworthy. Consulting Wikipedia about witchcraft, even more so witchcraft history (or werewolves), is not to be recommended, however. The anonymous authors are usually not the main authorities on the subject and, moreover, their text can be changed. This is also true of film and television reviews, but they are less speculative, probably because their subject is more topical.

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<sup>6</sup> Haleigh Foutch, "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina Season 3 Delivers Its Most Delightfully WTF Witchery Yet," *Collider*, 24 January 2020.

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comic\\_Code\\_Authority](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comic_Code_Authority).

## Introducing Sabrina

The current television series *ChAoS* is the latest manifestation of a web of comics, animated series, video games and earlier television series stretching back to 1962. Especially *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* which ran over 7 seasons from 1996 to 2003, with 163 episodes of 22 minutes each, will be one of the older viewers' main reference points. This series was accompanied by the television movies *Teenage Witch* in 1996, *Sabrina goes to Rome* in 1998, *Sabrina Down Under* in 1999. Melissa Joan Hart starred in all of the series as well as the movies. *The Teenage Witch* Sabrina conforms to the ingenue witch, as defined by Emily Edwards:

The ingenue witch is a child or teenager who learns she possesses magical power and must discover how to use that power as she copes with the trepidations of growing up and discovering who she is. In many films and television depictions, she must contend with the wickedness of middle or high school and the perverse social world of teenagers, where confidence is blighted and young people attempt to become what they believe will best help them to fit in with the social crowd. The ingenue witch is oftentimes an outsider, unpopular and picked on, even by other witches.<sup>8</sup>

Sabrina's first television appearance was in an animated series in the early 1970s; another animated series with 65 episodes aimed at children was released in 1999. Another animated film, *Friends Forever*, appeared in 2002 and *Sabrina's Secret Life*, an animated series, followed in 2003-2004. *Secrets of a Teenage Witch*, with 26 episodes, was first shown in 2013-2014. The last targeted a slightly older age group of adolescents. In *The Guardian* Lucy Mangan, awarded the first half of the present TV series three out of five stars; she remarked that a good children's story can be equally enjoyed by adults.<sup>9</sup> *ChAoS*, however, remained children's viewing.

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<sup>8</sup> Emily D. Edwards, *Metaphysical Media, The Occult Experience in Popular Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 110-111.

<sup>9</sup> Lucy Mangan, "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina Review – Where has the Magic Gone?" *The Guardian*, 27 October 2018.

The first animated series of Sabrina was based on comics, published by Archie Comics. Sabrina originally appeared in these in 1962 and was given an own comic series from 1971 to 1983. In October 1962 she was introduced as a slim waisted teen-ager with pointed breasts sitting on the floor of a modern bedroom with a TV set and a cat lying underneath it, listening to a record player, saying:

Hi! My name is Sabrina! I hope I haven't disappointed you! I mean... I hope you didn't expect to find me living on some dreary mountain top... wearing some grubby old rags and making some nasty old brew.

Readers of comics were indeed used to old witches in rags, like in the 1950 EC comics, *The Haunt of Fear*, *Tales from the Crypt*, and the *Vault of Horror*, where The Old Witch was one of the three hosts. Yet they were also familiar with young, beautiful witches, for instance in the 1958 film *Bell, Book and Candle* with Kim Novak, showing the courtship between a witch and a non-witch. This theme, albeit with a married couple, was later picked up by the very popular television series *Bewitched*, starring Elizabeth Montgomery and broadcast for eight seasons from September 1964 to March 1972. The combination of good and bad witches had entered American culture through the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, but also earlier books, stage acts, puppet plays, films and a musical. Appearances denoted moral character. As the Good Witch Glinda said: "Only Bad Witches are ugly."<sup>10</sup> Sabrina perpetuated this tradition with a twist: some evil witches could also be attractive and as a teenager she had the opportunity to bungle her spells, or as she herself acknowledged: "Sabrina, you goofed."

