

Witches: How Style Represents Transformation in “The Craft”

We, as a society, have grown to love witches. Witchcraft and Wicca have grown tremendously in the past 50 years, and a lot of that comes from the feminist movement. Witchcraft helps one feel in control of their lives. Thus, the 90s were filled with witches. Films like *Practical Magic* and *Hocus Pocus*, and TV shows like *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* create a want to embrace the mystical. However, I feel that no film represents the field of Wicca than *The Craft*. Although I myself am not Wiccan, it's easy to feel connected to the characters and their journey to self-fulfillment and control over their lives.

One of the most iconic parts of the movie is the costumes. Designed by Deborah Everton, the costumes are incredible reflections of the punk and alternative styles of the time. Everton wanted to focus on accessibility, so that any girl who watches the movie can copy the looks. Lots of girls would go to the movie dressed as the characters, which further created an idea of the girls in the film being ordinary people who got caught up in a lust for power. She was very inspired by alternative subcultures of the 90s, and even says at one point that she wants the girls to look like they're straight out of The Cure. She also had a heavy focus on the storytelling and the journeys of the characters. She tells Bustle Magazine, “My job as a costume designer is to tell the story of each character through what they're wearing. Not so much tell the story of witchcraft, but for each character to emote visually what's going on inside of them,” (Bustle) This style of dressing, along with the timelessness of the costumes are what make this film so iconic.

The Craft follows four girls in LA who are in a coven together. The movie starts with Sarah moving in and being pulled into the coven that the other three girls (Nancy, Bonnie, and Rochelle) had formed. However, there is something interesting about it: Sarah can actually do

magic. They all create spells to make their lives better. Sarah wishes that the guy she likes would like her back, Rochelle wishes to punish a racist bully on her swim team, Bonnie wishes to remove the burn scars that cover her body, and Nancy wants to improve her home life, which involves a small, trailer park home and an abusive father. Once the girls realize that all of the spells they had made actually work, they begin to get drunk with power. Nancy especially, lets her newfound power consume her, so much that she almost kills the guy who Sarah liked until he had attempted to sexually assault her. This scares Sarah, and she tries to distance herself from the coven, but they pursue her, since they know she is the only reason that their spells work. This all ends in a final battle between Sarah and Nancy, where Sarah wins by being the overall more powerful witch. Bonnie and Rochelle go back to their normal lives, feeling little to no guilt about what has occurred, while Nancy gets sent to an insane asylum. Sarah, meanwhile, moves away from LA with her dad and is now fully in tune with her magic, planning to use it for good this time.

The four girls all go through a tumultuous time as they discover their magic, and since this isn't a film with any "talking heads" dialogue, the best way to understand what they are thinking and feeling is through their clothing.

Rochelle

To look at the character of Rochelle, you look at an outsider. Although all the girls are considered outsiders in their school, Rochelle has the unique quality of being one of the only black girls in her mostly white Catholic school, and she is bullied mercilessly for it by Laura, a girl on her swim team. Rochelle tries desperately to fit in from the beginning of the movie, and she is definitely the most put together out of her friends. She wears the uniform very

traditionally and is the only one of the girls to carry a backpack with the school logo on it. She is also the only one of the girls to participate in extracurricular activities, like the swim team. However, after all this, she is still mocked for her coily hair and her skin color, which hurts her deeply.

In the first draft of this film, Rochelle was written completely differently. For one thing, she wasn't supposed to be black. Instead, she had an eating disorder and was bullied by her peers for it. Later on, however, the character of Rochelle was changed into what she is today. Although she was an incredible form of representation in the 90s, today she is looked at a bit deeper. For one thing, many black people have watched the movie and were confused by why Rochelle was taking the bullying so harshly, since what was mocked by Laura is what many black people are mocked for every day. Secondly, the actress who played Rochelle, Rachel True, has been left out of most of the various conventions and press reviews that have been hosted about the movie over the years, so to watch Rochelle be driven to extreme measures to get rid of this bullying whilst the actress is still being excluded feels odd to some people. This also reinforces the fear and anger that is presented in Rochelle's character, since everything she goes through is very rooted in reality.

For her spell that she created, Rochelle casts a curse on Laura, saying that if Laura ever hurts her again, she will lose what is most precious to her: her hair. Surprisingly to her, it works and Laura's hair begins to fall out. Rochelle finally begins to become more confident, and she starts to finally relax her uniform, switching her blazer for soft, white blouses and cotton tops. As her magic begins to darken, her casual outfits begin to change. They actually do the opposite of what she wears at school at this point, and she switches out her loose, boho dresses for stiffer, darker fabrics. Her outfits still look like her, as they often have lace detailing and flowing skirts, but outfits also start to mimic Nancy's. She noticeably starts to wear black, gray, and navy

exclusively.

