

Witchology Part 1 with Fio Gede Parma

Ologies Podcast

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Oh hey, it's your ex-boyfriend's bandmate who didn't recognize you at the DMV thankfully, Alie Ward here. Brand-new, shiny episode. Welcome to Spooktober. Every year, we've aimed to make *Ologies* kind of creepier, this year is going to be no exception. We've got some really great ones this month. Whooooo! ... Creepy. But let's just bust out of the cemetery gates strong with witches. We're finally doing witches!

Witchcraft, witch history, different types of witches, what it means to be a witch, witches among us, suspected celebrity witches, we got forest covens, teen movies, and so much more. We have the perfect, the *perfect* guest for this. I got an email from Lila Higgins, who I've mentioned so many times. Lila was the guest for the Entomology episode, and I talked all about her in the Field Trip: Natural History Museum episode, and recently I went on *Hidden Brains: My Unsung Hero* show and talked all about her. So, when I got an email from Lila suggesting I interview this guest, I trusted her completely, I delved into their bio, and I begged them to dial in from the southern hemisphere and be my friend.

So first off, we will discuss the term witchology, but do not come at me and tell me that I made this up because it is an established word for the study, it's in the literature; I don't make the rules. So, this witchologist has a long, long, long history with witchcraft, has been initiated as a witch and a priestess, cofounded the CloudCatcher Reclaiming WitchCamp, taught at witch camps and festivals, and events, and seminars all over the world, authored several books including *Elements of Magic*, *Magic of the Iron Pentacle*, *Ecstatic Witchcraft*, and then a new release, *The Witch Belongs to the World*, and has even created apprenticeships among all this cool stuff. So, their knowledge of the history and the context and perspectives is *so* thorough. You will love them. We had such a great, long conversation that I had to break this one into two parts just to do it justice and so that I could sleep. We cover everything from witch trials to the commercialization of witchcraft and gender and environmentalism and witch fashion.

But first, thank you to everyone supporting at Patreon.com/Ologies. You can join for a buck or more a month and submit questions. Thanks to everyone leaving reviews, which helps the show so much and I read them all. As proof, thank you, You'relojfd, who happened to write:

Alie Ward may legitimately be the closest we've gotten to a witch, there has yet to be a single bad episode in her catalog. My cat and I listen to this pod while I crochet.

I gotta say, thank you, You'relojfd because that is some stunning synchronicity with the timing there and I've got to tell you, with this episode and this guest, you really can't get any closer to getting a witch than *them*. So, I am but a girl standing in front of a witch asking them not-smart questions. But thank you all for your reviews.

On that topic, we're going to discuss some religious history too. Just a warning, we do touch on some of the historical brutality suffered by those outside of dominant religions and the stigmas faced by those worshipping or observing religions that are considered fringe. So, opinions and your spiritual or religious beliefs are yours to keep but the history of the conflicts are discussed.

Next week we're going to delve into your questions that deal, again, with witches in media, hallucinogenic plants, and broomstick legends, and sex-positive witchery, and if you're a witch or what to do if you think you might be one. But for now, get comfy, light a candle, stare at a tree, and

get ready for historical lore, dewy forests, midnight myths, lunar pratfalls, spells, cheerful nudists, awkward Uber rides, hexes, documentary suggestions, and so much more with author, speaker, spirit worker, witch, and witchologist Fio Gede Parma.

Fio: My name is Fio Gede Parma, and my pronouns are they and she.

Alie: Do you prefer one over the other, just to know, or can I kind of switch back and forth?

Fio: They is predominant, and she is very intimate, I would say.

Alie: Okay, great.

Fio: But yeah, they're both out there.

Alie: Okay, cool. Well awesome, I'm so excited to talk to you. So, first off, is witchologist the right term, how are we doing on that? What's the verdict?

Fio: Well, I've never-

Alie: Would we say? *[both laugh]* Have you ever used that term?

Fio: No, I haven't but for the purposes of now, yes. *[laughs]*

Alie: *[laughs]* I was on a deep dive last night. Some people have used wikkology, other people have used magiology for the study of magic in general. I wonder if among the community there's a preferred term because paganology is too broad.

Fio: Yeah, it's a very broad umbrella, and not all witches would even consider ourselves to be under it, although we intersect with it. I would just say, witch. There are people who academically study the history of witchcraft and the modern practice of it, and I'm a practitioner who definitely is a total nerd, *[Alie laughs]* and I definitely am devoted to the historical and folkloric study of the craft, that is true. So, I guess witchologist *would* be the term.

Alie: I know there are people that are going to say that we made it up, but I looked, and that term has been used all over the internet and in books.

Fio: That's great.

Alie: People are using it.

Fio: I'm so happy about that.

Alie: *[laughs]* And from what I understand, your interest and your experience in this goes way back.

Aside: Fio knew they were a witch before I even had a favorite cheese so, respect.

Fio: I guess so although I would argue that a lot of young 11- and 12-year-olds, I think a lot of passionate, nerdy, intrinsic, kind of, compulsive obsessions do start when we're quite young. But for sure, I knew I was a witch when I was 11, which is a very interesting experience to realize you're something and then to try to figure that out with the resources at hand. Luckily for me, I was part of a family where magic and spirit work and mediumship and divination was already embedded in our lives but from a different kind of perspective, from a non-Western perspective, from a Balinese perspective.

Aside: So, Fio was born in Bali to an Australian mom of Irish, Scottish, and English descent and their father is from Bali.

