

And if it harms none, do as thou wilt:

**How the Dewey Decimal Classification System Devalues and Diasporises Wiccan Religious
Literature**

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It wouldn't be a leap to say that Melvil Dewey's Dewey Decimal Classification was and is, inherently biased. Librarians such as Sanford Berman and Hope Olson have been decrying its mistreatment of women, homosexuals, the poor and fiction in general for years. Hope Olson describes, "the white, male, eurocentric, Christian, heterosexual, able-bodied, bourgeois presence [as] the mainstream and hence, the universal from which all else is a deviation" (1997, p. 183). These mistreatments have their champions in the form of librarians and activists, but even so there is a subsection of the DDC that has been overlooked; and not even overlooked so much as actively pushed aside as unimportant. Books on witchcraft have been, since the inception of the DDC, placed in a demeaning and disrespectful shelf location. Nestled in between mental derangements, delusions and mesmerism during the first half of the 20th century, and demonology and astrology in the latter half (Dewey, 1894; Webdewey, 2012). Since then, witchcraft (now commonly called Wicca) has been recognized as a religion by the federal government, and yet the DDC has insisted on keeping half of the Wiccan literature housed in the 133's and the other half in the 299's or "other religions" (Church and School of Wicca, 2006). The DDC's bias toward any religion other than Christianity disperses and scatters the Wiccan literature and applies negative terminology to the classifying of Wiccan books.

Looking at the progression of witchcraft to Wicca, while simultaneously tracing the growth and development of the DDC, one can see just how slow acceptance has been throughout society and how even now it is not taken as a serious as it should. In some of the most progressive public libraries across the United States half of the Wiccan collection is placed simultaneously in the 133's with witchcraft and demonology while also being represented in the 299.94's with other religions. Even if Wiccan literature wasn't spread across the library, the language that's applied

to the Wiccan designations are derogatory and demeaning. This isn't to say that there hasn't been change within the DDC. Many ignorances and prejudices have been removed over the years, but the truth is that the DDC has always been about 10 - 20 years behind the United States court systems in recognizing the equal rights of some of its patrons. In 1985, the Church and School of Wicca convinced a federal appeals court that Wicca was a religion equal to any other (2006). Yet his kind of inconsistency is in fact consistent with our culture's underlying fears and white, Christian worldview.

The atmosphere that witchcraft (and in turn, Wicca) has evolved in has been one of constant persecution and secrecy. The terms witchcraft, and witch have (for ages) been used as an excuse to abuse, oppress and intimidate women. The terms elicit negative connotations and images that stem from the media's portrayal, and many religious texts. Examples of these would be the famous line from Exodus 22:18 of the King James Edition Bible, "Thou shall not suffer a witch to live" and "A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them" from Leviticus 20:27. These two lines alone have led to thousands of people being put to death. Thomas Aquinas, in 1273 CE, argued that the world was full of evil and demons. In *Summa Theologian*, Aquinas argued that demons had a habit of, "reaping the sperm of men and spreading it among women" (Linder, 2005 para. 4); so began the association between sex and witchcraft. In the minds of Christians, demons are not only seeking their own pleasure, but are leading men into temptation. Demons quickly became associated with woman (or witches) since it was usually the woman who led *men* into temptation. Being that Eve was the first temptress, and was beguiled so easily by Satan, it wasn't a leap to make the accusation that any woman who

strays from the strict guidelines of Christian law could be considered in league with the devil and hence, a witch. During the 15th century, Europe began to see witchcraft as a crime. Torture was inflicted upon heretics in order to procure a confessions. Two friars, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger wrote *Malleus Malificarum* or “Hammer of Witches” in 1484 C.E. The document held that Christians had an obligation to hunt down and kill witches. The *Malleus* even offered hints on how to accurately discover a witch. One such hint was to strip search an accused witch to see if a mole was present, which was seen as a telltale sign of consorting with the devil. From 1500 to 1660 CE, Europe executed anywhere from 50,000 to 80,000 suspected witches. Eighty percent of those executed were women. The enlightenment led to the end of witchcraft throughout Europe, but the damage was done (Linder, 2005, para. 5-11). In the United States, the infamous Salem Witchcraft trials claimed 19 lives and reignited the hysteria (Linder, 2009, para. 1). As hard as it may be to believe the last witchcraft law was not repealed in England until 1951 (Reid, 2008, p. 17). In all the years of persecution, there has never been one proven case of a witch casting a spell or causing a storm. Instead, the church forced confessions out of individuals by means of coercion and torture. The Christian church, for almost a thousand years, controlled the state and with that power compelled citizens to distrust their own neighbors. With this power they could control the masses and weed out non-conformists.