At the final showdown, Rochelle is in her most Nancy-like outfit: a fluffy, black top paired with a black mini skirt, a long cross necklace, and black tights. She looks like an entirely different person, and she really has become one. She and Bonnie end up running away after Sarah scares them off, so she never gets to witness the downfall of Nancy. However, at the very end, we see her in her least “Rochelle” outfit of the film, which is a black dress and a sharply-cut, gray overcoat. This shows that, unlike some of the other girls, she shows no remorse for her actions and doesn’t try to revert back to who she used to be, despite no longer having magic.

Rochelle is one of the more complicated girls in the group, both on-screen and off. She never really gets the retribution that the other girls receive, and she has basically morphed into an entirely different person, despite being the kindest of the original three. Her character arc is fascinating on many levels, so it’s no wonder that she’s many people’s favorite character.

Nancy

In my opinion, Nancy has some of the best outfits in the whole movie. There’s something about her intense gothic energy, that gives both masculine and feminine at the same time, that just draws you in. She feels unapologetically herself in her outfits, despite her past and where she comes from. We start the movie with Nancy in her take on the school uniform. She has taken small bits and pieces of the original and made them into something new. She is a very distinct comparison to Bonnie and Rochelle in the first few scenes, since she is the one that looks the most confident out of the three. This soon becomes obvious in her personality as well, since we realize just how outspoken and easy to anger she is.

Through her spell, she wishes for life to get better. She was raised in a trailer park by two

parents who hate each other and who constantly take it out on Nancy. She obviously feels self-conscious about this, and she does her best to hide how cheap her outfits are by making them as fashionable and experimental as possible. Her goth aesthetic is also very prevalent in every outfit she wears. She also wears multiple layers in every outfit, possibly to show just how closed off she really is. However, once the spell works and she and her mom come into money, Nancy's style changes. Instead of her usual, cheap PVC coat, she swaps it out for real leather. Her outfits feel more feminine and she looks even more happy in what she's wearing. She is clearly doing everything she can to distance herself from her "white trash" background.

As she descends further and further into darkness, so darkens her look. Since her outfits are already all black, we notice this most with lip color, with changes from a dusty rose to a dark purple. In the famous party scene, she appears in a lacy, boho, black dress and pointed-toe boots, truly showing how witchiness has consumed her, since she looks most like a traditional witch. This is my favorite outfit in the whole movie. After this scene, her outfits are now at their darkest and most detached. Her chokers become spikier. Her eyeliner becomes even more defined. She wears even more layers in her clothing. You can also notice that Bonnie's and Rochelle's outfits seem to darken in tandem with Nancy's, since they are starting to follow her example. In the climax, we see her with her hair loose and tousled, her jewelry sharp and pointed, and her eyes hungry for vengeance. She is out for blood. Nancy is also contrasted in this scene with Sarah's light florals, making her appear even more evil.

Nancy loses the battle to Sarah, and in her last scene, we see her stuck in an insane asylum. Nancy is dressed in a hospital gown, with her nail polish chipped and her makeup gone. This is the first time we see her in white, and it is as if her identity has been stripped away, as if she's no longer human. She is vulnerable. She is worthless.

Nancy's clothing changes aren't quite as immediately noticeable as the other girls.

Hers are much more subtle. In order to notice them, you really have to look closely. She always dresses very gothic and experimentally, but noticing what that looks like within her wardrobe and how it's styled is how you begin to notice the changes in her arc as well. She is portrayed antagonistically throughout the movie, but her loyalty, abrasiveness, and confidence are definitely what make her the best and most interesting character.

Bonnie

Bonnie is definitely the character that helps the other characters enter into the world of witchcraft. She is the most dedicated and researched when it comes to the craft. She also survived a fire in the past, causing her to have scars that cover her neck, chest, and face. She desperately tries to hide them by wearing oversized turtlenecks and hoodies, and constantly keeping her hair in front of her face. She feels really insecure and wants to crawl in a hole and hide from the world. Her greatest wish is to get rid of her scars so she can feel beautiful. When the spells start to work for the girls, Bonnie's scars begin to disappear. Her skin becomes clear and her confidence goes through the roof. She begins to wear very tight-fitting silhouettes and tops that show off her chest. Her hair is curled up and out of her face, and her smile is bright. She looks like she finally feels like herself. As the spells get more powerful, her clothes become darker, just like the others. She begins to wear the Egyptian ankh around her neck, which is a symbol that represents life in Egyptian mythology, or in Bonnie's case, rebirth. She starts turning more into a Nancy-like figure, just like Rochelle. She transitions almost entirely into black by the climax, and has become dark and sinister.