Alie: And I understand, your father was also involved in healing and things like that?

Fio: He still is, yeah. He lives in Bali, and he is absolutely involved in traditional healing, and he is a spirit worker. So, that's a term I would use broadly to cover anyone who works with the mysterious ones or the spirits in order to do, well, anything. But usually, if they're a community healer, they're involved in healing and repair work and these people perform and enact really essential traditional roles in traditional societies. That is part of the role of the witch and has been for a long time, but the witch is also a provocateur in society and a transgressor of social limits that are imposed by the dominant culture, whether that's the church, or imperialism, or anything of that kind of like, control, top-down order.

Aside: So, witches, historically speaking, they fuck shit up in the name of speaking truth to power. But let's get back to their past.

Alie: And what happened at 11 where that kind of light went on for you?

Fio: A whole series of things happened, I guess. At that time, there was a lot in popular culture that was kind of revving up in the late- '90s where there was, I guess, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, there was *Harry Potter*, there was *Charmed*...

[clip from Charmed]

Hear now the words of the witches,

The secrets we hid in the night,

The oldest of gods are invoked here,

The great work of magic is sought.

... you know, all of this stuff. And I was looking at all of this fantastical, whatever, and I was like, "Oh, what is that?" There are often hints of actual magical practice insight because even *The Craft*, they had a technical advisor who was a witch.

[clip from The Craft]

Nancy: It is better that you should rush upon this blade than enter this circle with fear in your heart. How do you enter?

Sara: With perfect love and perfect trust.

Nancy: That's a girl. As above, so below.

Like, that famous cult movie, *The Craft*. So, you can sometimes see, "Oh, they've definitely gone to someone." And in retrospect, I realized they had. Like, an actual witch. *[Alie laughs]* But there were certain things they would do or say, and I was like, "That reminds me of something," and even though I hadn't yet done that in this life, things that they were doing, saying, their rituals, it sung to something kind of primordial in me, it was a whole self-knowing. And this is quite common for witches, to kind of feel that click into place, although it can happen at any age. And then I just fully dove in, I fully dove in. And there were a series of, like... as well as this, it did come with some interesting spirit phenomena which really woke me up to it. *["Spooky."]*

Alie: Did you have dreams where people visited you? Did you have any visions? Did you hear anything? Were things misplaced in different areas?

Fio: I mean the misplaced stuff is incidental but yeah, definitely all of the above. I would see spirits in the house and then my mother would be like, "Oh yes, I've seen that spirit too," and then describe the exact same being.

Alie: So, any that you like sharing, or do you like keeping most of them personal?

Fio: Well, some of them are very personal but, you know, I grew up in a very haunted house. My mother, my sister, my father, and I, when he would visit from Bali, we would all perceive and see the spirits. So, it was all of us, very different personality traits would be seeing and experiencing these things. So, it was very corroborative in that sense.

Alie: And now, from 11, you weren't just like, "Cool, I'm a witch. See ya!" You went on, in your young teen years, organized covens. Like, you were in the mix, right?

Fio: Yeah, I was a little freak. Yes.

Alie: *[laughs]* Overachieving witch.

Fio: Yeah, I really did do weird shit like that, that's true.

Alie: *[laughs]* What made you, kind of, get inspired to take more of a leadership role? Did you just feel like it was in you and you had a lot to give?

Fio: It definitely felt like it was in me. I remember being a 15-year-old and I'd been going to this Pagans in the Park thing, it's called, those events kind of exist in different cities and towns. But I met all these witches who were decades older than me, and they were very... I don't know, some of them were interesting to me but a lot of them didn't seem to be practicing the magic that I wanted to practice so I just started running my own rituals and inviting them and they were like, "Okay, you're running the rituals now." *["You're in charge."]* So, they would just come.

People decades older than me would come to my rituals and, I don't know, that felt very bolstering, and they all gave me great feedback, and obviously I was working it out as I was going and then I did end up getting traditional training. But I did a lot of trial and error, and I made a lot of mistakes, and I blew some things up. *[Alie laughs]* But it's okay, that's also a very common kind of teen witch story, the trying of many rituals and spells, and blowing things up. *[chuckles]*

Alie: *[laughs]* You actually lived the life of a teen witch.

Fio: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

Alie: I hope you've seen that movie; tell me you've seen *Teen Witch*.

Fio: I have, I have actually. *[laughs]*

Alie: Ahh! My god, the rap scene in that, is there anything like it on Earth?

Fio: I don't know. That movie is frozen in a time capsule for sure. *[both laugh]* *["You're one of us." "Me? ... A witch?"]*

Alie: There's a rap scene that I just, like, I hope they play it at my funeral because it's something that deserves to be heard. It's so powerful *[Fio laughs]* in the "Oh my god, what is going on right now?" kind of way. *["Top that, well stop that. I don't really give a [pause] about tryin' to top that, Top that."]* *[laughs]* It's beautiful.

Fio: I feel like that whole movie is like that. *[Alie laughs]*

Aside: So, that actress, Mandy Ingber, is now Jennifer Aniston's yoga instructor and the reason I know that is because I did a bunch of her yoga videos, Yogalosophy and I was like, "This teacher is pretty funny, and pretty down-to-earth. Looks so familiar! Did I work with her? Did I serve her in a restaurant? Did I date her brother?" And then I googled her, and my brain fell right out of my butt because hello, *Teen Witch*. Anyway...