Today, at least in western societies, witches are not put to death, but the stigma remains. Christian activists groups have attempted on many occasions to ban books such as: *Harry Potter*; *Bridge to Terabithia*, *Scary Stories*, *The Witches*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and *Carrie* on the basis of witchcraft being practiced, and “promoting Wicca ideology” (Grant, 2009). Applying the terms “witch” or “pagan” to an individual is used as an insult and condemnation. The current (and past)

ideology of the United States upholds the assumption that to be American is to be Christian. Anything outside of those confines is considered a minority and un-American. Wicca adherents are most assuredly within the parameters of minority. According to Raymond Eve (2003), “Wiccans see Christianity as a religion that originated from the myth of ancient Hebrew pastoral tribes. Such tribes were notoriously patriarchal, and Wiccans believe this patriarchy is still deeply embedded within modern Christianity” (p. 2). The terms witch, witchcraft, pagan, and Wicca still lead to misunderstandings and condemnations from the dominant ideology of the United States. We can easily see this ideology and preference at work by looking at the DDC’s 200 section of most public libraries where, “80 percent of DDC’s religion section (the 200’s) exclusively to Christianity and the existence of a separate section for American literature (the 810’s) when all other literatures are arranged by language is not surprising given the origins of this classification” (Olson, 1998, p. 234). The DDC originated during a very conservative time in American history - the late 1800’s. The manifestation of this bias and fear can be seen by looking at the progression of the subcategories and subdivisions within the DDC since its inception to present day.

In 1894 the 130’s of the DDC are housed under the Class **Philosophy**. The breakdown goes as such:

130 Mind and Body.

131 Mental physiology and hygiene.

132 Mental derangements.

133 Delusions. Witchcraft. Magic.

133.1 Apparitions. Ghosts.

133.2 Hallucinations.

133.3 Divination. Oracles. Second Sight. Omens.

Predictions.

133.4 Witchcraft. Sorcery.

133.5 Astrology.

133.6 Palmistry.

133.7 Humbugs. Quakery.

133.8

133.9 Spiritism. Table-tipping, etc.

134 Mesmerism. Clairvoyance (Dewey, 1894, p. 134).

In the 200's in 1894 it went as follows:

290 Ethnic. Non-Christian

291 Comparative & General Mythology.

292 Greek and Roman Mythology.

293 Teutonic and North'n Mythology.

294 Brahmanism. Buddhism.

295 Parseeism.

296 Judaism.

297 Mohammedanism.

298 Mormonism.

299 Minor Non-Christian Religions (Dewey, 1894, p. 286).

Almost a hundred years later in 1976, instead of **Mind and Body** at 130, there is **Anthropology**.

Also remaining is the 133 - Delusions, witchcraft, magic.

130 Anthropology.

131 Mental physiology and hygiene.

132 Mental derangements.

133 Delusions, witchcraft, magic.

134 Mesmerism (Dewey, 1976, Div. 2).

And instead of **290 Ethnic. Non-Christian**, the 1976 version removes the “ethnic” qualifier and becomes **290 Non-Christian Religions** (Dewey, 1976, Div. 3). Witchcraft (since the term “Wicca” was not used until the mid-20th century) was not present within the 290’s from 1876 to 1976 and the rest of the 200’s consisted of Christianity and its many sects.

Many changes have since occurred within the DDC. Mental Derangements at 132 has since been removed and a Wicca entry has been added to the 200’s under the **299.94 Religions based on modern revivals of witchcraft**, and yet more than half of a library’s Wiccan collection still remains housed in the 133’s surrounded by books about ghost chasers (133.9), psychic pets (133.89) and demon possessions (133N) (Multnomah County Library, 2012).

The most current edition, DDC 23, looks as such:

130 Paranormal phenomena.

131 Occult methods for achieving well-being.

132 Not assigned or no longer used.

133 Parapsychology & occultism.

133.1 Apparitions.

133.2 Parapsychological and occult aspects of specific things.

133.3 Divinatory arts.

133.4 Demonology and witchcraft.

133.43 is Magic and witchcraft.