Sabrina's family featured in the comics, too. Her aunt Hilda as early as February 1963 and December 1964, followed by her cousin Ambrose (in suit) in December 1969. The head witch Della and Fairy Witch Mother Greta had more or less regular roles, but both disappeared after a while. Hilda and Della enticed Sabrina to plague humankind, that is to say her friends, but that usually had an opposite effect. Aunt Zelda had a small part in December

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<sup>10</sup> Willem de Blécourt, "Witches on Screen," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, ed. Owen Davies (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 253-280, 287-288.

1968 where she was shorter and stockier, yet unnamed only to re-emerge a year later in December 1969. The early comics showed Sabrina as a “typical” teenager, hanging out with her friends (the Archie comics bunch) with an interest in boys.

A next series of comics ran parallel to the series with Melissa Joan Hart: 32 issues between 1997 and 1999.<sup>11</sup> In 2000 the comic series was re-launched at no. 1. It ran till no. 57 in 2004 and then continued in manga form till 2009 with 43 short stories. Reprinted as *Sabrina – The Magic Revisited* and *The Magic Within*, the stories differed slightly from the previous comics and television series. There was much more interaction with other witches and a greater exposure of the Magic Realm. Recently, a new series has started about Sabrina’s schooldays in Greendale: *Sabrina the teenage witch. ChAoS*, still aimed at adolescents, was preceded by its own comics as a kind of trial run for the television series. When one compares these latest comics with the present television series it becomes clear that the school and the group of friends were inserted only in the television series (and less based on the last *teenage witch* comics), yet they also partly referred to the original comics.

The latest manifestation of Sabrina has thus to be set against an enormous number of comics, animated series, and films. Yet, while the *Teenage Witch* can be characterised as light entertainment, today’s television series with Kiernan Shipka in the role of Sabrina, is much darker than its predecessors. It figures Father Blackwood, a high priest of the Church of Night where the Dark Lord, also known as Satan is worshipped and where witches, among them the Weird Sisters, are supposed to do evil. *ChAoS* has a manipulating Madam Satan as one of its main antagonists. As the name suggests it is designed to chill and seems thus a huge departure from *The Teenage Witch*. Or to phrase it according to the classification system by Emily Edwards: Sabrina moved from being “perhaps one of the best-adjusted of ingenue witches” to a satanic witch, complete with coven, magical school and an over-lord. In episodes 17 and 18 says: “I Am the Dark Lord’s Sword” and “I Am the Herald of Hell,” and follows this by her realisation: “I am evil.”

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<sup>11</sup> For general information about the Sabrina comics, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabrina\\_the\\_Teenage\\_Witch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabrina_the_Teenage_Witch).

## ChAoS

The new series was developed by comic book writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa.<sup>12</sup> He was born in 1973 as the son of a Nicaraguan diplomat which may explain Catholic influences and a preoccupation with death, or “afterlife” as it should be called it more accurately. After the success of introducing zombies into Archie Comics he became its chief creative officer. Sadly, he is no Whedon or Gaiman and Archie is no Marvel. Nevertheless, Sabrina is part of the American witch figure and in this she occupies an extreme position. As the animated series declares: “using magic is usually not the solution to her day-to-day problems.”<sup>13</sup> In *ChAoS* her boyfriend Harvey Kinkle becomes more and more convinced that Sabrina should not use magic, and on the meta level of the show, the message seems to be that Satan is never a preferred choice even for his daughter. Magic as a sign of female empowerment maybe a nice fantasy, but in actual politics it is a double-edged sword.

Certainly a new and exciting character in the Sabrina universe is Mrs. Wardwell, also known as Madam Satan. She is a conglomerate of different figures, one of them appeared first in *Pep comics* in 1941, as Aguirre-Sacasa explains.<sup>14</sup> But she also shares characteristics with the Head Witch Della in the first Sabrina comics of 1962. In *ChAoS* she takes on the shape of the teacher Mrs. Wardwell. She is also the first witch: Lilith. Below I will elaborate on the structural resemblance between Wardwell and Rupert Giles, the librarian in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Much of the plot relies on Wardwell’s actions and their consequences. As is revealed at the start of episode 16, Wardwell’s behaviour leads to Sabrina performing a string of miracles that are blasphemous versions of those performed by the Nazarene. This provokes the season’s apocalypse. From episode 14 onwards, however, the Wardwell storyline takes a turn that is, at first sight, incomprehensible: a fiancé suddenly turns up, only to be brought to an untimely demise in episode 17.