Alie: I'm sure that you get this a lot, but can you describe, let's say you were at a cocktail party and someone says, "Oh, you're a witch? What does that mean?" What is a witch?

Fio: [sighs] Yeah, yeah. Yes.

Alie: Heavy sigh, heavy sigh.

Fio: Yes, because it's complicated. A witch is... I do have an answer but there's a lot to unpack in there. [laughs] A witch is an ecstatic magical spirit worker who, I believe, not every witch would agree with me, is inherently anti-oppression and anti-imperialist. Our magic, witch magic, because there's other kinds of magic, witches' magic comes up from the ground and it comes from the poor and the marginalized and it is magic that requires intimacy with the elements of life, it requires getting dirty, it requires sensuality. So, a witch is a transgressive ecstatic spirit worker. And then you'd have to break all of those concepts down for people.

Aside: So, there are many folks who would self-identify as witches with a huge, big variety of sects and sources. And then there are others who would be labeled witches who do not consider themselves witches. And in some cultures, a witch or a sorcerer is someone who uses magic or psychic abilities just to do harm, whereas a shaman or a witch doctor is thought to use the same powers but to heal others. But then some religions get a bee in their bonnet with that because they're like, "If there is a power not derived from our single God, then it must be drawing from the power of Satan," so they label anyone who practices witchcraft as satanist. And witches are like, "Get it right my brother, that is not it."

Now, in the subreddit, Witches versus Patriarchy, I found a lively discussion of what is a witch and it included popular comments such as, "If you are trying to affect the universe, you are witching." And "As a grandson of the Caribbean diaspora, I think of the *abuelas* and aunties that made the voyage to places like New York and still held onto traditions." Another person said, "I'm a secular witch and I don't believe in any sort of supernatural power or cosmic energy or anything, but I do try to send good out into the universe, if only because it makes me feel better." Another person chimed in with this historical look at what makes a witch saying:

At one time if you were an educated or independent woman, you were a witch whether you asked for it or not. If you were of childbearing age but chose not to get married to a male, you were a witch, whether you asked for it or not.

But an overall take was, "You feel like a witch? You are a witch. No actual magic required."

Now, in the US and the UK and around the world, folks who are Wiccan or neo-Pagan will use the term witch but unlike perceptions of witches doing harm, their core tenant is "Do no harm," and they tend to approach things sociologically as progressive and in harmony with ecology which, if you ask me, has a lot of parallels with many environmental researchers and scientists I know.

Either way, let us traipse through the garden of vocab and smell the words "transgressive ecstatic spirit worker," in case those are not words that your iPhone predictive text would expect you to use frequently. So, transgressive means that you have kind of an outsider perspective to cultural norms; maybe you challenge, even violate them on principle. So, you're like a rebel with a cause, maybe even a rebel with a coven. Now, ecstatic isn't just being so happy, like, "I'm ecstatic to have found a parking spot at Trader Joe's on a Sunday." But ecstatic like, in a state of ecstasy; maybe a shift in your consciousness or maybe rhythmic sounds have put you in kind of a trance, or you're just in the zone, you're feeling connected, you're in flow. Now, a spirit worker, more straightforward, it's someone who is like, "Yeah, I fuck with spirits. I check in with them about my magic business and we are cool."

Now, you can also see Fio's own book, *Ecstatic Witchcraft: Magick, Philosophy and Trance in the Shamanic Craft*. I'll link that in the show notes but it's out of print right now so you can find it in used bookstores, you can also preorder the re-release which will be out next August of 2024. But

this book offers a less casual, a more in-depth view of this because I'm just mostly... I'm a curious ape with a search engine, that's why we're here.

Alie: Do you ever try to approach it differently depending on who you're talking to and how familiar they are with some of those concepts?

Fio: I have. But then I'm like, well, I feel like I'm half telling the truth, right? I never tell anyone I'm a witch in public because you never know who you're going to come across. If I'm sitting in an Uber and someone asks what I do, I never tell them what I do. I might say I teach meditation, which is not true, but I don't want them to fully know because there's a lot of prejudice and there's a lot of misconceptions and I never know if I'm sitting in a car with a fundamentalist religious Christian or something. So, if I'm being a bit spicier, I'll go, "Oh yeah, witches, we cast spells," because people ask that question, I'm like, "Yeah, we absolutely do that." Not all of us venerate deities but we venerate mysterious forces, that's for sure, like the darkness between the stars, the Earth herself, the water, the rain, the storm, and we work with those elemental primordial forces to achieve change in this world.

Aside: Okay, listen, some history. So, there are a lot of types of Judeo-Christian religions and if there was a bar trivia category about them, I would fail at it, I would be of no use to the team. I'm not a scholar on this, nor have we even covered theology. But from what I understand, ye old Bible has some great ideas and some ethos on how to treat other people, those parts seem great. I myself was raised Catholic, TBH it wasn't for me, did not like it. Also, some flavors of religion have been co-opted by people who may not have had the best intentions toward folks that they did not agree with or could not convert. But Deuteronomy, Old Testament, says that "Anyone who casts spells who is a medium or a spiritist or who consults the dead," anyone who does these things, "is detestable to the Lord." The Lord is pissed and so some Pagan gatherings and witchy festivals are often the target of Bible and bullhorn-bearing protestors.

Now, there are also some Torah verses that are not fans of witchery, like one verse stating, "You shall not allow a sorceress to live." That seems pretty straightforward. And in some Islamic and Muslim communities, magic is used but in others, it's thought to be evil.