133.5 Astrology.

133.6 Palmistry.

133.8 Psychic phenomena.

133.9 Spiritualism.

134 Not assigned or no longer used.

135 Dreams & mysteries.

136 Not assigned or no longer used.

137 Divinatory graphology.

138 Physiognomy.

139 Phrenology (Webdewey, 2012).

In 2012, in place of **130 Mind and Body** there is **130 Paranormal phenomena** and in place of 133 Delusions, witchcraft, magic the 23rd edition of the DDC offers 133 Parapsychology & occultism. Witchcraft and magic are nestled in the 133.4 along with demonology. Terms like “Wicca” or “Wiccan” are not used here, instead all we find is “occult” The word, “occult” and “occultism” are defined by *Merriam-Webster* as “matters regarded as involving the action or influence of supernatural or supernormal powers or some secret knowledge of them” (2002). Occultism references secret things, hidden things, things no “normal” person would understand. Shelving Wiccan books under the label of occultism is demeaning. In the introduction to *A Woman’s Thesaurus* it is stated that

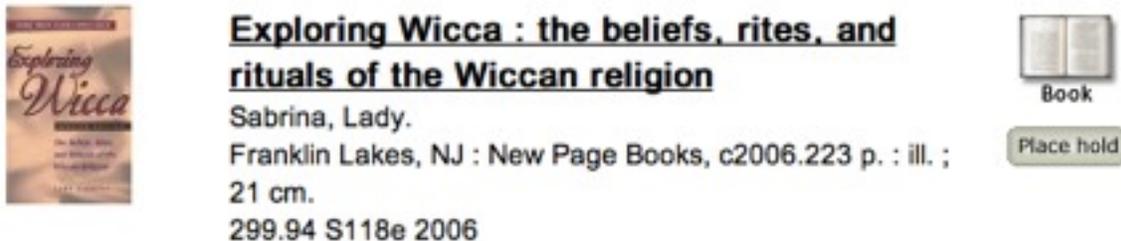
Language is one of the most intimate and most political of human activities. The power of naming in fact shapes and defines the institutions that structure so much of our lives. Attempts to standardize that naming process are intrinsically controversial, especially when they describe concepts, processes, and behavior that in themselves are attempting to redefine dimensions of the language - or at least wrench free of the assumed, often biased norms that disenfranchise significant groups and individuals in our culture (1987, p. xvi).

Shelving Wiccan literature alongside titles like *Disneystrology* at 133.5 and *Demonology and devil-lore* at 133.4 create a sense that the Wiccan books shelved at the 133.43 either have evil anti-Christian themes or are something of a hobby and not a religion (Multnomah County Library, 2012). The wording and phrases that are assigned to Wicca and to the surrounding literature of the 130’s constitute a demotion of value.

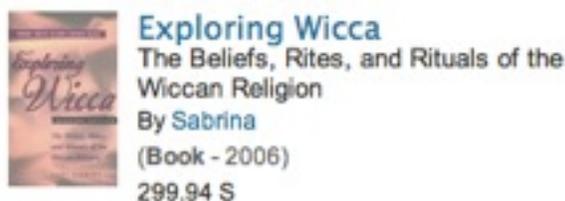
Looking at Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon and The New York Public Library in New York City another bias within the DDC surfaces when comparing the shelf location of many typical Wiccan books. These two libraries were chosen because they are both within liberal, progressive states and hold some of the largest circulation numbers in the country. If a bias can still be found within these two libraries, then smaller, less funded, more conservative libraries will almost assuredly be biased as well.

Doing an online catalog search of both libraries using the basic keyword “Wicca,” MCL yielded 53 results and NYPL 105 results. The use of the single keyword “Wicca” was chosen because it is the likeliest starting point a patron might use when attempting to find a book on the topic of Wicca. Four similar titles and one standout title were found to use as examples.

The first example is *Exploring Wicca: The Beliefs, Rites, and Rituals of the Wiccan Religion* by Lady Sabrina. The MCL entry looks like this, with the call number 299.94:



The NYPL entry is basically identical.



These two entries were both given the same call number and housed in the religions based on modern revivals of witchcraft section of the 299's.