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<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roberto\\_Aguirre-Sacasa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roberto_Aguirre-Sacasa).

<sup>13</sup> See note 11.

<sup>14</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa & Robert Hack, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina. Book One* (2018), no page numbering.

In the third part (episode 21-28) the witch's coven, lead by Aunt Zelda since episode 18, becomes more and more female. First, they start to worship Lilith instead of Satan, in episode 28 they find they need to revere the moon and call upon the triple Goddess Hekate.<sup>15</sup> In Edward's typology they now transformed into New Age Witches.<sup>16</sup> The only difference with the majority of the other cinematic witches is that the *ChAoS* witches prefer to operate in a coven, a concept popularised by Margaret Murray in her *The God of the Witches* (1933).<sup>17</sup> The move from Satanic to New Age Witches leaves Satan out of the picture and I suspect this was part of an (undisclosed) deal with the Satanic Temple who had sued Netflix because *ChAoS* had appropriated their version of the Baphomet statue.<sup>18</sup>

## References

*ChAoS* contains a spectrum of internal and external references. While I cannot claim to have spotted all of them (see the trivia in the IMDb and the song Sabrina sings in episode 20 is apparently from *The Phantom of the Opera*), I have found enough to discern a pattern. Examples run from minor and occasional to vital and structural. For instance, quite a few warlocks are named after horror writers: Blackwood; Lovecraft as Howard in episode 15; brother Bierce; brother Machen; Dorian Gray comes from the Oscar Wilde story. Then there are Salem names: Putnam and Hawthorne (the principal in part one) are lifted from *The Crucible*, which incidentally is also the title of the first *Chilling Adventures* comic book. Dorcas, too, is a Salem name. The Academy of Unseen Arts seems to refer to Terry Pratchett's Unseen University. Other names in the third part such as Caliban and Sycorax are taken from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hecate>.

<sup>16</sup> Edwards, *Metaphysical Media*, 121-126.

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret\\_Murray](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Murray); see also: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/coven>.

<sup>18</sup> Bryce K. Hurst, "The Devil is in the Trademark: A Discussion of the Satanic Temple v. Netflix," *Law and Religion* 20 (2019), 219-237. See also: Joseph Laylock, *Speak of the Devil: How the Satanic Temple Is Changing the Way We Talk About Religion* (Oxford: OUP, 2020).



There is a werewolf reference in first episode. At night, a car drives along a lonely road. The song *Bad Moon Rising*, by Creedence Clearwater Rivival, and used in a central scene of *An American Werewolf in London*, is playing in the background. The car scene is from the 1994 film *Wolf*. In the *Chilling Adventures* comics the werewolf verse is recited: "even a man who is pure in heart, and says his prayers by night..." (from the 1940 films with Lon Chaney). It echoes the werewolf in the first episode of *Secrets of a Teenage Witch*, the computer-animated series of 2013 and perhaps gives a wink to one of the early episodes of *Bewitched* from 1965. The reference is deliberate but at the same time spurious as there is no werewolf in the first episode and hardly so in the rest of the series, apart from the jumble of "werewolf" quotes in episode 14, Luperclia, unrelated to the earlier quotations.