Now, fundamentalist Christian, I'm so sorry, I had to look up what this meant. But that is a movement that stresses biblical literalism, Bible is fact. But fundamentalist groups tend not to be the biggest fans of witches either. So, in order to promote day-to-day harmony, sometimes people who are part of an invisible minority just keep things close to the velvet and lace vest. And as the holiday season approaches, many of us do this with relatives who don't believe in science. So, you get it.

Alie: And do you ever feel like there is, culturally at least, Western, do you feel like there is a big gulf between science and spirituality? And where do you feel like being a witch or practicing that craft fits in between that?

Fio: I do think that colonized Western society is deeply reductive. There's nuance and complexity everywhere but overall, I would say the paradigm in the West is dualistic and reductive, by which I mean that there's this idea of a body-spirit split that doesn't exist in most traditional, primary, or Indigenous cultures. So, the witch really, in Western capitalist society is actually really provoking a memory of that not being true. The body is all there is, but the body is deeper, wilder, and richer than we're taught. It's not an automaton, it's not a mode that moves through a chaotic machine. That's just not what body is.

Aside: If you're like, "this seems like a real problem," it is. And it's called the mind-body problem. Back in the day, we're talking, like, 1600s, a scientist and philosopher named René Descartes who

had an amazing French girl, long bob, or lob, great bangs, was all about something called dualism which was like, "Listen, you've got the body which is here sitting on a tufted chaise, maybe farting, and then you've got the mind, which is not the brain, but it's this thinking, feeling thing made of this whole other substance, a soul, if you will." That is what Descartes was all about.

So, connecting with your body, it's important for everyone because then you can take big deep breaths when you're stressed, you can eat when you're hungry, you can stop scrolling on a tiny computer device and maybe just go lay in the soft dirt and say, "Wow, I'm a whole hog animal. I'm not just a thinky contraption in a fleshy mech suit. What a world!"

Fio: And so, witchcraft is also deeply somatic and body-based, but we understand body in a very animistic sensual way. So, the split between spirituality and science is kind of manufactured. Something I often tell people is that most humans on this planet experience spirits, most humans, and that's normal and common and most humans, to this day, believe magic has efficacy. That's just true, that's true in most countries in the world. It's actually rarer to have a country where that is not the case.

Alie: What kind of witchy things do you think happen to us that some of us, especially in colonized Western culture, don't even pick up on?

Fio: You know, you raise a really good point. A lot of people see spirits and would never know because they think spirits will appear in, like, a mass of lights and there will be some weird tune or song that suddenly goes on. *[Alie laughs]* You are probably walking past spirits that you are seeing out of the corner of your eye or full-on, every day of your life on the street, on the bus, on the subway, and you would never know. You would never know. *[chuckles]* And to kind of bring it really down to the point, the trees are spirits, the mountains are spirits, the rivers are spirits, the birds, they're spirits, the insects are spirits, fungi, us, are constellations of consciousness. They are all spirits to us.

Aside: So, some folks describe this as animism which comes from the Latin for life, or soul. So, animated people are really lively, and animation, or anime, is static pictures brought to life. Spiritually though, animism means that everything is imbued with a spirit, and if you're like, "Uhh whatever," then why in French is a chair feminine but an armchair is masculine? We may never know.

But the term animism, it has kind of a dark past and there are forms of animism that are dead, so to speak. Old animism refers to scholars in the 1800s describing the spiritual beliefs of so-called primitive societies because, unlike a lot of Western monotheistic religions, many Indigenous cultures recognized the spirits in what then scientists would argue is just a rock, that thing's not alive. But then a new animism emerged as kind of a reclaiming. And trust me, there's a whole deep dive on this, we could do an entire episode. But the basics are the split between "I am me, a person, and it is the rest of the non-persons in the world," versus an "I, thou" kind of relationship meaning, "I am me, and I am a part of the rest of the systems of Earth, both with human persons and other things, and objects." Now, Fio continues...

Fio: And so, a spirit is not some discarnate entity, right? It's a living buzzing center of agency. So, the reality is that all of this is happening all of the time, and witches, we pay attention, we lean in, and we cultivate conscious co-partnership with these beings to do all kinds of things. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence for the impact of the moon, so much. The moon is very big in witchcraft. My mother is a nurse and I know many nurses and they all say the same thing about the full moon. It's like anecdotal folk wisdom.

Alie: ERs get packed. *[laughs]*

Fio: Yeah! And that weirder things happen. My mother has always said that people take more risks on the full moon, risky accidents happen on the full moon.

Alie: *[laughs]* You're like, "I will change the lightbulb in the high-ceilinged living room. It's a full moon."
[giggles]

Fio: Exactly.

Alie: "I will make a cucumber salad with the sharpest knife." *[laughs]* Those are mine.

Fio: Exactly, just little things like that. Also, synchronicity, you know, what Carl Jung called synchronicity, that does happen to most people, and I think increasingly, people do pay attention to synchronicities.

Aside: Synchronicities, in Jungian psychology are, in Jung's words, "Meaningful coincidences of two or more events when something other than the probability of chance is involved." So, kind of a "Eugheyah!" *[phonetic]* goosebumpy, kind of moment, or something just cool and spooky. And you can say, "Weird," and just chalk it up to chance, or maybe you say, "Weeeeird! *[softly]* What are the chances? What are the chances?"

Now, if you're an ER healthcare worker, hello, and thank you for doing what you do. But you might attest to things getting a little wacky when the moon is in full effect, but statisticians might disagree with you.