The next example is of a book housed in the 133's at both MCL and NYPL. Before the title is given though a quick reminder from the DDC Centennial introduction explaining how to assign a call number and where to shelve a book.

The content or the real subject of which a book treats, and not the form or the accidental wording of the title, determines its place. Following this rule, a Philosophy of Art is put with Art, not with Philosophy; a History of Mathematics, with Mathematics, not with History; for the philosophy and history are simply the form which these books have taken (1976, para. 6).

The next book is *The Encyclopedia of witches, witchcraft and wicca* by Rosemary Guiley. This first image is from the MCL and the second from NYPL.



The encyclopedia of witches, witchcraft and wicca

Guiley, Rosemary.

New York : Checkmark Books, c2008.xii, 436 p. : ill. ; 28 cm.

133.4303 G956e 2008



Book

Place hold



The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca

By Guiley, Rosemary

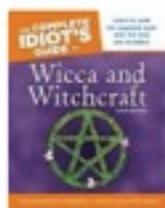
(Book - 2008)

133.4303 G

They are both shelved in the same location in the 133.43's even though it should be housed in the 299.94 which is given the actual designation of Wicca. The definition within the DDC introduction is clear that no matter how the book is set up or how it is written it should be shelved according to subject. The subject of these books is witchcraft and Wicca. While 133.43

has a place for witchcraft, it does not make allowances for Wicca, which is exactly what 299.94 does.

This next book illustrates the incongruities present within the DDC schema. The first one, *The complete idiot's guide to wicca and witchcraft* by Denise Zimmermann is shelved in the 133.43's in MCL while, *Wicca and Witchcraft for Dummies* by Diane Smith is given the call number 299.94 and housed with the Wicca religion designation.



The complete idiot's guide to wicca and witchcraft

Zimmermann, Denise.

Indianapolis, IN : Alpha, c2006.xxiii, 360 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.
133.43 Z72c 2006



Book

Place hold



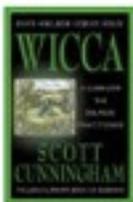
Wicca & Witchcraft for Dummies

By Smith, Diane

(Book - 2005)

299.94 S and more...

What is the difference between an idiots guide and a dummy's guide that would require them to receive different call numbers and be housed in different sections? The same discrepancies can be seen in this last comparison. The book *Wicca: a guide for the solitary practitioner* by Scott Cunningham is given a 133.43 designation at MCL and a 299C designation at NYPL.



Wicca : a guide for the solitary practitioner

Cunningham, Scott, 1956-1993.

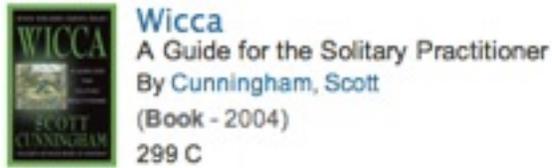
St. Paul, Minn. : Llewellyn Publications, 2005, c2004.xiv,
239 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.

133.43 C973w 2005

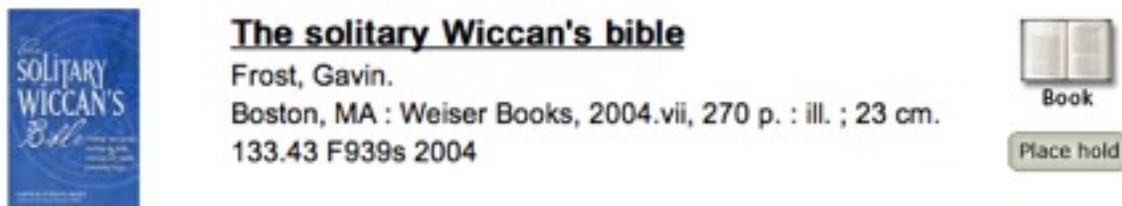


Book

Place hold



The standout title is *The solitary Wiccan's bible* by Gavin Frost. It is from the MCL. The title has the word bible in it, an important word to Christians, and yet it is not given a 299.94 call number. It isn't housed with Wicca as a religion, but instead in the 133.43 section, under the subdivision of demonology and witchcraft. (Multnomah County Library, 2012; New York Public Library, 2012).