The so-called "hedge-witches," who are not aligned to a coven,<sup>19</sup> are an odd mixture taken from stories in diverse places. Gryla is Icelandic and Pesta is Norse.<sup>20</sup> More generally medieval witches were thought to have spread pestilence and after the trials started they were accused of boiling babies; thus their role in *ChAoS* does not appear completely strange; at the most it is exaggerated. The references are increasingly bewildering, however. Mambo Marie or Marie LaFleur refers to Marie Laveau, a nineteenth-century midwife, herbalist and voodoo practitioner in New Orleans.<sup>21</sup> Mother Hubbard was one of the Salem witches whose first name was Elizabeth; there is also a (probably unrelated) English nursery rhyme.<sup>22</sup> The members of the Carnival are mostly derived from Greek mythology, although there are some double references. Pan is otherwise known as Carcosa after Ambrose Bierce's "An Inhabitant from Carcosa," a part of the Chtulhu mythos which also featured the name The Old Ones for the old gods, although one has to be careful here; the old gods also feature in *The Wicker Man* and there they are derived from Murray. The name of Nagaina, the snake charmer, comes from the Hindu half-deity

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<sup>19</sup> Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca* (New York: Facts on File, 2008, third edition), 159; she refers to *A Guide to Solitary Witchcraft* by Rae Beth (1990) who would have first used the term.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* III (London: Bell, 1883), 1045, 1188.

<sup>21</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie\\_Laveau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Laveau).

<sup>22</sup> Iona and Peter Opie, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Oxford: OUP, 1997 – second edition), 374-380.

Nāga,<sup>23</sup> but with her snake hair she behaves like the Greek Medusa, whose look turns people into stone. Circe, together with Medea (not used) the archetypal fairy-tale witch, made a name for herself by turning Odysseus' companions into animals. In *ChAoS* episode 25, she turns four boys into pigs, the same boys who were tricked by Sabrina and the weird sisters in episode 2 to make love to each other. Hekate, the triple goddess, of course, also has a Greek origin.

Sabrina is both witch and mortal, the dichotomy deriving from *Bewitched* and already present in the earlier television series and films. In *ChAoS* it leads to double school attendance and the pressure to sign *The Book of the Beast*, which eventually means simply acquiring enough power to deal with the threat on Greendale – which is to say that the threat is enough to push Sabrina over the line. So much for a principled refusal.

### **Buffy, the Slayer of Vampires**

In episodes 2 and 26 of *ChAoS* aunt Hilda is killed by her sister Zelda but subsequently brought back to life. Any resurrection in twenty-first-century popular culture is reminiscent of the resurrection in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, created by Joss Whedon, when Willow brings Buffy back from the death at the start of season 6. This alerts one to the similarities between Buffy and Sabrina. The Dutch student Floortje Schuurmans, who compared the two teenage heroines, found that “some scenes in the pilot episodes are eerily similar to each other” and concluded: “Both shows revolve around ‘good’ girls, trying to live normal high school lives in spite of being ‘the Other,’ and dealing with both the mundane such as friendships and relationships as well as supernatural, life-threatening situations.”<sup>24</sup> The relation between the two series, however, goes somewhat further. The main borrowings from Whedon's series are structural, often characterised by opposites. Sunnydale is at the American west and Greendale at the east coast; at least that is implied by the Salem

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<sup>23</sup> At least according to the fanpage: <https://riverdale.fandom.com/wiki/Nagaina>.

<sup>24</sup> Floortje Schuurmans, *Transgressive Women Warriors or a Post-Feminist Masquerade? The Evolution of Gender Portrayals in Female-Fronted Teen Television Series* (Bachelor's thesis, Nijmegen: Radboud University, 2019), 43, 45.

reference: the Greendale thirteen were hanged at about the same time as the Salem witches, thus the action took place in Massachusetts. Another example of the convergence between the two series is the (missed) opportunities of the socially awkward double.

In *Buffy* season 5, episode 18, *The Intervention*, the so-called Buffybot plays a part. The Buffybot is a robot, made to look exactly like Buffy, but her program restricts her when she has to interact with other people. Thus she has the tendency to blurt out all she knows at once. Meeting Xander Harris, she says: "You're my friend, and a carpenter!" In another exchange, this time with Willow, the Buffy replica reveals her true purpose: "I had sex with Spike. I'm sorry if it bothers you. You're my best friend." The double of Sabrina in *The Mandrake* (episode 19) is vegetable instead of mechanical, but exhibits a similarly odd relationship with her friends. She wants to turn them into mandrakes, too, so that they can all be together. As she explains in an exchange with cousin Ambrose:

A: Sabrina, what's going on?