I found this list of maybe 100 studies trying to connect full moons with accidents and births and death rates and conception rates. Only a few of these studies, out of like 100, found any connection such as the 2016 study, "Secular pattern of aneurysmal rupture with the lunar cycle and season," that found a significantly greater risk of an aneurysm rupture during a new moon and full moon compared to other lunar phases. And there was this 2021 study, "Effects of weather and moon phases on emergency medical use after fall injury: A population-based nationwide study," and it noted that more fall injuries, you know, bailing off a ladder, whatever, happen during full moons in rural areas but there was no difference in rates in the city. So, no matter how tempting it is to paint a barn by moonlight, just take it easy; it's not worth the hospital bills. It's better to have a peeling barn than a GoFundMe all your relatives have to contribute to.

But if you're a motorcyclist, check your calendar, take the bus on the full moons because over a 40-year period, researchers found that yes, more motorcycle deaths happened on full moons and this 2017 study hopes that the data might encourage motorcyclists to ride with extra care during a full moon and more generally, to appreciate the power of seemingly minor distractions at all times. So, big, bright moon; motorists are out there trying to take pictures of it on their iPhones and then looking at their screen, wondering why their picture sucks, and then boom, you're reuniting with your grandma on an astral plane. Also, for more on the moon and why those pictures never turn out, you can see the Selenology episode all about the moon. It's a good one. But yes, synchronicities.

Fio: Which are really just are meaningful coincidence, but the thing is, it's so meaningful to the point where it becomes uncanny and a little bit scary. *[laughs]* Like, not just two things but ten things layering for instance.

Alie: Well, I wonder too, how much do you think that psychology borrows from animism or a naturism like shadow selves and things like that?

Fio: Yes, I was just saying last night to a friend of mine, almost all psychology and psychotherapy, that I know about at least, the people who founded those schools of thought and practices were deeply

immersed in occult study, astrology, alchemy; they were deeply immersed. So, that does impact the way a lot of psychological streams have evolved, for sure.

Aside: A few notables are quantum physicist, friend of Einstein and Nobel laureate Wolfgang Pauli, and psychology bigwig, Carl Jung who were both into alchemy and numerology and some real mystical shit. In 2016 there was a paper, “Are you Afraid of the Dark? Notes on the psychology of belief in histories of science and the occult” that notes that many founding fathers of psychology were into psychic stuff and parapsychology. They were like, “Hey, thoughts are in the brain. What else can the brain do? Who knows?” Literally not me. Which is why I find people who know more than me and I ask them questions that we all have such as...

Alie: What about breaking it down kind of categorically? If you are new to this or kind of taking a peek behind the curtain, can you explain some of the different types of witchery that are out there?

Fio: I can. It’s also very complex. So, the modern witchcraft revival in the West does trace back to a British civil servant named Gerald Gardner, and you can look him up, there are documentaries about him. He came out as a witch, I think he was the first person to self-declare as a witch in the modern era, I believe it was in 1951 that he did that or 1952. So, after the witchcraft law was repealed in 1951, it was definitely after that, so it probably was 1952. [*“Because while it looks like an ancient folk religion, Wicca was actually developed in the 1940s by a middle-aged nudist from the New Forest called Gerald Gardner.”*] And then he published a book called *Witchcraft Today* in 1954 which was a watershed moment because it did actually reveal... He said that he had been initiated into a witchcraft coven in the New Forest in 1939. For all intents and purposes, it does look like that did happen. It does look like there was a group of people in the New Forest...

Aside: So, the New Forest is this big-ass beautiful forest in the south of England. But the New Forest Coven was one that our friend Gerald Gardner, the so-called Father of Wicca was involved in. But yes, the New Forest Coven, 20th-century real ones.

Fio: ... Who were a mix of kind of hereditary cunning folk, which is an English term for like, village witch, kind of, a helping village witch, a white witch they would say, although that’s also a term to unpack. And then a group of Victorian Edwardian older women who had been involved in the golden dawn and ceremonial forms of magic and mysticism. And so, he published a book, so the witches that come from him—we call them traditions and lineages – they’re called Gardnerian witches. Back in the ‘50s and ‘60s, there were a lot of black and white photographs of Gardnerian and Alexandrian witches and they’re all naked because that’s a part of their tradition, so they practice their rights sky-clad or clad only by the sky, or naked. And this was deeply... Can you imagine in the ‘50s in Britain? Even in the ‘60s, it was deeply scandalizing, and witches were often in the tabloids.

Alie: Oh, I’m sure.

Fio: People were scandalized by it.

Alie: I mean, you couldn’t leave the house without a bra in those days without getting arrested.

Fio: Yes.

Aside: Okay, I meant that as hyperbole, but I found myself on the Wikipedia article titled “Bralessness,” and found that even in 2019, a woman in Iran was arrested for public bralessness and had to sign a pledge that she’d never do it again. But yeah, even during the 1940s, a lady could straight up get arrested for wearing pants. And the US Senate didn’t let female representatives wear trousers until Bill Clinton was in office. So, any lads out there wanting to wear dresses or skirts, please go for it, just do it. The world will catch up! Maybe even sooner if you do.

Fio: And a lot of the younger – especially in the ‘60s with a whole other movement of witches called Alexandrian witches which come down from Alex and Maxine Sand, Alex died in 1988 but Maxine is still alive and lives in London – but there were a lot of pretty, young witches. And people were so into it because they were naked, and it was very intense. So, that’s a stream of witchcraft that people call Wicca which is a term for a particular form of British witch. I am not a part of that lineage.