This issue of dual location can be annoying to patrons at best, and antagonistic and cruel at worst. Half of the Wiccan literature collection is in the 133's and the other in the 299.94. When a patron enters the library looking for a book about Wiccan practices for teenagers, they might instantly go to the 200's since it would be common knowledge to them that all Wiccan literature be shelved in one location; and if it is to be in one location, it would be a location that is housed under how they view it: a religion. Sanford Berman rightly states that, "... restrictive shelving practices, [render] much material inaccessible even though it is in the collection" (2001, p. 49),

but in this case it appears that extremely lax shelving practices spread what should be a relatively limited collection across the entire library layout. This isn't the case with the Christian religion, which is housed respectively in subcategories, and all nicely umbrellaed in the 200's. In *Mapping beyond Dewey's Boundaries* (1998) Hope Olson says that, "classifications are bounded systems that marginalize some groups and topics by locating them in ghettos, diasporized across the system"(p. 1). It can be easily said that adding the designation of 299.94 as a Wiccan religious hub was an appeasement, not a solution. This is because, "members of dominant groups not only participate freely and comfortably in mainstream culture, which reflects their own world-view, but they are also allowed the conceit that lower-status groups share their assumptions and that other perspectives or points of view don't exist" (Vance, 1984, p.13). Most mainstream, dominant groups do not view Wicca as a religion, so the existence of a "spot" for them still within the 133's is comforting to the dominant cultural group because it reinforces their stereotypes.

The dominant ideology (white and Christian) are the ones creating the DDC. In a letter to the editor, Janet Tapper, herself a librarian and a Wiccan, said this about her religious literature being shelved in the 130's. "The unsubtle 19th-century bias of what constitutes a religion and what does not is so ubiquitous at most public libraries that you can almost hear the librarians of yesteryear clucking as they tried to find a place to put these 'topics'" (2006, p.16). She also mentions that, "let's face it: *occultism* is a loaded word, secretive, spooky, and sinister at its worst; 'woo-woo' and a tad silly at its best. In other words, if it's not evil, it's a joke" (p.16). Wicca is toyed with, seen as a farce, and the DDC reinforces such ideas by its fear mongering wordage and multiple placements in the library.

Wiccans one commandment is, “And if it harms none, do as thou wilt” (Eve, 2003, p. 5). Wicca is not a religion that insists upon itself. Wiccans aren’t fighting school districts so that chants are mandatory or that all students have to celebrate the winter solstice. They don’t have a lobbyist to fight their battles for them and to make sure the Wiccan ideology is maintained. They simply wish to do no harm. In a very optimistic manner, Mark Rosenzweig (2004) expresses his sentiment about what it means to be a librarian, “Librarianship is an endeavor which, sometimes despite itself and despite its quotidian appearance, has acted as if, while serving the intellectual needs of the present, it is preparing for a better day” (p. 43). Librarians need to ask themselves if they are really serving the intellectual needs of all their patrons, or are we just assuming that it will be fixed later - that “better day.” Librarians should take on the challenge of usurping the modus operandus and using a classification with more flexibility, such as the Universal Decimal Classification system. Or even simpler, downsizing from multiple locations to one. One place for all your needs. Eunice Kua (2004) asks the question, “can the arrangement of books on a shelf really have an impact on how we think of the world” and the answer is yes (p. 256). Humans are constantly classifying and organizing the information around them, and it effects them all differently. Libraries, for the most part, are publicly funded and so there is a level of reverence attributed to them, and the understanding that they are representative of all of us as a whole. If libraries co-locate Wiccan literature with books about demons, then the library (and in turn the tax-payers) are making a statement about their inherent “aboutness”; that there is a relationship here between these two things, or else librarians (and hence, the public) would not place them next to each other. Patrons for the most part accept the librarian’s professional responsibility in regards to the development and classification of a collection. The patrons have placed within

librarian's hands a great deal of authority and leadership. Wiccans are our patrons, and as such, that professional responsibility extends to them just as much as to any other group. There will never be such a thing as a perfect classification system, but there is also no such thing as an unmalleable one. Change is possible, if not a little disruptive.

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[searchtype=Y&searcharg=wicca&SORT=R&searchscope=1&submit=Search+catalog](http://catalog.multcolib.org/search/a?searchtype=Y&searcharg=wicca&SORT=R&searchscope=1&submit=Search+catalog)

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