S: It's my friends.

A: [gasps] Oh. What happened?

S: Harvey, Rosalind, and Theo. Their heads were smashed in. Their bodies were pulped. The ground was soaked in their fluid.

A: Sabrina, you're not making any sense.

S: They were so beautiful.

A: Why would anyone kill those poor souls?

S: They were going to love me. We would have grown up together.

A: Hm.

S: I just wanted them to love me.

A: [gasps]

S: You love me, don't you?

A: Off course I do. But, erm, perhaps you should lie down and rest?

S: Can I sit on your lap?

A: Sabrina, you're not yourself.

The solution to having two Sabrinas is a duel between the two. The real Sabrina, being a human, cheats and kills her double. In season 9, volume 2 of the continuing comic series of *Buffy, A Part of Me*, Buffy's mind is partly

transferred to a new Buffybot. She now also fights herself. After this is interrupted, it is decided to put the whole Buffy back together again. Sabrina, by killing her mandrake self, loses her power which was transferred to the magical root; she regains it in a later episode. Buffy season 9 stems from 2012; the Sabrina episode is seven years later. The writers of Sabrina were surely inspired by Buffy in a very detailed way. Yet this is apparent in more than a single episode as an important part of the human half of Sabrina is structurally similar to Whedon's vampire slayer.

For evidence one only has to look at the Scooby gang in *Buffy*, the friends Buffy surrounds herself with from the start. Certainly, in *Teenage Witch* Sabrina has school friends, namely Harvey Kinkle and Jenny Kelley, but in some important aspects Sabrina's friends in *ChAoS* resemble the scoobies more. I sum up:

Buffy Summers – Sabrina Spellman, both becoming sixteen and acquiring their powers.

Willow Rosenberg, from a Jewish family, a witch – Rosalind, "Roz" Walker, the daughter of Greendale's minister, has "cunning" (premonitions), that is to say she is a cunning woman. A cunning woman is the opposite of a witch.

Xander Harris, secretly in love with Buffy, dates Cordelia and has a brief affair with Willow – Harvey Kinkle, starts as Sabrina's boyfriend and then moves on to Roz.

Susie/Theo Putnam from *ChAoS* relates to Cordelia Chase, or Daniel "Oz" Osbourne in *Buffy* (or to both).

The most important borrowing from *Buffy*, however, is Mary Wardwell as the librarian Rupert Giles; there are even moments in which she acts like a librarian. In episode 3 of *ChAoS* about books banned from the school library, Wardwell supports the action by enabling a "secret book club where they only read banned titles."<sup>25</sup> In episode nine she tells Sabrina:

W: Now you weren't thinking of borrowing my *Book of the Dead* without permission, were you? Not when all you need do is ask. Go on. Take it.

S: [Sabrina sighs, stammers] Ms. Wardwell?

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<sup>25</sup> [www.adventuresofsabrina.fandom.com/wiki/Chapter\\_Three:\\_The\\_Trial\\_of\\_Sabrina\\_Spellman](http://www.adventuresofsabrina.fandom.com/wiki/Chapter_Three:_The_Trial_of_Sabrina_Spellman).

W: Yes?

S: I picked up the wrong book. I was looking for the *Occultist's Almanac*. For some extra credit I'm doing for Father Blackwood. Is it okay if I borrow it?

In the course of the episodes Wardwell build up trust and becomes a mentor to Sabrina, like the "watcher" Giles to Buffy. In episode six Wardwell tells Sabrina that her father Edward sent her to watch over her. Subsequently she supports her performing an exorcism. Thereafter, she gives Sabrina a copy of the *Book of the Dead* in order to raise Harvey's brother. The next step is to retrieve the brother's soul from limbo and Wardwell guides Sabrina to a portal. In a twisted way, Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa has even recreated the relationship between Giles and Jenny Calendar; Wardwell's fiancée Adam is now killed by Satan. Beyond this citation, there is hardly anything relevant in the Adam storyline.