Then there are other witches like fairy witches, which I am a part of that lineage, and that developed in the United States in the ‘30s and ‘40s. That’s a different kind of witchcraft, we don’t necessarily work naked, we don’t work with the polarity of masculine and feminine in the same way that the Gardnerians and Alexandrians might.

And then there are all kinds of other witches; eclectic witches who pick from here, there, and everywhere; there are reclaiming witches, I’m also part of that tradition. It’s a very eco-feminist political tradition that started in the California Bay Area. Starhawk is one of the main theologians and mothers of that tradition and she’s a very famous witch who has ended up becoming very active– She was always an activist, but she’s become very much a permaculturalist and goes and teaches in Palestine to this day about permaculture and Earth-based spirituality. And then there are Dianic witches, they are women-only. Some of them are very, like, I would say deeply transphobic, to be honest. And then there are the Dianic witches who embrace all women. In witchcraft too, like any subculture or strand of whatever, there’s a lot of human complexity. [*“That’s one way to put it.”*] And there’s a lot of different kinds of witches.

And then if you look out of the anglophone, English-speaking areas, you’re going to find all these other kinds of traditional Brazilian witches and Mexican witches, although they would say *bruja*, *brujo*. There’s a whole renaissance of Mexican and Chicana people embracing their witch traditions, and Black folks in the States embracing their African-based diasporic hoodoo traditions. So, witchcraft is a huge, huge thing and it’s not... I think some people, maybe even in witchcraft, think of it as very European, obviously ‘witch’ is just so European. But to be honest, the word suits any, as I said, any transgressive ecstatic spirit worker who is working with primordial forces and witches have always existed in every culture.

Aside: So, next week we’ll be back with so many good questions, but this was such a chonk of an episode we had to break it up into two so make sure that you’re subscribed or follow the show on your podcast app so you get Part 2 as soon as it comes out next week. Meanwhile, we’ll learn more from Fio in a second. But first, we’ll go to a quick break from sponsors of the show who make it possible to donate twice to a cause of Fio’s choosing which is Mudgin-Gal Women’s Group which is a leader in family violence prevention, and they are an Aboriginal service that is completely staffed and managed by Aboriginal women, and they provide early intervention and vital services for vulnerable women in the Sydney community. So, we’ll link to their site in the show notes, and again, that donation was possible by sponsors of *Ologies*.

[*Ad Break*]

All right, so next week we’re going to delve into your questions about witches and media and hallucinogenic broomsticks, sex-positive witchery, and if you’re a witch, or what to do if you think you might want to be one. But first, back to the basics and the history.

Alie: How long do you think the notion of a spiritual, kind of, spooky healer [*Fio laughs*] that people want to repress has been around? Has it been around ever since one person in a small gathering of humans knew that a certain herb could help a rash? Has it just been around since one person seemed to have powers that another didn’t?

Fio: I think so. I love what you just said, I'm like, maybe that's the new definition of witch, a spiritual spooky healer. I love it. Because to be fair, that's true. I'm thinking of one of my friends right now who is a long-time witch who would love that definition. [*Alie laughs*] But I do believe that... Yes, yes. The answer is yes, you articulated it very well.

Alie: Perfect. And you know, you brought up something too about some groups being more transphobic. Can you speak a little bit about gender inclusion in witchcraft and what historically the perspective on that has been?

Fio: Yes, well let's talk about the witch trials, right? We have to. That's a really big piece of this. So, the witch trials happened for about 350 years. There were some in the late 15th century, but in the 1500s, 1600s, and into the 1700s. We probably know of 100,000 that were executed but many more were accused and died in prison and stuff.

Now, 80% of these people were assigned female at birth, were women in their societies. So, we know then that witchcraft has been historically connected to feminine magic and to women's power. But the thing is, there are all the revisionist ideas about this, and yes, misogyny is totally part of the witch trials and it's a big but it's not the only part. Christian societies were absolutely terrified of magic.

Aside: Fio emphatically hit the table with their finger just passionately making the point.

Fio: Absolutely. And previous to Christianity existing, Rome, Vikings, all these other Pagan, pre-Christian societies were terrified of witches too. And one of the reasons they were terrified is because yes, it was women's power, and it was grassroots anarchistic power. It wasn't always linked to the temples or to the top-down religious hierarchies or social hierarchies, it was out of the box, it was beyond the hedge, in the forest, in the wildwood. And at the same time, we have evidence of terms from pre-Christian Viking or Norse societies, like *ergi* in English letters, it refers to the feminine behavior of men, like, if you practice sorcery or witchcraft, you're *ergi*, you're basically queer, you're queer.

So, in the gender history of witchcraft, the body of the witch has always been deeply femme and deeply queer. And then if you look at woodcuts, the folkloric representation of witches' sabbats or secret conclaves or revels, you'll always see naked, sometimes clothed, sometimes naked, voluptuous, haggard, beautiful forms, all mixing together with antlered gods and old women holding snakes and cauldrons. They are some of the most beautiful pieces of art from Europe, I think. The fascination with the witches' sabbat has formed so much good art. You can see, in what a lot of Europeans would have been horrified by, you can see the queer orgiastic beauty of it all and there's a lot of un-gendering in it. I would argue that the witches' sabbat as a kind of motif is actually about the dissolution of the boundaries between so-called humans and so-called animals, between masculine and feminine, between up and down, left and right.