At the end of the film, after everything has happened, we see her in her final outfit: a loose, maroon, button-down shirt and gray jeans. This is a strange outfit for her, since it's not

quite the same as her original outfits from the beginning of the movie, but holds pieces of both her past self and her present self. This probably represents how she is more remorseful for the hurt she's caused than Rochelle, but she also really doesn't want to go back to who she used to be entirely.

Bonnie is personally not my favorite character, but she has some very unique looks and feelings throughout the film. Before her corruption, she just tries to be kind and caring to everyone around her, and it's only after her corruption that she has hurt anyone. She is a really interesting character and is very easy to relate to, especially for girls with low self-esteem.

Sarah

As the new girl and "girl next door" of the group, Sarah is our guide into the strange happenings of the coven. Her style is very average for its time, with lots of sweatshirts and jeans. She is new to LA and doesn't have any trouble making friends, but the coven pulls her away to join them. Sarah is the only girl in the group with magic, and they intentionally draw her in to have access to her power. She joins their coven, causing the girls to actually be able to use their magic. They use her and encourage her to use her to use her own powers as well. She decides to use her powers to get the attention of a boy who she is interested in, but the spell works too well and he becomes obsessed with her.

As she gets more annoyed with Chris, her spell begins to darken and so do her clothes. She changes very quickly from soft pastels and creams to black outfits and heavy eyeliner. This all symbolizes her relationship to Nancy, whom she has been sucked into and whom she might even be turning into. It's also easy to notice that the better she gets with magic, the more she starts to dress like her mother, who we only see in pictures. However, we can see her mother's

free spirited way of dressing starting to be reflected in Sarah. Through all this, though, she stays in her signature florals, signifying that there's some of her inside that remains after everything that has happened to her.

About $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way through the movie, Sarah is assaulted by Chris, who is desperate for her because of the spell. For this, Nancy takes revenge. She first seduces Chris by using Sarah's likeness, and then throws Chris out of a window. This scares Sarah immensely, causing her to immediately switch back to what she used to wear before all of this started. She also faces Nancy in their final battle in a similar outfit. This is meant to show how far she has come as a character, and how she was the only one of the three girls to not be completely corrupted by Nancy's influence, since she could so easily switch right back. She defeats Nancy and proves that is the most powerful out of the coven, all the while remaining true to herself.

Sarah ends the movie in white, the same as Nancy. However, in Sarah's case, it represents her inner power. She and Nancy went through very opposing character arcs, but here we can truly see through the colors just how opposite they are. Rather than white being a representation of Sarah's loss of self, as it was for Nancy, it represents her coming fully into herself. She is no longer trying to imitate Nancy as she was before. Now, she has become the witch she was destined to be.

Women's Transformation in Media

When it comes to power, women are usually portrayed without it. We are seen as weak and helpless a lot of the time. However, sometimes women receive power, whether it be through magic or sheer willpower. To do this, especially with magic, they are often transformed, either physically or mentally. They Many times, when this is represented, the women aren't allowed to reach their full potential, and they either die or are sent somewhere to

contain them. A prime example of this is *Thelma and Louise*, a movie where two women run away from the police after Louise kills the man who tried to rape Thelma. Through their cross-country trip, they end up discovering their full potential as a duo, but they end the film by driving off a cliff as a final self-sacrifice.

The Craft takes a bit of a different approach. Throughout the movie, the girls become immensely powerful. They do this through their connection to Wicca and their magic. They get to the point where they are practically unstoppable, but when Sarah comes to her senses and fights the others, she defeats them with the same things they tried to use to take her down. The power is then taken away from Rochelle, Bonnie, and Nancy, with Nancy ending the film chained up in an insane asylum. However, contrary to the genre, Sarah still holds on to her power at the end, but just doesn't use it. She has actually reached her full potential and is allowed to keep it. This is practically unheard of in any form of media about a woman's transformation.

Rather than some vaguely explained things in the plot, the girls in this movie discover their true potential through modern wicca, and use it to make their lives better, even if most of them turn evil by the end. This idea is what is used to create these complex female characters who are allowed to be flawed and evil, while also not being products of male fantasy. These are just some of the many reasons why this iconic film is so beloved to this day.

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