Another similarity between the two series is that Buffy sends her boyfriend Angel, who has temporarily become soulless, to Hell (in season two). A nice touch in *ChAoS* is that the boyfriend is called devil (Nick Scratch). He goes to Hell, too, after being possessed by Satan (thus in a sense having two souls). Like the Hellmouth below Sunnydale, Greendale has its entrance to the Hell in the mines and, like in *Buffy*, the problem is how to keep it shut. Blood, however, is a much better means than signs scribbled on paper. In the third part of *ChAoS* Nick morphs into Riley Finn, another of Buffy's boyfriends, by becoming addicted to sex demons. There are, however, limits to the similarity of the two series: a struggling dark Willow is nowhere to be seen in *ChAoS*.

## Films

In episode 18 a visual quote occurs from *Practical Magic* (1998).<sup>26</sup> Sabrina stands with a broomstick on the roof of her house against a blue background and a full moon. The same film is quoted when Zelda slays Hilda, although the killing of a boyfriend with saucepan is more imaginative than one aunt killing another with a hammer or a bullet. Both the boyfriend and Hilda are

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<sup>26</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Practical\\_Magic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Practical_Magic).

resurrected. In the film *The Craft* (1996) four high-school witches feature, which are quoted when Sabrina joins the three Weird Sisters in episode 2. *The Craft* is also one of the few witch films in which a main figure of worship is mentioned.<sup>27</sup>

More citations are taken from the 1972 film *Necromancy*, starring Pamela Franklin and Orson Welles, reissued in 1983 as *The Witching*. Apart from a witches' puppet, a magic shop, a satanic ritual, an orgy and a devil with a goat's head, not to mention the coven leader's strict control of the town Lilith, there is a little ghost boy. He is akin to the boy Quentin in *ChAoS*, also a ghost, first in episode 4, then in episode 17. Whereas all the first mentioned characteristics of *Necromancy* can be designated as part of the common language of Satanism, the boy stands out and can thus be seen as a quotation. The third part of *ChAoS*, especially the travelling carnival, leans heavily on *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, the book by Ray Bradbury, who also wrote the script for the eponymous film. It ends as a persiflage of *The Wicker Man*.

The 1983 film *Something Wicked This Way Comes*<sup>28</sup> features a carnival, also called pandemonium. It thus stands to reason for Pan in *ChAoS* to be the head of the pandemonium (although there the name is transferred to Hell). In *Something Wicked* the numerous odd performers of the carnival are part perpetrators and part victims: Mr. Dark and the fortune teller, the dust witch, belong to the former; the bearded woman to the latter. Such a dichotomy is missing in *ChAoS*. Naigana is only a weak reflection of Bradbury's dust witch. *Something Wicked* is interwoven with the 1973 film *The Wicker Man*, and Mr. Dark and Lord Summerisle merge. This British film provided a reference to the old ones, the hare, the Green Man (as the name of the inn) and the animal masks (*ChAoS* episode 24), apart from the sacrifice in the huge wicker figure

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<sup>27</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Craft\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Craft_(film)).

<sup>28</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something\\_Wicked\\_This\\_Way\\_Comes\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something_Wicked_This_Way_Comes_(film)); this article only has a small plot description. On the earlier novel, also written by Ray Bradbury, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something\\_Wicked\\_This\\_Way\\_Comes\\_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something_Wicked_This_Way_Comes_(novel)).

See also: Robin Ann Reid, *Ray Bradbury. A Critical Companion* (Westport/London: Greenwood Press, 2000); Jamil Mustafa, "The American Gothic and the Carnivalesque in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*," *The New Ray Bradbury Review* 5 (2019), 52-67.

in episode 28.<sup>29</sup> In the American context the remark of Carcosa, "We were here first," can be read as referring to the native American people and the reaction of the Greendale coven reflects the imperialism of America's colonisers. But one should seriously ask how in *ChAoS* the "old gods" could be set against Hekate, who has the same mythological ancestry as Pan, Circe, or Medusa. It is debatable whether Pan can be seen as patriarchal: he is too disruptive.<sup>30</sup>