So, just on an artistic historical level to look at that period of time and to see what was being represented as witchcraft, it's actually deeply about the provocation of binary gender and it's about men or cis-men's fear of feminine power that's coming up from the underworld. That's the other thing, you said spooky so I will say, most witchcraft is totally coming up from the underworld. A lot of other religions always gesture upwards to the, you know, as if God or whatever is living upstairs somehow. But a lot of our power we call up from the underworld and historically and in many cultures to this day, the underworld is not a place of, like... People would maybe link that with the idea of a Christian Hell, but for most cultures, the underworld is a place of wisdom and mystery and power. It's also where the seeds germinate, it's where the fungi, you know... So, for us, it's power.

Alie: I was going to say, yeah. We couldn't even grow zucchini without Earth's crust. *[laughs]* And we return to it when we die, unless we get, you know, shot into space or something, which is very expensive. *[laughs]*

Fio: *[laughs]* Wow.

Alie: You need to get a good Groupon for that. Yeah. *[laughs]* I'm wondering too, in terms of, pop culturally, I always think of the movie *The VVitch* or you know, *Game of Thrones*, or something where the worst thing a femme can be is really hot, and then boom! Just kidding, they're an ugly hag. That is more scary to people than, like, plane crashes and zombies and getting your throat slit with a medieval sword. The worst thing that can happen is someone who you thought was hot is an old lady. *[laughs]*

Fio: Oh my god, that is so funny.

Alie: That is the absolute horror of the male gaze. But where did this idea of witches as hags come from? These bedraggled, need a root-touch-up kind of women?

Aside: I'm asking that because I need a root touch-up, if I'm honest.

Fio: Well, I think there are actually many answers, one is actually a very fucked up answer. So, there is some evidence to suggest that one of the roots of the popular, kind of, iconography of an old haggard witch with a broken crooked nose, dah-dah-dah dah-dah dah-dah, with a particular kind of hat, is actually deeply antisemitic. *[Alie exclaims]* Yeah, truly. In that time period, there were many pogroms and many, many Jewish people being slaughtered in the streets. And we know that Christians, which formed the majority of Europe, they were deeply, deeply suspicious of Jewish people and they called them sorcerers, they called them Satanists. And interestingly, a lot of the early ways of referring to witches' gatherings, they called them synagogues. *[Alie gasps]* They also called them sabbaths, which is literally also antisemitic.

Aside: Not a history that I was familiar with, and I don't like it. And if you're like, "What even is or was sabbat in relation to witchery?" Well, many people think it's a yearly midnight gathering just to hang with the devil. There was this book from 1608 that described these conferences in the woods with, "Attendants riding flying goats, trampling the cross, and being re-baptized in the name of the devil, while giving their clothes to him, kissing his behind, and dancing back-to-back." So, people thought there were like, big, naked witch geggars doing do-si-do while kissing the Beelzebub's bottom. *["Wow, it sounds like quite a party out there"]* Very fertile imaginations.

But now the sabbat is observed by the Wiccan tradition as celebrating solar cycles, like the equinoxes, or the solstice, or just the harvest, kind of not unlike your family's spring and winter gatherings but probably better fashion choices, I don't know. Or maybe more naked people, I don't know what your family does.

Fio: So, a lot of the European lore of witches is deeply antisemitic, like, put on witch practitioners by Europe, or put on those accused of witchcraft by Christian Europe. Obviously, again, very top-down.

But then the other thing is that older women are the elders of most traditional societies, so when you have these healers, which again, if you go to a rural part of Greece or France, of many European nations, anywhere in the world, you will find the veneration of older women and they're the lore keepers. But when you have a hierarchy of men representing a male god, you can't have that anymore. You can't have older women being so revered and centered for their authority and sovereignty and magic. And certainly, also the grandmother hag is one of the most- And I say hag as one of the best things you could possibly be. *[Alie laughs]* But a grandmother hag is like a

primordial force that many witches venerate; one of the titles for the primordial mystery is Grandmother. So, we call her that.

Alie: You know, so many people I know want to know this so I'll ask it before we even get to Patreon questions because I would be reading their names off for, like, an hour. I mean, you obviously came from a background of this and you knew at a young age, but so many people want to know, how do I know if I'm a witch or if I'm just normcore? [*Fio laughs*] Or what if I want to become a witch?

Fio: Yeah. I did a radio interview the other day where somebody asked a similar question. I think interest in witchcraft goes in cycles, right? And certainly, when the Earth, I mean, the Earth is in catastrophe, the climate crisis is awful, so intense. And witchcraft and magic, it's almost like it's revived when things are really intense. So yeah, there's a lot of interest right now.

I would say that, look, there's no litmus test. If you are a person who is sitting there, reading about witchcraft, or looking at witchcraft, or feeling into witchcraft and you're like, "Oh my god, I want this so bad, this is me," then you're a witch! Go for it! Not everyone is sitting there thinking that by the way, [*Alie laughs*] so if you're sitting there focusing on that, you probably are a witch.