Themes in witch films include the domestication of the female witch, a loss of the sense of self (in cases of resurrections), the question of identity or the matter of turning evil. They can be observed, for instance, in *Practical Magic*, *The Craft*, in the 1987 film *The Witches of Eastwick* or in Romero's *Season of the Witch* (1972) and also in *Buffy*.<sup>31</sup> Such concerns do not bother Sabrina. The inhabitants of Green Town in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* are driven by their desires, regrets, frustrations and secrets. Mr Dark is feeding on these – Carcosa (Pan) on his turn only symbolically targets Harvey's father by letting Naigana sleep with him. In *Lilith*, the town where *Necromancy* is situated, Mr. Cato desperately wants to bring his son back to life; in *ChAoS*'s Greendale Quentin only appears twice and then without much emotional baggage or a father. The grandfather of the lord of Summerisle, where *The Wicker Man* takes place, has convinced the inhabitants of the feasibility of the old religion and they sacrifice the Christian virgin representative of the king for good reason. The pagans who arrived in Greendale are just out for power. They try to accomplish their aim by burning a wicker man with a life human in it to resurrect the Green Man. But why would it be necessary to resurrect a god? This is especially questionable when the genuine Green Man, Robin Goodfellow, is already settled in Greendale and has entered into a relationship with Theo. The original films on which *ChAoS* draws have much more coherence and also show more depth. *ChAoS* is a superficial collage and indeed what the acronym portrays: it is chaotic.

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<sup>29</sup> Mikel J. Koven, "The Folklore Fallacy. A Folkloristic/Filmic Perspective on *The Wicker Man*," *Fabula* 48 (2007), 270-280; Valentina Bold, "The Wicker Man: Virgin Sacrifice in Dumfries and Galloway," in *Fantastical Imaginations: The Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture*, ed. Lizanne Henderson (John Donald Publishers, 2009). See also: David Huckvale, *A Green and Pagan Land: Myth, Magic and Landscape in British Film and Television* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. The Great God Pan, a 1894 story by Arthur Machen: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Great\\_God\\_Pan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_God_Pan).

<sup>31</sup> De Blécourt, "Witches on Screen."

## Final considerations

The citations go beyond witches. For instance the use of the time egg (a return of two Sabrinas) derives from a 1995 video game.<sup>32</sup> The idea that Judas Iskariot was the first vampire comes from the film *Dracula 2000*.<sup>33</sup> It is certainly necessary to situate Sabrina in an existing popular witch lore but nor is it a crime to add to it, too. To portray a recognisable witch, the writers of the series had to emulate some of her main features and to apply a common witchcraft imagery, especially when the witch is no longer old and ugly. It almost looks as if they were prohibited from being original. In this they continued the silliness of the early comics. In her Satanic guise, Sabrina is still defined by bubblegum.

The main question is whether all this actually matters. In films the copying of plots and scenes is constantly happening. To give some examples from witch films and television: *Bewitched* copied its main theme from *Night of the Eagle*; many features in *Harry Potter* are derived from *Bewitched*. Yet the extent of copying in *ChAoS* is unparalleled. Are the citations and references in *ChAoS* then a homage or do they indicate a lack of creativity? Possibly both. In my view, in the case of *ChAoS* it is also a matter of aesthetics: the many citations make the series too crowded and this has clearly been noticed by critics. Sabrina is too many witches at once, and, one can argue, she thereby loses herself. There is never enough space to realise the potential of particular themes. Some story-lines go nowhere. I do not know whether it would make any difference for the viewers who may not know the connections pointed out here – Foutch would probably still love the series. I have done little further research on the reception of *ChAoS*.<sup>34</sup> It should matter, however, for studies of female empowerment versus hegemonic masculinity and the like. The texture of superficiality and borrowing pervades the gender relations in the series and should thus emerge in a good analysis.

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<sup>32</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrono\\_series](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrono_series).

<sup>33</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula\\_2000](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula_2000).

<sup>34</sup> See IMDb, User Reviews: [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7569592/review?ref\\_=tt\\_urv](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7569592/review?ref_=tt_urv).



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