And it does require, I will say, witchcraft is also a discipline as much as it is a phenomenon. So, the magical discipline of witchcraft, and it looks different on different people, it does require a lot of focus, a lot of surrender, a lot of near-obsession. [*both laugh*] You've got to *really* want it because there's so much to study, there's so much to do, there's so much to take in, in the world, in the cosmos. So, I would say, all humans can practice magic, but I will say not all humans are witches, but all humans can practice magic. So, go learn. [*"Gotta hit the books, you hit the books."*]

I'm one of the witches who does this, there are many witches out there who have public, open community classes and they're for beginners. In the reclaiming tradition, we have a class called Elements of Magic, it's literally the elements of magic and the elements of life, earth, air, fire, water, and spirit and we teach the basic foundational ecstatic tools of relating to the elements of life, of grounding and centering yourself, of being able to sense and perceive life force or magical power, being able to shape it and cast spells, being able to run your own ritual, cast a circle, step between the worlds, enter a trance state, invoke a deity, invoke a spirit. So, we teach all of that; you can come and take it.

Those tools, I believe, are revolutionary and radical for anyone. Anyone can come to the witches, please come to the witches and drink from our cauldron because I think those tools are good for anyone to be honest. But whether or not that person will then become a witch priestess or an initiate or a full-on, just, card-carrying witch, that's up to you, that's up to you and your desire and focus. Yeah. That's what I would say.

Alie: Are there classes, like, at the community center, or do you have to go on a forum somewhere?

Fio: Sometimes there are classes in community centers, sometimes there are classes at universities. All you have to do – specifically for the class I just mentioned, they're taught in at least five continents – is type in "Elements of Magic class," and you'll find it, they're around. You don't have to enter a private forum to find that information for sure. And there are just so many witches out there now offering public work.

Alie: Lovely! Can I ask you some questions from patrons?

Fio: Yes, of course.

Alie: They have such good ones.

So, ask very smart people not-smart questions because honestly, those are the best ones. And next week, patrons, we'll be asking yours in Part 2 of Witchology, so spread the word. Make sure that on your podcast app that you hit follow or whatever, so you get it as soon as it comes out. And thank you so much to Fio for being on twice. Links to their latest book, *The Witch Belongs to the World: A Spell of Becoming*, as well as their social media and website are all in the show notes as well as to the charity of choice this week.

We are @Ologies on Instagram and Twitter. *Smologies* are shorter, kid-friendly versions of classic episodes, those are linked in the show notes as well, they're up at AlieWard.com/Smologies. Thank you, Zeke Rodrigues Thomas and Mercedes Maitland for editing those. Thank you, Erin Talbert, for adminning the *Ologies* Podcast Facebook Group. Thank you, Emily White of The Wordary who makes our professional transcripts. Noel Dilworth is our scheduling producer, Susan Hale is our managing director, Kelly R. Dwyer makes the website. And we would meet up in a dark forest anytime with lead editor Mercedes Maitland of Maitland Audio. Nick Thorburn did the theme music.

And if you stick around until the end of the episode, I tell you a secret and this week it's that when I was a goth teenager, we went to this club in Alameda, in the East Bay in northern California. Some of you might be going, “[gasps] Really? Is it? Is it?” Okay, it was this old movie theater that was a dance club, and it was called The Twilight Zone, or we just called it The Zone, and I discovered there's a Facebook group for people who used to go, and I was like, “Gahhh! Is there a photo album?” and there was. And I was looking through all these photos and I was like, “I remember that couch, it smelled so bad,” and I got socked with a nostalgia bomb so hard, just a flood of “Wow, that era was the best.” Just piling in your friend's dead grandpa's old sedan, some idiot smoking cloves in the back seat, no phones, you're just lurching around to the soundtrack for *The Crow*. Anyway, people in college used to ask me if I dressed like the girls from *The Craft* and I was like, “I had all these plaid skirts and a bad dye job before that movie came out, you attractive, well-adjusted jock.” Anyway, nostalgia, excited for Part 2. Happy Spooktober. Berbye.

Transcribed by Aveline Malek at TheWordary.com

Links to things we discussed:

[An Interview With Pat Devin: Consultant for “The Craft”](#)

[The Real-Life Witch Who Heavily Influenced The Craft](#)

[“The Worst Witch” trailer](#)

[“Teen Witch” trailer](#)

[Teen Witch Movie CLIP - Top That! Rap](#)

[Reimagining Witchcraft as a Refuge for Marginalized Groups](#)

[How to make a thousand witches with one Supreme Court decision](#)

[On the Meaning of the Words “Witch,” “Witchcraft,” and “Sorcery”](#)

[Wikipedia: Gerald Gardner](#)

[Gerald B. Gardner's ‘Witchcraft Today’ \(1954\)](#)

[The Secret Pioneer Of Witchcraft In Britain | Wicca Man Gerald Gardner | Absolute History](#)

[Witch Magazine Cover, UK, 1960s](#)

[The Antisemitic History of Witches](#)

[Lecture: "Witch Trials and Antisemitism: A Surprisingly Tangled History"](#)

[PDF Download: "Imagining the Witch: A Comparison between Fifteenth-Century Witches within Medieval Christian Thought and the Persecution of Jews and Heretics in the Middle Ages"](#)

["Animism" Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology](#) by Nurit Bird-David

[Why Do Witches Ride Brooms? \(NSFW\)](#)

[The History Of Jack-O'-Lanterns + Make Your Own Dippy Jack-O'-Lantern](#)

[What Is Animistic Witchcraft?](#)

[Witchcraft beliefs around the world: An exploratory analysis](#)

[Islam and magic](#)

[Descartes mind-body problem](#)

[Globalization of the magic concept](#)

[Belief in Luck and Precognition Around the World](#)

[Study finds that magical belief varies around the world](#)

[Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle](#)

[Bralessness](#)

[Trousers as women's clothing](#)

["Incantation" by Alice Hoffman](#)